The *Informe* in David Lynch's Cinema: Reading American Film Through the 'Philosophy' of Georges Bataille

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Declaration:

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that several of American filmmaker David Lynch's works employ a subversive textual operation in their representations of America and American life that is comparable, in both its approach and political significance, to the collapse of conceptual systems French philosopher Georges Bataille termed '*informe*'. Each chapter of this thesis explores an aspect of American ideology that has been shaped within filmic conventions of genre, narration and representation, analysing how the *informe* in Lynch's films encourages awareness of difference; of other possibilities for representing human relations beyond these powerful circumscriptions of identity and ideology. In each analysis, the 'work' of the *informe* in the films under discussion is also linked to some of the prominent political concerns dealt with in Bataille's work. These include his focus on genuine human connectedness, eroticism and transgression, all of which are couched within a broader philosophical emphasis that emerges in his work on the need for balance in social existence between the 'heterogeneous' or 'sacred' aspects of society on the one hand, and the 'homogeneous' or 'profane' on the other.

The Introduction explains several of Bataille's key concepts that will be relevant to this research project, and discusses the relevance of his theoretical perspective to film. It also provides an overview of literature in the field, positioning this thesis in relation to other work on Bataille and Lynch.

Chapter One examines conventional constructions of the home and family and their relationship to American national identity. By comparing these representations to Bataille's notion of *homogeneity* I suggest that they crystallise a certain kind of American nationalist ideology that elides internal differences within America and is subtly exclusionist in its relation toward 'others'. In an analysis of *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* the chapter suggests that the *informe* in

Lynch's work unravels the conventions of realism that produce this ideology. By so doing, I suggest that Lynch disrupts their power to sustain social cleavages through ceaselessly privileging one sector of America as *the* American nation, and asserting its 'inherent' normality over its others (both inside and outside of the country's physical borders).

Chapter Two focuses on *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, using Bataille's theory of eroticism to illustrate the alienating implications of the objectification of women, and how the *informe* in Lynch's films resists this configuration of desire. This analysis is largely carried out in the framework of existing feminist film theory, and it draws on the work of Laura Mulvey, Teresa de Lauretis, and Martha Nussbaum in particular.

The chapter on *Wild at Heart* compares Bataille's notion of transgression with road movie-style rebellion, and argues that, while the latter is framed in terms of a rejection of the limits of the 'square' world of production and laws, it is in fact quite different from a form of cultural transgression, and closer to being an extension of prohibition. I suggest, therefore, that rebellion, as it has come to be constructed within the conventions of mainstream American film, is another brand of American identity, a marketable lifestyle option complete with accessories, rather than a political drive to realise a more exuberant culture and more authentic human relationships beyond the highly regulated exchanges of life in the urbanised West.

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Introduction

In the 1930s, philosopher and novelist Georges Bataille began publishing essays and books that explored a broad range of topics relating to the sacred in human life, including the gift, eroticism, violence, sacrifice, festival, and transgression. In conjunction with his writing, he was also involved with the French Surrealist movement, and a founding member of a number of radical avante-garde groups between the two World Wars, such as Contra-Attaque, Acephalle and the College of Sociology. The last of these reflects well the themes that concerned Bataille throughout his life's work. Established in 1937 and disbanded in 1939, the College's self-proclaimed objectives were to contribute collectively toward a 'sacred sociology' and reassert the importance of the sacred in society[1]. Most of Bataille's non-fiction shares these concerns. It takes shape as a response to what he saw as a rejection of the sacred in the wake of European society's fixation on

[1] In a 'note on the foundation of a College of Sociology' (1938), jointly authored by its founding members, the aim of the organization was summed up thus:

> The precise object of the contemplated activity can be called Sacred Sociology, implying the study of all manifestations of social existence where the active presence of the sacred is clear. It intends to establish in this way the points of coincidence between the fundamental obsessive tendencies of individual psychology and the principal structures that govern social organisation and are in command of its revolutions (in Hollier 1988: 5).

In his introductory paper for the College, first published in 1938, one of its co-founders Roger Caillois expanded on this last point, illustrating the view of the College members and Bataille that the human individual is driven by impulses to find 'fusion' in a collectivity that dissolves this individual:

> There are certain rare, fleeting, and violent moments of his intimate experience on which man places extreme value. From this given the College of Sociology takes its departure, striving to reveal equivalent processes at the very heart of social existence, in the elementary phenomena of attraction and repulsion determining this existence, as in its most marked and meaningful *formations* such as churches, armies, brotherhoods, secret societies (1988: 11).

The College included a number of key thinkers and generated a considerable output of theoretical material that was either published or presented in lectures. Many of the major themes reflected in these texts feature in Bataille's work right up to his last publications. For example, in *Death and sensuality*, published in 1962 some 23 years after the College was disbanded (published in English in 1977), Bataille states that 'there is in nature and there subsists in man a force that exceeds the bounds [of individual existence], that can never be anything but partially reduced to order' (Bataille 1977:40). This force 'always entails a breaking down of established patterns, the patterns...of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals' (1977: 18). For Bataille, this is the basis of the sacred, and what makes it so important. Without the sacred, humanity finds no release for this drive, and frustration, endless compulsive consumption, or social collapse ensues.

social *homogeneity*, with a resultant prioritisation of individual enrichment and accumulation under capitalism, and an obsession with rationality, science, and philosophical truth[2].

In North America, over 20 years after Bataille's death, the filmmaker David Lynch has produced a body of work that, I will argue, picks up on related themes and employs violence and eroticism to challenge his own society's ideological shortcomings. As its focus, this thesis will analyse Lynch's work in terms of the *informe*, which Bataille saw as a subversive textual strategy of breaking down established conceptual forms in order to challenge social *homogeneity* and open up the space of the sacred. My research questions whether Lynch's films, in taking up this strategy, follow from a similar impulse to resist and transform the distorting and alienating effects that overwhelming *homogeneity* has on human relations (and with it a concomitant desire for the return of the sacred in his contemporary social milieu).

Lynch's films have become infamous for being variously 'weird', 'disturbing', 'incomprehensible' and even 'offensive'. In postmodern analyses, they have also become known for their intertextual disruption of established 'realist' cinematic codes and conventions of representation, which normally create logically coherent narratives with a powerful sense of verisimilitude (see Dienst 1995 and Denzin 1991 for example). *Blue Velvet* has become one of the most frequently analysed films in this regard, but disruption has been an element in most of Lynch's work. For example, in *Lost Highway*, what initially reads as a relatively coherent narrative representation of a strained relationship leading to the murder of a woman by her husband gradually 'comes apart at the seams'. As the narrative progresses, the husband and protagonist, Fred Madison transforms into someone else without any narrative explanation, and, at the end of the film, violates the logic of identity and temporality that are fundamental to cinema

[2] Elements of economy, production and culture that collectively make up social *homogeneity*. I discuss Bataille's concepts of the *sacred* and social *homogeneity* in more detail below.

narrative (and indeed all narrative) by being in two places at once. If the narrative included some supernatural explanation (or a story of time travel), this would go some way to filling in the logical gaps the film creates. However, instead, this rupture of logic and causality is left unresolved in the film. A similar approach is also employed in *Mulholland Drive* where characters disappear and reappear in different roles, and narrative teleology is lost in temporal contradiction and impossibility.

Another, quite different collapse of cinematic verisimilitude and meaning in Lynch's work recurs in most of the films I discuss in this dissertation. It involves the overt 'quotation' of conventions from the history of American film and its genres. In *Twin Peaks*, soap opera meets the detective genre, the sitcom, the horror, the gothic, and the musical to the point of overload, while in *Blue Velvet* the characters are so obviously based on media archetypes as to render them hollowed-out incarnations of America's homely self-image. The result is to hold up the 'reality-effect' these conventions have traditionally created, along with their internal coherence for viewers, and turn it into a strange façade of flattened out media images, behind which lurk more façades, without any final grounding. Here again, the form and mimetic function of film conventions – along with the form they lend to social discourses that give meaning to the world – is unravelled, revealing an inadequacy in these conventions and the discourses they sustain.

Reading Lynch's films in terms of Bataille's notion of the *informe* highlights some of the political implications and possibilities of these semiotic strategies for American film and media, and suggests key links between Lynch's approach to these sites of cultural production and Bataille's own social critique of excessive homogeneity. *Informe* can be translated as 'formless', and in his mock 'dictionary', published piecemeal in each edition of the French journal *Documents*, Bataille describes it as 'a term that serves to bring things down (declasser) in the world generally requiring that each thing have its form' (in

Bois and Krauss 1997: 5). It implies a collapse of systematic thought and signification within the realm of homogeneity, the same kind of breakdown of established discourse that occurs in a number of Lynch's films.

While narrative film creates meaning through sound and images that bear a resemblance of contour, colour and so on to what they depict, making them, in Gregory Currie's terms, 'narrations carried out ...by iconic signs...which tell us what it is appropriate to imagine', a mode of 'perceptual realism' (1990:196), the worlds created with these iconic forms are by no means a simple facsimile of reality. On the one hand, the images the film reproduces have internal codes (*mise en scene* for example – clothing can show class in a film as in life), on the other, the film itself contains ways of representing what it shows through sound (choices of music, for example), editing, cinematography, arrangement of *mise en scene*, and narrative structuring. It also has its own codes that viewers' 'visual literacies' enable them to understand. In this regard, Dunne observes that '[f]rom a semiotic perspective...soundtrack music, styles of acting, verbal intonations, echoes of film conventions, and allusions to other films are just as much forms of language as words on a page' (Dunne 1995: 22). Indeed they are more like words on a page than a mirror on the world, since, with conventions such as temporal ellipses, and cutting between scenes, they would be incomprehensible if watched without an understanding of what these editing techniques signify[3]. This field of discourse is the structure against which Lynch's films exert their disruptive movement. This movement is therefore reliant on the same principle as Bataille's notion of the *informe*, which requires a system to unwork. As theorists Fred Botting and Scott Wilson observe in their study *Bataille*, 'there is no shock, no

[3] This comparison is a highly contentious one, and I do not suggest that film 'language' is directly comparable to written or spoken language in the strict sense of the linguistic structures it uses to create meaning. It may have only a distant similarity to the 'discrete combinatorial unit' structure (which designates the way in which letters combine to make words, words combine to make clauses, and the latter combine to make sentences and so on) that prominent linguist Steven Pinker (among others) sees as one of the chief structuring mechanisms behind the functioning of language (see Pinker 2000: 80). It would be hard, for example, to find a cinematic equivalent of a single letter of the alphabet. However, the analogy is used here to suggest a link between film language and written language insofar as both create meaning through the combining and recombining of conventional elements in various ways, as opposed to some kind of 'direct' re-creation of reality.

crash...without some form or system with which or in which to crash' (Botting and Wilson 2001:8).

As a result, Lynch's films do not so much present the *informe*, as enact it. Where conventions are manipulated or unravelled in his work, it is generally not for the sake of asserting an alternative ideology or an alternative cinematic representation of 'reality'. Rather it is to create semiotic rupture within his film, an intertextual operation that destabilises the aspects of cinema discourse that are incorporated. In such instances, his film does not portray an alternative mimesis to the constructions of Hollywood and other mainstream film or television in order to contest them on their own terms (i.e. by asserting one version of reality over another). Rather it is a subversive gesture in the direction of its source texts calling their discursive agency to a halt, like an 'indecent gesture'. In this respect, Krauss and Bois description of what *informe* does is more appropriate to understanding the term's significance for Lynch's cinema than an attempt to neatly define what it is: '[n]othing in and of itself, the formless has only an operational existence: it is a performative, like obscene words, the violence of which derives less from semantics than from the very act of their delivery...The formless is an operation' (Bois and Krauss 1997:18). The *informe* is a defiant and even obnoxious operation that can never be returned directly to use value. Lynch's film can be unrelenting in its dismantling of - and in some cases even desecration of – cinematic constructions of the American home, the patriarchal protagonist, or the rock n' roll hero (in the case of Sailor Ripley in *Wild at Heart*), among other things. In the process, the *informe* in Lynch's film also gains political significance by subverting the normalising power of realist conventions, which tend to entrench various ideologies and identity positions that make up the American cultural landscape, and which interpellate[4] subjectivity in the media-saturated spaces of global capitalist culture.

[4] I use 'interpellation' here in Louis Althusser's sense. For Althusser, '*Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects*' and '*all ideology has the function (which defines it) of "constituting" concrete individuals as subjects*' (1971: 160, italics in original). As a result, Althusser argues that through this interpellation of the subject in language, 'you and I are *always already* subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of

While 'realism', 'diegesis' and 'narrative' are concepts that I will expand on and explore throughout this dissertation, for now I will merely point out, following Turner (1993), that '[w]hen we talk of popular films as 'realistic'...we do not necessarily mean they are like 'real life'; we mean that we have in some sense agreed to respond to their codes and conventions – their established systems of narration – as if they *were* like real life' (Turner 1993:80). I also follow writers such as Abercrombie (1996), Fiske (1987), Hall (1977), Higgins (1991), and Platinga (1999) in arguing that the conventions of realism and logically coherent narrative can serve to naturalise dominant ideology[5]. Fiske sums up this position well when he states that:

> 'realisticness' is the process by which ideology is made to appear the product of reality or nature, and not of a specific society and its culture...The conventions of realism...disguise the constructedness of the 'reality' it offers, and therefore of the arbitrariness of the ideology that is mapped onto it. Grounding ideology in reality is a way of making it

ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects' (ibid.:161-2). The sense of identity and of individual personality that each person has depends on this positioning within social meanings and language. Without these, there is no sense of self or individual subject. I argue below that film and television narrative conventions and generic representations have come to play a key role in this interpellation due to their pervasiveness, for example, in the constitution of the gendered subject (which I discuss in Chapter 2 of this dissertation).

[5] It should be noted that this does not require concomitant adoption of a naïve direct media effects model for understanding the ideological impact of cinema. Anthropologically oriented media analysts such as Kelly Askew have correctly pointed out that 'meaning is actively invented during the process of reception – distorting, eliding, even reversing encoded meanings', and that theories of "cultural imperialism" have to account for 'the subordination of Western media products to local narrative demands and values' (See Askew 2002: 6). My study focuses on how film and media reinforce and make available some agendas and narratives over others – and how this affects subjectivity – within a context that is heavily saturated with texts that together create dominant or hegemonic meanings. In this regard I emphasise the gradual and cumulative establishment of moral norms, ideological assumptions and textual conventions. One film is unlikely to exercise a decisive influence on an individual's views or behaviour, especially in a cultural context wherein cultural norms are at odds with those expressed in the film. One film affirming republican values is unlikely to win over a democrat, for example, and one film by David Lynch is unlikely to reverse anyone's views on American culture. But many films that together participate in creating a shared 'language' are more powerful in affirming consensus. Similarly, Lynch's films may have limited force in their own right, but may offer possibilities for more influential shifts in cinema and culture. In this respect it can be argued that '[l]ike other cultural sites, cinema, as an institutional practice, has an unavoidable responsibility to the interpellation and continuity of the society it produces and is produced by' (Adah 2001: 47).

appear unchallengeable and unchangeable'. (cited in Abercrombie 1996:30 (36))

Lynch's work offers some examples of how the *informe* in cinema is able to reveal the provisional nature of these widely accepted modes of representation as they have come to construct and entrench recurring facets of American identity and ideology. In American cinema, the gradual, cumulative development of an almost standardised vocabulary of characters, settings, and even diegetic continuity has lent form to a cinematic vision of America that is comfortingly familiar. This vision tends to rely on the exclusion of difference and disorder. Since America is by far the predominant setting (physical and social) in much of American film, it is clear that the aspects of America and American life it depicts have gained a familiarity with audiences, forming a space where self and other, good and evil, sanity and madness are mapped out in a set of conceptual hierarchies. This mapping of America, and indeed of reality itself, is made even more powerful by the fact that 'film makes use of a range of existing means of expression which are so familiar to us that we are almost blind to their operation' (Higgins 1991:116). There are a number of instances in Lynch's films where the *informe* subverts the ideological force of realism's 'means of expression' by momentarily revealing their provisional nature, supplanting the familiarity they create with the uncanny or the impossible. While his work is unmistakably set in America, it is often strangely decontextualised and dislocated historically and geographically speaking, reflecting what Harold Hampton, in 'David Lynch's Secret History of the United States', calls 'the supersession of reality by the dreamscape of motion pictures' and other mass media in America (Hampton 1993:38). In this respect it engages with America's increasing reliance on this 'dreamscape' to know itself, to conceptualise itself, despite the fact that the America portrayed in mainstream film is increasingly becoming divorced from any lived reality. As critic Frederick Wasser observes in his essay on the trans-nationalisation of Hollywood, 'Is Hollywood America?', in their quest to cater for a global market beyond national boundaries, 'film producers set themselves

the task of portraying an "America" that is a dreamscape for "universal" desires rather than historic reality' (2002: 358). However, it would be wrong to assume that this idealised and abstracted vision of America reflects a neutral global agenda or genuinely 'universal' desires, and that it does not still, less directly, reflect American ideological concerns (a point that chapter one of this dissertation should illustrate).

Each chapter of my thesis explores a different ideological aspect of mainstream American cultural production that has been shaped within film conventions, genre, and narrative, and describes how the *informe* in Lynch's film invites an awareness of difference, of other possibilities beyond these circumscriptions of identity and ideology. I will suggest, in each case, that his film thereby calls for 'an openness to the other' (to use the late Jacques Derrida's phrase)[6].

Focusing on Lynch's *Blue Velvet* and the *Twin Peaks* television series, the first chapter sets out to illustrate this point in a detailed analysis of how cinematic 'realism' and its ability to construct 'normality' is destabilised by the cinematic *informe* in these films' depictions of the American home and family. I base my analysis on similar observations to those made by Fredric Jameson and other critics of 'pastiche' such as Fred Pfeil; however, I come to very different conclusions (which I detail both in my discussion of pastiche later in the current introductory chapter and in Chapter One). I have chosen this as a starting point for my exploration of the *informe*'s political potential because, I contend, conventional constructions of the home and family have partly defined an exclusionary American nationalism by circumscribing America as a moral centre in the country's mainstream film and television. Lynch's texts reproduce these representations, but infect them with an uncanny semiotic slippage and narrative

[6] In *Deconstruction in a nutshell*, philosopher and founder of 'deconstruction' Jacques Derrida describes one of the key motivations of his Deconstructive Criticism as 'hospitality' and an 'openness to the other'. Derrida identifies one of deconstruction's aims as the dismantling of discourses that maintain strict and exclusionary relations of inside and outside, self and other in society and politics. Derrida believes that breaking down the axioms of these conceptual categories encourages a willingness to see beyond fundamentalist assumptions and greater acceptance of cultural, religious, ethnic, gender, and even interpersonal differences (See Derrida and Caputo: 1998).

instability. The result, I argue, is an undoing of representation that loosens the normative hold of this key site of American identity, and with it, the power it has to deepen social cleavages through ceaselessly privileging American 'normalcy' over the nation's others (living both inside and outside of the country's physical borders).

Building on this initial exploration of how the *informe* disrupts the homogenising ideological effects of realism and narrative, the second chapter examines how the *informe* dismantles the pervasive American (and indeed Western in general) discourse on eroticism that has been constructed around objectifying constructions of femininity. In an analysis of *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive,* I draw on the work of feminist film theorists Laura Mulvey, Martha Nussbaum, and Teresa De Lauretis, and also on Bataille's theories of eroticism to illustrate both the implications of objectification of women for eroticism, and on how the *informe* resists this configuration of desire. I also emphasise that these films involve the breakdown of the narrative logic that equates the satisfaction of controlling and possessive male desire with closure and a 'happy ending'. In this case, by resorting to the *informe,* the two films refuse to even entertain this mode of satisfaction, and parade it as a hopeless fantasy. As a result, I suggest, they highlight Bataille's point that eroticism is only available outside of objectifying and controlling relations. My chapter also demonstrates the potential value of Bataille's theories of eroticism for feminism, since it suggests that over and above, or concomitant to, a focus on affirming and politically securing women's agency in a patriarchal society, the deconstruction of objectification should also focus on the ways in which social relations and discourses disfigure emotional intimacy (an issue that affects both sexes).

In the last chapter, I argue that the *informe* in Lynch's road trip *Wild at Heart* (which features a misguided 'outlaw couple', Sailor and Lula) foregrounds the assimilation of America's ideology and iconography of rebellion, along with the various identity positions associated with it, into mainstream cultural production

and the mass consumption of the cinematic image. As a result it throws into relief some of the core contradictions of a prominent American ideology that sells itself as a rejection of, or escape from, the 'square' world of production and law-abiding society. The *informe* emerges in *Wild at Heart* as a dislocated juxtaposition of recycled cinematic images and narratives, which ultimately expose the way in which rebellion has become little more than one commodified American identity among others, a niche-marketed lifestyle on offer in the film and media industry. As a result, I argue that in *Wild at* Heart, rebellion is depicted as simply a different flavour of the same obsessive inscription of – and buying into – identity that is epitomised in the media's incessant return to mom-and-apple-pie small town USA. In this respect, the film's bleak vision of America unveils the inability of this ideology to provide deliverance from immobility, and alienated individualism, despite the promise of ecstatic release from the isolation created by laws and production that is encoded in its imagery of transit and escape. My discussion includes a detailed comparison of Bataille's notion of transgression with road movie-style rebellion in order to clarify this point.

As this brief synopsis should indicate, in each chapter, I tie the 'work' of the *informe* in the films discussed to some of the prominent political concerns dealt with in Bataille's work. Bataille's chief concern was with prioritising genuine human connectedness, part of his programme of making a space for the sacred in society, which, for Bataille creates social fusion. Similarly I argue that in many instances the *informe* in Lynch's films likewise serves to destabilise certain cinematic trends that have worked against this, and which have encouraged and entrenched alienating social relationships and eroticised power rather than supported community and human connectedness[7]. Abercrombie has noted that realism and its support for ideologies has 'particular effects of supporting the

[7] In this respect, my argument shares some similarities with Martha Nochimson's analysis of Lynch's work, although she frames this aspect of his film in terms of Jungian psychoanalysis and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. For Nochimson, 'Lynch's films encourage spectators to perceive the hollowness of linguistic structure and then discover a more complex form of connection through the subconscious' (1999: 7).

existing distributions of power, authority, wealth and income and of ensuring conformity' (1996: 31). It is in this regard that the textual disruption of the *informe* carries the potential to encourage an 'openness to the Other' (see footnote 6 above). On the one hand, it reveals 'otherness' within the categories used to define the American self, demonstrating that even America can be strange despite its comforting familiarity in generic film especially. While the home and family have been prominent in this, and are rendered disturbing and 'other' in much of Lynch's work, even the figure of the rebel, embodied by Elvis, James Dean and any number of more recent rock icons, has become somewhat homely in America, and is likewise subject to Lynch's defamiliarising text. In the process, Lynch's work gives the impression that in many ways these discourses, which have come to define the American self, may have always been weird to begin with. Perhaps this, and not the nudity and violence in his films, is the real scandal so many American reviewers have seen in his work

The *informe's* political possibilities in Lynch's films can therefore be compared to its significance in the work of Bataille on several levels. Both have sought to exceed the discursive constraints of their respective social and cultural milieu. Both adopt the *informe* as a tool to undermine the normative hold of the established cultural discourses they engage with, rather than continue a debate within the terms set by them. Most importantly perhaps, both see it as an instrument of protest, part of a larger rejection of alienating and ultimately destructive social and interpersonal practices that start with problematic modes of representation and thinking.

This is why the *informe* can be located as part of Bataille's broader interest in the sacred and *heterogeneous*[8] areas of human culture and society. It is in terms

[8] While heterogeneity in Bataille's writing does encompass more than what is normally designated as sacred, and includes excretion, madness, and the like, for Bataille both are defined on the same terms as being what lies in excess of the homogeneous world of law, reason, language, and production. For Bataille, the sacred is not limited to 'the good' or holiness, instead it includes all elements that are in excess of social limits, including eroticism, the gift, violence, and sacrifice (See 1989: 141-2). Bataille also uses the terms

of his emphasis on the sacred that the significance of the *informe* for Bataille - and Lynch - can be understood.

In Bataille's work, the sacred exists in various social forms, but always in excess of production, and it embodies humanity's inherent desire to exceed isolation and all limits set by homogeneous society. It allows the 'inner experience', for each person, of *communication* with others, which momentarily dissolves all boundaries and all awareness of being alone. Without the sacred, the individual remains trapped in his or her isolated existence[9]. In the *Accursed Share* he defines the sacred as follows:

> The sacred is that prodigious effervescence of life that, for the sake of duration, the order of things holds in check, and that this holding changes into a breaking-loose, that is, into violence. It constantly threatens to break the dikes, to confront productive activity with the precipitate and contagious movement of a purely glorious consumption. The sacred is exactly comparable to the flame that destroys the wood by consuming it. It is that opposite of a thing which an unlimited fire is...it is never isolated and, in a world of individuals, it calls for the general negation of individuals as such. (2000 (b):215)

The sacred always takes shape in relation to social limits, and would mean nothing without them. Unbridled sex or violence without any prohibitions would lose the character of being sacred (see Bataille 1977: 63 and Bataille in Richardson 1998 b: 57). The sacred is defined by work and the prohibitions that govern it:

'homogeneity' and 'the profane' to denote almost exactly the same thing in his various publications. I will use the former term in this dissertation.

[9] I discuss Bataille's notion of communication in relation to eroticism in Chapter Two, and in relation to the festival and transgression in Chapter Three.

> [w]ork set up the distinction between the sacred and the profane... the sacred world is a denial of the profane, yet it also owes its character to the profane world it denies. The sacred world is also the result of work in that its origin and significance are to be sought not in the immediate existence of nature's creation but in the birth of a new order of things, brought about in turn by the opposition to nature of the profane world of purposeful activity. (Bataille 1977: 114-115)

Thus the profane/homogeneous on the one hand, and the heterogeneous/sacred on the other are complementary in Bataille's work, the former setting the limits on desire, the latter using these limits to create explosive release. In this respect, Bataille's notion of the sacred draws on the work of sociologist, Emile Durkheim. It is also partially derived from the research of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, especially in regard to the latter's writing on the gift, insofar as it describes the aspect of a social body where individual interest and accumulation are superseded by the generous exuberance of the festival, sacrifice, and the transgression (see Richardson 1999: 25 and 74 for a discussion of Bataille's relationship to these writers).

Bataille's work reflects this concern in its emphasis on a need for balance in social existence between the 'heterogeneous' or 'sacred' aspects of society and the 'homogeneous' or 'profane'. In his 1933 essay 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', Bataille describes homogeneity as the area of social existence dominated by agreed-upon principles, social conventions, laws and prohibitions that regulate material production (1985: 137). Homogeneity reinforces, and is dependent on, conceptual thought (or cognition), which operates as a tool that in turn conceives of the world in terms of self-identical *things* existing in relation to each other, and which have use-value (as tools in their own right) for increasing the accumulation of resources and sustaining individual life: 'human relations are sustained by a reduction to fixed rules based on consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations' (ibid.). This regulation

also means that 'in principle, all violence is excluded from this course of existence' (ibid.: 138).

The sacred and social heterogeneity, on the other hand, are 'elements that are impossible to assimilate' into homogeneity, that are defined by their exclusion from homogeneity (Bataille 1985: 140). Thus '*heterogeneous* existence can be represented as something *other*, as *incommensurate*' (ibid.: 143). Violence, excess, delirium, eroticism, the festival, sacrifice, and emotional connectedness or *communication* are all examples of heterogeneity, and they all provide moments of emotional or experiential intensity that exist for no purpose other than this intensity. The *informe* is also a heterogeneous social practice, as indicated by the way in which Lynch's films undermine mimesis, rationally-determined narrative, and the homogenised formations of social discourse that have come to secure various American identities and ideologies.

While Bataille does grant homogeneity its place, and does not suggest that all socially constructed texts are equally arbitrary or useless (on the contrary, they are centred on use-value), he argues that if utility becomes the sole value in society, it risks becoming an entirely self-serving and alienating impulse that is cancerous within a social body (see especially the first volume of *The Accursed Share*). It begins to place the interests and accumulations of the solipsistic individual over the generosity and exuberance of the sacred (which he and the other members of the College of Sociology believed was crucial for social cohesion). In Bataille's view, homogeneity was taken to extremes in the mid-twentieth-century West, where material wealth became of paramount social import, and rationality was seen as all-encompassing. For Bataille, while capitalism is an 'unreserved surrender to things, heedless of consequences and seeing nothing beyond them' (1988:36), he argued that '[t]he world of things or of practice is the world in which man is subjugated, or simply in which he serves some purpose, whether or not he is a servant of another. Man is alienated therein, he is himself a thing, at least temporarily, to the extent that he serves'

(1992:313-4). In the middle class of the capitalist West especially, Bataille argued that 'the tendential reduction of human character takes place, making it an abstract and interchangeable entity: a reflection of the *homogeneous things* the individual owns' (1989: 138). As a result, human existence risks being reduced to '*being for something other than itself*' (ibid.), always in the service of future profits and projects, rather than focusing on the present and on connecting with other people as thinking and feeling subjects. And while the festival, eroticism, transgression, and other aspects of the sacred offer release from this state, the loss of the sacred in modern society, due to an excessive focus on accumulation, therefore left fewer and fewer exits from alienation. Bataille makes this point when he observes that in capitalism the aim is generally to at least 'balance the accounts', matching all expenditures with equal or greater acquisitions (1992:167). As a result,

> capitalism does not escape the logic of Bataille's dialectic: it does spend and it spends quite as uselessly, quite as prodigally as any other society. What is missing from capitalism is not the fact of expenditure but any sense of a joyous surpassing of limits. In so far as we spend, we do so grudgingly with an eye upon an ultimate accumulation... Equally, this expenditure is not returned back to the community but is made to serve the aims of the market, which in the process is imbued with its own reality that exists independently of the real needs of mankind. (Richardson 1994:95)

The excessive homogenisation that Bataille saw in the society of his time applies equally to the late-capitalist West. As Jean-Joseph Goux observes in 'General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism', the political economy of consumerism is still centred on use-value for the individual, rather than on the collective effervescence of the festival or the self-loss of the erotic. He argues that consumerism 'does not at all subvert the status of the extensive concept of 'utility' in political economy, even if it undoes the trivial (moral) notion of the

useful' (1998: 210). The use-value of products has therefore simply shifted from a focus on their ability to satisfy the basic survival needs of an individual, to satisfying all the individual's whims. In this sense, even luxury foods or art forms depicting women as objects for male desire still have a use-value to the individual as a sensual indulgence to be 'owned' and consumed.

The chapters that follow seek to articulate some of the ways in which Lynch has engaged with this world, especially in America. They suggest that Bataille's notion of the *informe* remains more relevant than ever in its ability to destabilize the ideological legitimation of interpersonal alienation (and even the alienation of the self from its desires and needs), the deepening of social cleavages, and the reduction of the world to fixed marketing categories and stereotypes in a burgeoning, multinational media industry. It is in this breakdown, and not, for example, the neat closure of so many of Hollywood's productions (which sanctify the isolated nuclear family or the patriarchal acquisition of the 'trophy wife' in an illusory 'happy ever after'), that Lynch envisions the openness of the sacred wherein alienation is overcome, even if only for a while. Thus his films tend to reproduce such closure (in *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart* especially) with a careful play on realist conventions that renders them overtly artificial, mechanical reproductions like the infamous robin on the windowsill in *Blue Velvet.*

In this respect, Lynch's subversive approach to established meanings, mimesis, and narrative, shares much of the mischief of Bataille's *informe*, but also its deeply disturbing and defamiliarising effects that never quite resolve themselves into a meaningful agenda. Bataille resists defining *informe* in any strict manner, since, like Derrida's 'concept' of differance[10], it alludes to the undoing of fixed definition (one of the core principles of homogeneity) per se. However, he offers

[10] See Derrida's essay 'Differance' in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (1978).

a playful metaphorical description in his mock 'Dictionary' entry mentioned earlier:

> 'Formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning but a term that serves to bring things down [declasser] in the world generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing, and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.' (Bataille in Bois and Krauss1997:5)

Despite this deliberate evasiveness, it is evident that the *informe* for Bataille is a critical *device* that 'brings down' form, in the sense of structured or organised systems of thought, knowledge, and meaning that in turn govern the goal-oriented and productive human activities of homogeneity. Rosalind Krauss, who has written extensively on the *informe* in the visual arts, comments on this: 'Shapeless matter, like spittle or a crushed worm...are instances of formlessness. But far more importantly, the *informe* is a conceptual matter, the shattering of signifying boundaries, the undoing of categories' (Krauss 1993:157). Similarly, critics Fred Botting and Scott Wilson see the *informe* as 'a matter of conceptually deforming concepts; its 'work' is the work of un-working concepts that make discursive work possible' (2001:7). As I have already indicated, Lynch's work similarly takes apart meaning. In its most extreme instances in *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, any decisive interpretation becomes virtually impossible.

However, in Chapter 2 I argue that this resistance to meaning gains a certain significance in its own right, and does not necessarily need to be recuperated to

meaning through symbolic interpretation. Bataille's own dealings with the question of impossibility help to illuminate this by situating it squarely within the context of the sacred. *Informe, 'the impossible'*, and *'non-knowledge'* are all similar 'anti-concepts' in his writing. Each of these reveals the limitations of knowledge and language, suggesting these are merely 'frock coats' that give form to an otherwise tumultuous and chaotic world of overflow and excess, a characteristic of the world that only the sacred 'articulates'.

In the early 1950s he wrote several essays dealing with the 'concept' of *non-knowledge* (or *un-knowing*), including 'Un-knowing and its Consequences' and 'Un-knowing and Rebellion' (originally published in 1951 and 1952 respectively). In the latter he describes *non-knowledge* as 'that which thought cannot conceive' (2000 g: 329), stating that in pursuing this 'object' his 'thought has but one object, play, in which [his] thinking, the working of [his] thought, dissolves' (ibid.: 327). Like *informe*, *un-knowing* unravels knowledge as a homogeneous system. While for Bataille 'there is a servility fundamental to all knowledge, an acceptance of a mode of life such that each moment has meaning only in terms of another, or of others to follow', un-knowing offers an escape into a 'sovereign moment', an experience of the sacred and of deep connectedness with others (ibid.). Essentially this means the momentary removal of the division between the knowing subject and known object in the experience of the individual, the experience of *communication* that is at the basis of the sacred and eroticism, and that helps create social unity. Thus '[e]ach time we relinquish the will to knowledge, we have the possibility of a far more intense contact with the world' (ibid.: 324). The *informe* likewise creates gaps in homogeneity, demanding a similar openness to experience of difference and the Other, and in Lynch's work this becomes evident in his desire to dismantle homogenised constructions of identity that stereotype, objectify, and alienate, rather than unify.

Bataille also pursued the idea of non-knowledge in *The Accursed Share* (completed in 1953 and published posthumously in 1976), where he states that he

> resolved long ago not to seek knowledge, as others do, but to seek its contrary, which is un-knowing. I no longer anticipated the moment when I would be rewarded for my effort, *when I would know at last*, but rather the moment when *I would no longer know, when my initial anticipation would dissolve into* nothing. (2000 (e): 309)

Similarly, in *Literature and Evil*, his study on the relationship between literature and heterogeneity, he argues that in some cases literary language has the potential to unravel the structures of thought and language in the same fashion as the *informe*. However, for Bataille, this only occurs where poetic language effaces the signifying work of language (see 1957: 12-13) while 'linguistic project' or mimetic representation, even if fictitious, tends to remain in the service of homogeneity due to its adherence to logically consistent narrative.[11] In this respect, some of Lynch's most powerful aporia, especially in *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, can be seen to act as a cinematic examples of what Bataille terms 'poetic loss', which briefly gives a glimpse of what is beyond our cognitive mapping of the world, helping us to realise that rationality and conceptual *form* are not the totality of being. Thus:

> language substitutes the appearance of a solution for the insoluble, and a screen for violent truth. In short, any commentary which does not simply say that commentaries are useless and impossible moves us away from the truth at the very moment when it might come close to it in itself. It interposes a screen which subdues the light – and even what I say is yet another obstacle which we must remove if we want to see. (1957:74-5)

[11] For an extended discussion of literary language and the collapse of meaning in Bataille's work, see 'The hatred of poetry in Georges Bataille's writing and thought' by Marie-Christine Lala, and 'Sacrifice and violence in Bataille's fiction' by Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons (especially 98-99), both published in Gill 1995.

He also echoes this theme in *Inner Experience*:

> understanding relates the non-manufactured, unknown elements, one after the other, to the known. But desire, poetry, laughter, unceasingly cause life to slip in the opposite direction, moving from the known to the unknown. Existence in the end discloses the blind spot of understanding and right away becomes completely absorbed in it. (1988: 111)

Finally, in *Death and sensuality*, he returns to this point in relation to philosophy and epistemology, arguing that '[p]hilosophy cannot escape from the limits of philosophy, of language, that is. It uses language in such a way that silence never follows, so that the supreme moment is necessarily beyond philosophical questioning' (1977: 274). It is this position that leads him to declare that in his own argument he has 'been trying to talk a language that equals zero, a language equivalent to nothing at all, a language which returns to silence' (ibid.: 264), since to articulate non-knowledge, the sacred, or the *informe*, is to immediately negate them[12]. It is clear, then, that for Bataille the *informe* and its variants serve as a means to disrupt systematic knowledge and discourse, along with the latter's claims to provide all-encompassing accounts of human existence. Although the *informe* only featured prominently in Bataille's early work, its implications reappear in all of his analyses of the uses and limits of philosophy and rational discourse in human life, which included a critique of scientific methods and of Hegelian philosophy[13].

[12] Michael Richardson, one of Bataille's critics and translators, clarifies this problem as follows:

> Since the sacred is precisely defined as being what is not the profane and since the scientific method is expressly founded in the domain of the profane, something implied by its being based on the principle of falsification, it would therefore appear that it is unable to accept anything as being sacred without compromising its fundamental principles. How can it then, in good faith, even claim to be able to speak about the sacred? In order to treat the sacred, must science not by definition turn it into something that is profane and, by so doing, does it not destroy the very object it wants to study? (Richardson1994:48)

[13] While he drew on Hegel in much of his work, Bataille saw existence as essentially being governed by 'tumult which overflows, wherein fever and rupture are linked to intoxication' (1988: 81). For this reason, he argued that Hegel's vision of a philosophy that could account for the totality of being was misguided

Informe is a complicated term because it goes beyond simply designating chaos or abstraction. Rosalind Krauss describes the problem thus:

> It is too easy to think of *informe* as the opposite of form. To think of form versus matter. Because this "versus" always performs the duties of form, of creating binaries, of separating the world into neat pairs of oppositions by means, as Bataille liked to say, of "mathematical frock coats."...Chaos as the opposite of form is chaos that could always be formed, by the form that is always already there in wait for chaos. (Krauss 1993:167)

In other words, *informe* can easily be seen simply as the circumscribed 'other' of form, form's other that is neatly conceptualized and re-assimilated into systematic thought as 'chaos'. *Informe* relies on form in the sense that there has to be a pre-existing set of conceptual categories to be violated in the first place, but ultimately it is an undoing of the very basis of conceptual forms, it falls outside of conceptual logic altogether in that it is inconceivable or impossible. However, to exceed form in the true sense requires that *informe* fall beyond it. The formless is only formless to the extent that it remains unarticulated, which is why Bataille repeatedly returns to the idea of speaking 'a language that returns to silence'. Just as transgression, in Bataille's discourse, functions only in relation to prohibition, an initial containment which it can exceed while also throwing into relief the prohibition, so *informe* only operates as the absolute and indeterminate undoing of organized form, including its conceptually circumscribed opposite, chaos.

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because it 'stems from the rejection, in Hegel's life, of everything which could seem to be sacred *intoxication*' (ibid.). Thus, while he conceded that Hegel was correct to 'dismiss the lax concession to which vague minds resorted in his time', he argues that 'by taking work (discursive thought, project) for existence, he reduces the world to the profane world; he negates the sacred world (communication)' (ibid.). See also Richardson (1994) and Derrida's essay 'From restricted to general economy: A Hegelianism without reserve' in *Writing and Difference* (1993) for a discussion of Bataille's relationship to Hegel.

Informe is based on a dual movement of maintaining yet rupturing established, homogenized forms of thought and language. Bataille believed that within the politics of language the *informe* creates a certain impact when it ruptures established forms of thought, since it unsettles and shakes up the reading and writing subject, an assault on his or her sense of knowing and understanding the world, forcing a confrontation with the provisional nature of his or her ideological perspectives. Thus '*Heterogeneous* reality is that of a force or shock' (Bataille 1985: 143). As Botting and Wilson observe, upon encountering this shock: the whole perceptual and cognitive system crashes, at least for a moment, and is disassembled (Botting and Wilson 2001:8). It is this that lends the *informe* its subversive potential, and it can create powerful and uncanny effects. The closing scene of *Lost Highway* is one such example. It brings together a moment where the full depth of the film's conceptual impossibility is revealed with Fred's doubling and the temporal sequence of events thrown into contradiction with a visual and aural intensity that finally dissolves the image into a directionless, aimless road and an echoing silence (See Chapter Two for a discussion of this scene).

This subversive force of the *informe* has also led to its being adopted for various critical purposes. Since Bataille's death, *informe* has resurfaced repeatedly in critical literature, including Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, Julia Kristeva's feminism, and Fred Botting and Scott Wilson's cultural critiques (2001). It was also the subject of a major art exhibition held in Paris in 1996 called 'L'*Informe* Mode d'emploi', documented and discussed by Yves-Klein Bois and Rosalind Krauss in *Formless, a User's Guide*. In the exhibition it features as a common thread in a collection of artworks that seek to escape established and canonical artistic forms in 'a declassification, in the double sense of lowering and of taxonomic disorder' (Bois and Krauss 1997:18). Bois and Krauss see the *informe* in these artworks as a subversive gesture toward realist art and photographic representation.

This reading of the *informe* at work in contemporary art has contributed to my own extension of the study of *informe* to cinema with the anticipation of it having a similar impact in a medium that, if anything, is even more often used to create the impression of a 'window on the world'. I have also drawn on Botting and Wilson's essay 'Signs of evil', which reads *Twin Peaks* in relation to the *informe*. They argue that the series' generic play and subversive ambivalence relative to grand dichotomies of good and evil, self and other interrogates 'the banal and extremely powerful myths of Americanized western culture' (2001: 150). Finally, I also draw on Reni Celeste's reading of *Lost Highway* in '*Lost Highway*: Unveiling Cinema's Yellow Brick Road' (1997), which makes reference to a link between Lynch's work and Bataille's notion of formlessness (see Celeste 1997).

Apart from these authors, however, there have been very few explorations of the significance of Bataille's work for analysis of cinema, and even fewer analysing Lynch's work in terms of Bataille. Where Lynch's work has been analysed in an academic context, it has mostly been considered in terms of psychoanalytic readings (see especially Zizek 1994, 1997, and 2000), 'postmodernism' (I have already mentioned Dienst and Denzin, but there are many others), Marxist interpretations of postmodern 'pastiche' (following from Fredéric Jameson's influential analysis, see below) and various 'auteur theories'. By relating Lynch to Bataille, my dissertation seeks to cover new ground both in terms of film studies and in the growing body of critical literature on Lynch. In the process it also draws on, and creates links between Bataille and established feminist and narrative film theory.

By situating Lynch within Bataille's discourse (and, drawing parallels with the latter's political agenda), his various textual strategies emerge as politically loaded interventions in American popular culture rather than empty auteurist idiosyncrasies, interventions that carry the potential to unsettle the hegemonic force of Hollywood and other mainstream film and television constructions of

American identity and ideology, both within America itself and also in other contexts where American cultural production has gained a hegemonic status (South Africa being one such example)[14]. This political significance is suppressed by certain other readings that either see his work merely as 'weird' or as participating in a politically stagnant 'pastiche'. The latter approach to Lynch's work is the more seriously damning, as most dismissals of his work on the grounds of its 'weirdness' often do so on superficial and largely moralistic grounds, or according to narrow preconceptions of what narrative cinema should be.

'Pastiche' first gained impetus in Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism or, the Logic of Late Capitalism* (first published in 1984 in *New Left Review*) as a theoretical term to describe one of the main features of 'postmodernist' representation. It describes the tendency, according to Jameson, of postmodern texts to take part in 'the random cannibalisation of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion' (2001: 18). However, unlike parody, which usually does this with a pointed satiric intention, Jameson argues that postmodern pastiche is politically vacuous:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of

[14] This has a number of economic and political implications that are beyond the scope of the current discussion. One of the better-known arguments is that an American 'cultural imperialism' has arisen within the global culture industry. Writers such as Herbert Schiller have argued that in nations where American cultural production has been heavily distributed at competitive prices, it is interfering with, and even eliminating, the unique social meanings of these nations. This has the potential to entrench American norms as ostensibly global norms and marginalise other voices, and, according to Schiller, also supports economic domination. In *Communication and Cultural Domination,* for example, he argues that 'Cultural Imperialism....develops in a world system within which there is a single market, and the terms and character of production are determined in the core of that market and radiate outward' (1976: 5). Apart from marketing discourses that 'developed to sell industry's outpouring of (largely inauthentic) consumer goods', narrative film and television also create aspirations and portray lifestyles as desirable, 'selling globally ideas, tastes, preferences, and beliefs' (ibid.: 3). This collection of norms and identity positions, which also help to constitute the American self-image, comes unstuck in Lynch's films. See also Schiller's *Culture Inc: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (1989).

> laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs. (Jameson 2001: 17)

For Jameson, pastiche is the superstructural dominant of the era of late – or multinational – capitalism. He argues that the latter is an economic infrastructure that has become ungraspable in scale and that has developed symbiotically with postmodern culture, a culture which, in this overwhelming economic milieu, lacks any clear vision of historical causality. It literally 'emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way' within a new world order (ibid.: 21). Pastiche is therefore the latest turn taken by culture's ideological misrepresentation and elision of economic contradiction in a society where 'exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced' (ibid.: 18). Jameson argues that with this loss of historicity comes a loss of understanding of how the material conditions of late capitalism came to be. Instead 'the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history' and 'generational periods open up for aesthetic colonization' (ibid.: 19-20). In turn, 'the logic of the simulacrum, with its transformation of older realities into television images, does more than merely replicate the logic of late capitalism; it reinforces and intensifies it' (ibid.: 46).

However, Linda Hutcheon, in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1991), has pointed out that Jameson's reading of postmodern pastiche as historically and politically bereft is too generalised, and that there are some instances where the incorporation and reproduction of earlier texts has more subversive potential than he allows. Hutcheon calls certain instances of this reproduction of reproductions 'postmodernist parody', claiming that such instances are a 'value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations' (1991: 94). She observes that by 'making

representation into an issue' through the reproduction of past images and texts in the manner that Jameson describes very generally as pastiche, postmodernist parody is able to 'challenge assumptions about its [i.e. representation's] transparency and common-sense naturalness' (ibid.: 32). She does concede however that there are indeed instances where past images are merely reproduced for decorative or spectacular purposes, as in the case of many MTV rock videos, which, for Hutcheon, 'should be called pastiche according to Jameson' (ibid.: 107). While I do not wish to employ Hutcheon's term of 'postmodern parody', (and I do not frame my discussion in terms of 'postmodernism' generally since debates around this term fall beyond the scope of this dissertation), I hold that the films of David Lynch discussed below serve as examples that illustrate her point. Thus, for example, while Jameson holds up *Blue Velvet* as an instance of politically barren pastiche in *Postmodernism or, the Logic of Late Capitalism*, in the first chapter I set out to demonstrate that on the contrary, the film intertextually incorporates conventions for the sake of forming a 'value-problematizing, de-naturalizing' cinema that undermines constructions of late capitalist America. Norman Denzin takes a similar position when he points out that 'such non-discursive, figural texts problematize and make unstable the very ability to represent, hence capture the "real"' (Denzin 1991: 46).

Moreover, it should be observed that the reproduction of past images in Lynch's film is more than simply a case of a director who, in Jameson's terms, has 'nowhere to turn but to the past' and 'the imitation of dead styles' (2001: 17). With the media becoming an ever more pervasive aspect – and shaper – of American life itself, finding new ways of dealing with and confronting this fact is no doubt a part of Lynch's agenda. As I point out in Chapter 3, for example, in *Wild at Heart* Lynch uses the styles of past films such as the Western and the road movie to illustrate the extent to which his characters have lost their ability to distinguish between emotional reality and the trappings of the mass media. With identities closer to being conglomerates of media stereotypes than anything else, they pursue a utopian, and hopeless quest for liberated sexuality and

adventure on a yellow brick road to nowhere, steeped in American myths of glamorous rebellion from *Bonnie and Clyde* to *Elvis Presley.* His film incorporates these elements into its stylistic repertoire to generate uneasiness in the viewer, and prevent them from assuming a privileged distance. Instead, they are faced with the process of their own interpellation in the media staring back at them. Also, in *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch deals explicitly with the problems of filmic representation and its role in shaping identity in his depiction of the plight of a young actress whose aspirations to be a star and object of desire leaves her subjectivity caught, and eventually mangled, in the mechanisms of power and desire that drive the 'dream factory' Hollywood itself. The film's at first overtly generic narrative and use of characterisation follows her aspirations to shape herself as an actress (read industry fetish object), but ultimately leads to a collapse of identity and causality in the film that leaves the viewer without any satisfaction of closure, or even knowing what finally transpired. Hollywood thereby becomes a site of disintegration rather than consolidation of narrative and representation in the film. This interest in the problems of representation and their political force recurs throughout Lynch's film, making readings of them as politically neutral somewhat absurd. Reni Celeste makes an interesting observation in this regard:

> [c]ritiques which read texts in order to delineate the politically 'progressive' from the 'regressive' remain ensconced in the stability of metaphysics, fixed in a modern conception of static justice. Lynch's cinema has never fallen under the good graces of such readings. His vision of America has been neither condemning nor embracing, and his pastiche never simply playful nor nihilistic... Lynch is interested in coming closer. Exaggeration, the seeing 'too much' of obscenity, has always been an important part of Lynch's language. Even a florescent diner sign can be obscene if we look at it long enough; and especially if we listen to it. Such visions unconceal something beneath form, something naked in its neutrality. (Celeste 1997: 14)

This recalls the problem that Bataille identified in relation to heterogeneity. Since it is irreducible to a fixed, knowable meaning or organised agenda, it cannot easily make itself the object of knowledge. In society, as in discourses such as Lynch's

> *[h]eterogeneous* elements...find themselves subjected to *de facto* censorship: each time that they could be the object of a methodical observation, the functional satisfaction is lacking; and without some exceptional circumstances – like the intrusion of satisfaction with a completely different origin – they cannot be kept within the field of consideration. (Bataille 1989: 141)

Yet, as I have pointed out, what Celeste identifies as a 'coming closer', the disclosure of heterogeneity in human relations, places, and even objects, does create a 'force or a shock' (Bataille 1989: 143). This in turn disrupts stereotyped and essentialising understandings in social relations, making room for a discourse that lies outside of the closed forms and identities of much of Hollywood and other mainstream film or television. Critic Martha Nochimson argues in *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood* that this heterogeneity has the potential to take the positive impulses behind many of the mass media's productions and turn them to the service of a more positive approach to cinematic discourse that facilitates openness and empathy:

> Lynch reopens the Hollywood image; he does not merely repeat it. His methods...give him the insight to represent both mirror-image ideals of the filmic image and the wild energies that disturb it. In this balance, we find that he taps into the vitality of Hollywood *and* is often corrective to the lies and repressions involved in Hollywood's pretence of a rationalist form of realism (1999:13-14)

My argument draws on Nochimson's analysis at several points to argue that Lynch associates certain conventional Hollywood forms with a loss of touch with emotional reality; however, the films I analyse here do not, in their own right offer any obvious solutions to this problem. Instead I argue his work often reproduces Hollywood imagery and conventions as a slick complex surface of narcissistic identities and ideologies that isolate individuals and rob all exuberance of human communication or emotional connectedness from the fragmented America he constructs, or more accurately deconstructs. The ostensive satisfaction of the spectacular and opulent America that Hollywood paints becomes a disturbingly meretricious world of illusion and horror in *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway*, while, as mentioned earlier, even romantic resolution begins to bear an uncanny sense of artifice in *Blue velvet* and *Wild at heart*. However, as with all forms of protest, satire, and subversion, including Bataille's, this does not relegate Lynch to empty pessimism, but rather calls for a more critical reflection on culture and its effects, and demands that room be made for other possibilities.

Chapter 1: *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*: Lynch's Intervention in Homogeneity and Home

In the following chapter I will explore how *Blue Velvet* (1986) and the *Twin Peaks* television series (1990-1991) apply the disruptive force of the *informe* to popular film and television representations of the American home. I will start with a discussion of how the representations they engage with have become an aspect of social homogeneity in Bataille's sense that both maps, and is mapped within, American identity and nationalist ideology. As a result, I suggest that Lynch tackles the gradual, cumulative sedimentation of meaning that has come to naturalise this space as an organising principle and a moral and political centre in the contemporary media.

This homogeneous 'centring' of the home has several consequences. As a result of its sheer repetition, its ludicrously simplified vision of the American Way of Life has become such a pervasive and ingrained marker of 'normality', it seems almost absurd to challenge it. As a consequence, an affirmation and naturalisation of social cleavages along national and cultural lines is inadvertently built into the cultural hegemony gained by this conceptual organisation of the American self. This is excacerbated by the fact that, for all its appearance of normality and wholesomeness, popular narrative constructions of the American home have tended to rely for their form on an outside, 'evil', otherness; a process of exclusion and circumscription that is a crucial part of self-consolidation. At the same time this conceptualisation also creates an 'Americanness' that whitewashes social complexities *within* the social groups it affirms. Issues such as domestic violence, cultural dislocation, and personal identity are subsumed beneath a single, banal set of mass-produced narratives.

I will argue that Lynch's reworking of this restrictive mapping of American nationalist ideology disrupts its affirmation of this burgeoning social homogeneity. Both the film and series suggest that there is as much 'otherness'

and uncanniness within the American self as it projects onto its margins. At the same time, they disrupt the powerful hegemony these representations have established as a means to secure one kind of American identity as more 'normal' and 'natural' that other cultural configurations.

My argument explores how *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* adopt the *informe* on two fronts. On the one hand, I examine their collapsing of narrative oppositions that position home as a moral centre in generic film and television (using conventions lifted from *film noir*, detective stories, soapies, and sitcoms from the 1950s up until the present). The home and hometown have come to be associated with the good, the civilized, and the wholesome in the media. As such, I will argue that by *informing* this American institution *using the terms of discourse that traditionally normalise it*, Lynch intertextually subverts its ideological hold in the media in the manner of 'a performative, like obscene words' within its own arena of discourse (Krauss and Bois 1997:18). Good and evil, hero and villain, and home and its peripheries are all rendered empty, interchangeable media tropes that lack the ability to stabilize the uncanny and collapsing world Lynch portrays.

On the other hand, I consider how Lynch's generic play and deliberate foregrounding of the artifice at work in the vocabulary and techniques of realist film carries the defamiliarising shock of Bataille's *informe* into representations that have traditionally been rendered seemingly normal by the effective use of these techniques.

In this respect, my analysis draws on Harold Hampton's reading of these texts as a 'clandestine history' of the Bush and Reagan eras. Hampton argues that 'Lynch works in those gaps where the celluloid splices don't hold' in Hollywood's often nationalist (and even jingoist) constructions of America (1993: 39). My analysis also follows Botting and Wilson who claim that by parading the 'need for evil, in its subordinate place within the grand opposition that organizes the world and

identity' Lynch's unravelling of cultural narratives 'can be seen to be interrogating the banal and extremely powerful myths of Americanized western culture' (2001: 150-1).

Home: Film and Television's Inscription of an American Cultural Homogeneity

As I have already observed, for Bataille, *homogeneous society* 'is productive society' wherein 'all violence is excluded' and 'human relations are sustained by a reduction to fixed rules based on the consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations' (1989:137-8). The enduring mass-mediated representations of the American home that *Blue Velvet* and the *Twin Peaks* series incorporate and unravel through the *informe* are well defined by this description. These representations have helped create clear boundaries that exclude violence and disorder – and indeed all others – from this privileged site of 'normality' and familiarity, and, as such, have become exemplars of cultural homogeneity.

On the one hand this is evident in the characteristics attributed to home in film and especially television. *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet* play on media portrayals wherein the middle-class suburban household and its environs, sheltering the nuclear family (or minor variations thereof), have come to signify a strong work ethic, patriarchal control, security, and conservative morality regarding sexuality and violence. Lynch's evocation of the 1950s is particularly significant in this regard. His use of 1950s classics from Bobby Vinton and Roy Orbison, and a retrograde imagery of picket-fenced suburbia alludes to an era in which the home and small town became symbols of a prosperous but moral America, especially in light-hearted romantic comedies that celebrated everyday life[15]. Many of the films starring Doris Day epitomise this tendency in cinema, which include *The*

[15] Several critics have identified this aspect of *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*. For example, Scott Pollard describes their small towns as portraying a 'retrograde '50s-era vision of the American Way of Life' (Pollard 1993: 297). Similarly, Norman Denzin observes that Lynch appropriates conventional representations of an America wherein 'identity is rooted in home, children, work, commitment, material objects, family vacations, and watching old movies together' (Denzin 1991: 121).

Winning Team (1952, also starring Ronald Reagan), *The Tunnel of Love* (1958), and *Teacher's Pet* (1958). On television, *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963), *Father Knows Best* (1954-1963), and later the *Brady Bunch* (1969-1975) also become highly popular.

In these texts, the home served as a generally upbeat embodiment of the fruits of the post-World War II economic boom and an accompanying escalation of consumerism and nationalism couched within, and sanctified by, family values. This set of associations, bringing together productivity and moral order, condenses the key elements of social homogeneity in Bataille's sense, that is, maximising production, controlling sexuality and violence, and preserving the individual, a formula which has recurred ever since in more contemporary films, for example, *October Sky* (1999), *Field of Dreams* (1989), and the teenage comedy *She's All That* (1999).

However, representations of home and the nuclear family have also become part of America's cultural homogeneity through the way in which they are positioned within narrative oppositions that at once define them (i.e. give them a recognisable form) and grant them a positive moral charge. Deleuze and Guattari, whose philosophical texts draw on Bataille's work, define the homogeneous character of home in terms of its dependence on conceptual boundaries. For them it is a space circumscribed by exclusion:

> home does not pre-exist: it was necessary to draw a circle around the uncertain and fragile centre, to organize a limited space. Many, very diverse, components have a part in this, landmarks and marks of all kinds...now the components are used for organizing a space...the forces of chaos are kept outside as much as possible, and the interior space protects the germinal forces of a task to fulfil or a deed to do (cited in Pollard 1993: 295).

This logic marks out what Bataille calls 'the consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations' that makes the organisation of homogeneity possible (Bataille 1989:137-8). In *Film as Social Practice* (1993), Graeme Turner develops an analysis of structuring oppositions within the greater part of popular American film and television narratives that helps to illustrate how this homogeneous logic also creates home as a *moral* 'centre'. Turner observes that this opposition, 'once set up, produces both structure and discourse – the movement of the plot and the specific means of its representation in sound and image' (Turner 1993: 76). Typically, an equilibrium or desired state is interrupted and this has to be restored, sometimes in a higher form 'through the action of a force directed against the disrupting force' (ibid.). In narrative film and television intended to be read as a realistic portrayal of a world (even if it is a fantasy world), a 'preferred reading' often singles out one set of opposing values as 'good', and a heroic protagonist fights to maintain or restore this 'good' situation or principle. These moral dichotomies thereby sustain a contrast between a desired state and a crisis that in turn generates an arc of tension and resolution.

For example, in Mel Gibson's *The Patriot* (2000) a romantic hero fights to secure independent American territory against threats from its peripheries in the form of English imperialists, and in turn drive out internal threats that belong on the periphery. On the other hand, Kevin Costner's *Dances With Wolves* (1990) depicts an American soldier standing up for a tribe of Indians against its vilified enemy tribes, and also voracious American frontiersmen who threaten their territory and indigenous lifestyle. Although neither of these films portrays the middle class American home, both are based on a principle of territorialisation that asserts the rights and power of one group to call a space 'home', while other groups are portrayed as outsiders or threats.

As I will argue below, *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* parade this homogeneous narrative structure and its definition of the American home as a moral centre and

destabilize it through the *informe*. They adopt a now almost universally conventional American form that has, according to Fred Pfeil in his essay 'Home Fires Burning', developed from the so-called *noir* films of the early to mid 20th century. This is the opposition between the home as a safe and familiar world and its peripheries, ghettos, decaying urban landscapes and streets, and the debauched spaces associated with nightlife. These, in contrast to home, tend to form part of an associative matrix for violent crime, drugs, moral degradation and various other forms of evil in *film noir* classics such as *Double Indemnity* (1944) or *Dead Reckoning* (1947), horror films such as *Candy Man* (1992), thrillers, crime dramas and even sci-fi like *Blade Runner* (1982). Such settings, even when they are explored with some relish, still gain their moral charge through being aligned with all that is 'other' to, or excluded from, the world run and inhabited by 'decent', law-abiding American society and its citizens (the assumed viewer), an other which (inadvertently or not) helps perpetuate a clear sense of what is normal or right through antithesis.

Pfeil cites a particularly useful unpublished Bahktinian description of these oppositions as they feature in the thematics and 'chronotope' [16] of *noir*:

> The diacritical contrast that structures film noir...is between the impersonal, discontinuous rented space of cocktail lounge, nightclub, hotel, and roadside café, on the one hand, and the familiar, unfragmented secure space of domesticity on the other...The chronotope of film noir...perversely celebrates the repressed hysteria of a postwar cultural moment when domestic and economic coherence were fractured, spatializing and concretizing a "freedom" at once attractive, frightening, and ultimately illusory. (Sobchak cited by Pfeil 1993: 229-230)

[16] A notion originally developed by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe the typical set of narrative and stylistic conventions of different literary genres and styles that give them their 'phenomenal feel' (see Pfeil 1993: 229).

Of course this kind of contrast is not restricted to *noir*. However, the *noir* chronotope and its subsequent mutations and manifestations are significant in contemporary cinema because even when 'bad' aspects of the USA are shown, they are shown in terms of a narrative opposition that contains them within the moral designation of 'evil,' 'corrupt,' or 'bad.' As such they are still part of a larger conceptual schema, which scholars on Bataille's work, Fred Botting and Scott Wilson describe as a homogeneous discourse that renders the world coherent by setting up 'grand oppositions of good and bad' (2001: 151).

In my discussion of *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* I draw on Fred Pfeil's analysis of Lynch's work, which claims that several of Lynch's films take the original *noir* chronotope that focused on the moral instability of spaces peripheral to the secure home into the home itself, '*noirizing*' it[17]. For Pfeil, the outcome in *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* is a representation of American life which is centred on 'home and family, even as it decentres and problematizes both' (1993:231).

A further way in which the home has become a cornerstone of homogeneity is through the conventions of 'realist' filmmaking, which allow it to be read as a coherent and ostensibly 'normal' site of American identity and moral good. To return to the discussion of cinematic 'realism' in the introductory chapter, these include the ordering of (what appear to be) 'moving' film images and synchronised sounds according to established conventions that allow an understanding of narrative causality and maintain the consistent self-identity of objects and characters that feature in this narrative. Film analyst Kristin Thompson describes how these conventions developed and gained their familiarity in *Storytelling in Film and Television* (2003). For Thompson, 'the norms in widespread use in recent decades are essentially still those of the "Golden Age" of studio filmmaking in the decades before 1960' (Thompson 2003: 19), an age of cinema which Thompson, along with co-authors David

[17] Other critics have also commented on the links between *Lynch's* work and *film noir*. See, for example, Leighton Grist's 'Moving Targets and Black Widows: Film Noir in Modern Hollywood' in Ian Cameron (ed) *The Movie Book of Film Noir* (1992).

Bordwell and Janet Staiger, calls 'Classical Hollywood' (1985: 4). In terms of narrative, this approach generally dictates that 'a cause should lead to an effect and that effect in turn should become a cause, for another effect, in an unbroken chain across the film' (Thompson 2003: 12)[18]. In terms of how this sequence of events is portrayed (i.e. how it is created in sound and light), this approach deploys film techniques, including 'continuity editing', synchronised sound, naturalistic acting, and the concealment of the filming equipment and process to give the viewer the sense that they are looking through a 'window on the world' via the camera. Lived reality seems to be merely 'reproduced' rather than constructed through sound and light: 'Hollywood film purports to be 'realistic' in both an Aristotelian sense (truth to the probable) and a naturalistic one (truth to historical fact)...[it] strives to conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and 'invisible' storytelling' (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 1985: 3).

As I have already indicated, it is also around the culmination of the classical Hollywood era that representations of home in film and television, with the aid of these established techniques, became an embodiment of American family values and prosperity. The techniques perfected at this time have ensured that home has been an easily intelligible space with seemingly real people in it that encourages involvement and identification on the part of the viewer.

Representations of home in television narratives are particularly instructive in this regard, making *Twin Peaks* particularly interesting from a political perspective. Thompson observes that many of the norms of 'classical Hollywood' 'have also been adopted or adapted by television precisely because they have been so suited to telling straightforward, entertaining stories' (Thompson 2003: 19). These techniques, along with the 'diacritical contrast' discussed above, have

[18] As Thompson observes, this does not mean that 'each effect follows immediately from its cause'. Rather, 'one of the main sources of clarity and forward impetus in a plot is the "dangling cause," information or action which leads to no effect or resolution until later in the film' (Thompson 1999: 12).

been at the basis of television genres such as sitcoms (I have already mentioned shows from the 1950s like *Leave it to Beaver,* but this has continued to the present with *Rosanne*, *Full House, Everybody Loves Raymond*) and soapies (*Loving, Santa Barbara*, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, etc) that centre on – and centre – the American home.

If these various techniques and narrative structures have secured home as a part of social homogeneity, the way in which these texts are consumed has been equally important. The sheer volume of production of these representations, and their endless repetition, has entrenched home as a homogeneous mapping that secures American identity through familiarity. Apart from the mass consumption of films at commercial cinemas, television has made films and programmes representing the home and family an everyday occurrence. In addition, a number of social commentators have pointed to the ideological significance of television's role as a fundamentally domestic medium and phenomenon. For example, Nicholas Abercrombie observes that 'television is an integral part of everyday life' and that many of its texts 'are very much concerned, though not exclusively, with the family, home, and domestic life' (1996:18). Similarly, James Monaco (2000) points out that 'television happens in our space, in our time. It becomes part of our reality' (Monaco 2000: 506). This has profound ideological implications:

> television *assumes* a great deal about the world which is not then questioned. What is presented is a seamless web which actually depends on a set of specific assumptions. As a result, what appears on television seems to be common sense, what we already know. Situation comedy and soap opera, for example, generally depend on assumptions about how families – implicitly *all* families – are constituted and how they work...The world of television texts is therefore a commonsense world in which much is taken for granted and the net effect is to exclude

alternative possibilities and to present one meaning as the only real one. (ibid.:32)

These norms tend to be those of the middle class; as Scott Pollard asks, 'isn't the whole purpose of network television to promote the middle class as *the* way of life?' (Pollard 1993: 303).

Reading representations of the home through Bataille's notion of homogeneity therefore allows us to see that home in the media has become one of the ways in which identity and selfhood are mapped in a familiar and comforting or seemingly 'normal' conceptual scheme. For Bataille, homogeneity is governed by laws, and consists of cognitive forms (such as science, maths, language, and narrative) and concrete systems (from physical technologies to bureaucracies) that make day to day rational activities within a co-operative situation possible (Bataille 1989:137-8). Media representations and narratives such as those depicting the home can be understood as an instance of the former aspect of homogeneity; however they clearly affect how the latter are carried out in practice through guiding policies, shaping human relationships, influencing moral decisions and the like. In this respect political theorist Richard Fox's notion of a 'nationalist ideology', which he develops in *Nationalist Ideologies and the Production of National Cultures* (1990), is useful in conceptualising the political significance of homogeneous representations of home. According to Fox, national ideologies 'refer to the production of conceptions of peoplehood...the social beliefs and practices labelled as ethnicity, racial identity, and nationalism...are all cultural productions of public identity' (1990: 3-4). Such a construction allows purposeful action and productive co-operation, and also determines the specific configuration of laws and prohibitions that give a community its unique character. As Fox puts it: 'a national culture starts out as a nationalist ideology, that is, a consciousness or perception of what the nation is or should be, which then may gain public meaning and be put into action' (1990: 4).

However, from a Bataillean perspective, the risk is that by portraying the home endlessly as a norm, there is a strong element of denial, the 'substituting of a screen for the violent truth' (Bataille 1957: 74). As with the overblown homogeneity that Bataille saw at work in the society of his time (1988:36), excessive homogenisation of public discourse risks leading to the denial of real social problems created by this bounded ideological community by entrenching inflexible and prejudiced cultural essentialisms that exclude self criticism and disqualify other identities or lifestyles. Derrida and Caputo's argument in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* sums up this problem:

> the various nationalisms are...the almost perfect embodiment of "identity", of identitarianism, of self-affirming, self-protecting, homogenizing identities that make every effort to exclude the different. Such nationalist identitarianism does everything it can to prevent the "other" from crossing over "our" borders, from taking "our" jobs, from enjoying "our" benefits and going to "our" schools, from disturbing "our" language, culture, religion, and public institutions. They could not be more inhospitable to the coming of the other (Derrida and Caputo 1998: 107).

The more polarised and rigid forms that American nationalist ideology has taken occur in the political rhetoric that ran through the 'red fever' and McCarthyism of the cold war era, and that has continued in the more recent phobia of Islam that has developed in the 'war on terror'. Ronald Reagan's 'dark allies of oppression and war,'[19] George Bush's 'civilization, the values of which are uniquely universal,'[20] and U.S. national security advisor Condoleezza Rice's recent comment in a celebrated *Newsweek* essay 'You're Safe With Us' (2004) that 'since September 11 the world's great powers find themselves on the same

[19] Cited in Botting and Wilson 2001: 150.
[20] Cited in Rice 2004: 65.

side of a profound divide between the forces of chaos and order' (Rice 2004: 65), all rely on this conceptualisation. As Botting and Wilson comment, this rhetoric rests on the assumption that 'at the frontiers of an unbounded political psyche lies an evil empire', but it is a projected image of the other which defines American nationalist identity through antithesis, becoming 'the constitutive inversion of America itself' (Botting and Wilson 2001: 150).

This is not to say that these conceptions are intrinsically linked to the home. However, historically the home has become a key element in supporting and maintaining them, alongside more obviously ideological representations of, for example, U.S. military strength in the post-Vietnam era or demonised communists/terrorists (see Ryan and Kellner 'Vietnam and the New Militarism' (in Ross 2002: 281-302) for a discussion of the latter).

Although the representation of home in popular film and television discussed above has been prevalent, as a homogeneous discourse, this moral and ideological centring has, inevitably, been subject to heterogeneous disturbance. As Bataille observes, social homogeneity and the ideologies and systems it produces are vulnerable to impulses that destabilise it (Bataille 1989:138). As a product and part of homogeneity, nationalist ideology is itself open to change. Even its initial form 'emerges from the confrontation over what the nation should and will be' (Fox 1990: 4). In American film and television, the home and family that I have suggested form part of a larger American nationalist ideology have also been contested sites for some time, much like other aspects of the ideology they support. Television series like *The Simpsons* (1989 to present), *South Park* (1997 to present), *Married with Children* (1987 to present), and the 'reality' show *The Osbornes* (2002 to present) have produced less-than-flattering families in various ways over the last decade. Many films have created even more divergent constructions of the 'good old' American home and hometown from the margins, especially, although not exclusively, within the realm of cinema marketed as 'art film'. Various problems affecting the America's real-life homes

have been singled out, including overbearing patriarchy (*Pleasantville* (1998)), racism (Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* (1956)) and its often claustrophobic conformity and saturation with technology (*American Beauty* (1999) and *The Truman Show* (1998))[21]. However, most of these cinematic depictions of the American home have not adopted the same approach as *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet* in undermining, to the point of the uncanny, the narrative and semiotic conventions of mainstream film.

The Narrative Undoing of Lumberton and Twin Peaks

I will now compare the manner in which *Blue Velvet* and the *Twin Peaks* series engage with homogeneous representations of the American home to Bataille's *informe*. In the process I will illustrate how they can be seen as 'performatives' that intervene in this ostensibly normal and stable discursive field, and I will suggest that by so doing, they challenge its powerful normalising force. The first aspect of the film and series that I will explore is the way in which both disrupt the narrative oppositions (identified in the above discussion of Turner and Pfeil) that help structure and reinforce American nationalist ideology.

A brief plot summary of the film and the series is already revealing in this regard. Both Twin Peaks and Lumberton are towns where surface appearances of wholesomeness and clear moral divides are problematised, revealed to be at best illusory, at worst meretricious. *Blue Velvet* tells the story of Jeffrey Beaumont, an ostensibly naïve boy-next-door character from a conservative home and a synthetic looking all-American neighbourhood who gets mixed up with the

[21] While *All that Heaven Allows* is a relatively realistic (although highly melodramatic) exploration of racism in its depiction of the consequences following from a young white woman's affair with a black gardener, the more recent of these films also include a high degree of self-reflexivity in their portrayals in order to comment on the construction of home as American reality in the media. *The Truman Show* depicts the deluded life of a young man who is actually the unwitting star of a 'reality TV' show filmed 24 hours a day in a huge dome controlled from a communications hub. *Pleasantville* uses the contrast of black and white film and technicolour, as a literal expression of two youngsters 'bringing colour', in the form of emotional vibrancy and sexuality, into the staid 50s TV show small town that they are pulled into via a 'magic' TV remote.

violent underworld of his hometown, Lumberton. In the process he discovers less-than-innocent impulses within himself. After a stroke shown in the opening of the film, his father Tom Beaumont lands up in hospital, leaving his home without patriarchal control, and his son Jeffrey the space to stray from this haven into an unnerving world of moral chaos in the 'bad part of town' while playing detective/voyeur. Upon finding a severed ear, taking it to Detective Williams, and being tipped off on its possible origin by his daughter Sandy Williams, Jeffrey is drawn into a disturbing parody of his own family situation. In the dim space of an apartment in a run-down block of flats, he discovers that pathological drug dealer and hoodlum Frank Booth has kidnapped lounge singer Dorothy Vallens' husband and child in order to force her to participate in an irrational mutation of traditional patriarchal domestic relations (Frank forces her to call him 'daddy', bring him drinks, wear costumes for him, and have violent sex with him while he calls her 'mommy'). The film finally comes to a deliberately implausible closure, where Jeffrey falls in love with blonde Sandy, shoots the 'bad guy', and his father recovers. By doing so Lynch creates an absurd whitewashing of the fact that Jeffrey has indulged in sadistic and adulterous sex with Dorothy behind his family's and Sandy's back, and found that on some level he is not as distant from Frank as he (or the Williams family no doubt) would have liked to have believed.

A similar emphasis on defamiliarising and decentring the American family and the small town is found in the *Twin Peaks* series. The series starts with the discovery of homecoming queen Laura Palmer's body on the shores of a lake in the beautiful and otherwise tranquil small American town of Twin Peaks, and then follows FBI agent Dale Cooper's investigations into the *noir* side of the town looking for her murderer. In the process Laura is shown to be less than the quintessential, all-American icon she initially appears to be (and should be), as she is involved with drugs and prostitution. The final blow to the appearance of normality in her home is revealed when the killer turns out to be her own father Leland, acting under the influence of Bob, who could be seen as many things,

including a possessing spirit (a la gothic horror) or a bestial alter ego. Following this, the series continued with a less commercially successful second season that continued Cooper's adventures. A rogue/psychotic agent Windom Earle follows Cooper to launch a murderous rampage in *Twin Peaks*, forming the complicating action for Cooper as hero/protagonist to act against. What follows leaves Cooper's status as a conventional hero complicated, since it emerges that he has had an adulterous relationship with Earle's wife, which cost the latter her life at Earle's hands, and, by the close of the series, he succumbs to Bob, or at least what Bob represents. A number of subplots dealing with other themes also run parallel to the Laura and Windom stories in the manner of a soap opera, with other major characters taking the focus in some episodes.

Apart from the obvious theme of corruption within what appears to be idyllic American small towns, it should be clear from my brief summaries that, while the protagonist in both cases is aligned and identified with the social order, he is permeated by the same violent energies that he seeks to drive out of the home-as-centre.

This complication illustrates how the *informe* operates to destabilise the narrative inscription of home in the two texts. The upsetting of moral boundaries in the film and the series goes beyond the mere 'corruption' of a hero and the world he seeks to protect. If these texts could be read in this way, it would mean that they maintain the larger formal oppositions of 'good' and 'evil,' centre and periphery, in their narratives. Jonathan Preston's article 'Dantean Imagery in *Blue Velvet*' (1990) helps to illustrate why this is not the case. He points out that in most American films where morally centred protagonists have become tainted 'the artists have removed their characters from the civilized world to jungles or islands where controlling influences of law and convention do not exist' (1990: 168). Within the terms of the dichotomy underlying the *noir* chronotope discussed above, corruption of a lead character would occur in the nihilistic netherworld outside of the domestic or its immediate community. However, in

both *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* the conventional protagonist comes unstuck within the small town American home 'where order traditionally prevails among guardians of convention and custom' (ibid.). Moreover, neither Jeffrey nor Cooper is simplistically cued as 'evil' or prone to corruption. Quite the contrary, their decency and moral rectitude is stressed through their archetypal characterisation. In both *Blue Velvet* and the *Twin Peaks* series, Jeffrey and Cooper are constructed as generic lawmen and representatives of the moral good that attempt to secure and define the limits of the American home.

Scott Pollard's reading of the *Twin Peaks* series in 'Cooper, Details, and the Patriotic Mission of *Twin Peaks*' (1993) identifies this link between Cooper and the American home particularly well:

> Twin Peaks is home – a metonymy for America...Cooper must shape Twin Peaks into a defensible territory – an ideology plus the fragment(s) of the universe with which it has forged connections – to re-establish clear borders, "marks" and "landmarks" within which goodness can be preserved, and from within, beneath or behind which evil may be expelled.... From the details he observes and interprets, Cooper creates a moral surface out of Twin Peaks that is meant to be separate and distinct from the subterranean evil that bubbles below. (Pollard 1993: 296-297)

Despite his idiosyncrasies[22], Cooper's narrative function is deliberately portrayed as that of a conventional television lawman from the outset. Cooper's unique skills of perception and analysis are foregrounded in the series at various points, such as when he spots James Hurley's motorbike reflected in Laura's eye on a video recording. Cooper is, at least initially, also 'characterized by moral superiority, a quality we find in a number of other American heroes' (Carroll 1993: 289), and he is a lover of all things wholesome, including traditional

[22] Cooper uses unusual methods, including a receptiveness to dreams and the 'Tibetan method' for finding clues to Laura's killer. He is also eccentric in his dress and his constant monologue into a tape recorder.

American institutions like morning coffee (in almost every episode he waxes lyrical over a cup of 'goodmornin' America'), homemade pie, cosy diners, and above all, nature, recalling another archetypal American figure, Daniel Boone (Carroll 1993: 290).

Cooper is therefore not only working for the FBI, but has also taken a vested interest in what Twin Peaks represents, a certain ideal that he and the townspeople wish to protect. This is evident in his speech about the down-to-earth goodness of the people of Twin Peaks to the insensitive big-city forensics expert, Albert, in episode two. He even acts as the town's deputy for a while, and is initiated into its elite, all-boys club 'the Bookhouse Boys'. Thus, 'as he glorifies the pie and commends the coffee, not only recognizing but endowing such details with a positive moral charge, he reinforces the cogency of that surface' (Pollard 1993: 296-297).

In many ways, this also applies to Jeffrey in his relation to Lumberton. While Jeffrey is not officially an enforcer of the law, he, like Cooper, takes up this role, to restore everything to its rightful place (to rescue Dorothy's family and end the threat that Frank and the dirty detective Gordon pose to his hometown). Thus Jeffrey acts as a force to return the film's narrative oppositions to the equilibrium wherein his home and hometown are separate and safe from their peripheries (Frank's world and Dorothy's lower-class situation). Like Cooper, he also has a vested interest in the town by virtue of it being his home and the source of his identity as a wholesome 'boy-next-door' character. While Cooper works for the FBI though, Jeffrey's informal role is more in the vein of a private detective. As Betsy Berry points out in her essay 'Generic conventions and the subversive imagination in *Blue Velvet*' (1988), although Jeffrey is far from the 'hard-boiled' detective due to his (at least initial) naiveté, in a similar fashion to a professional he pursues and lays bare the mystery presented by a severed ear he finds in a field. He also stakes out the activities of the criminal underworld involved and searches for clues in the mysterious Dorothy's apartment (Berry

1988:83). Even in his unofficial capacity then, Jeffrey still works as a force of 'good' and is characterised by similar moral preoccupations to Cooper. 'Why is there so much trouble in this world?' he laments after telling Sandy about Frank's abuse of Dorothy, to which she responds with a hopelessly naïve (in the context of the film) vision of robins bringing love and goodness to a dark world. It seems that just like Cooper, Jeffrey wishes to make Sandy's vision – and the media's homogeneous representations – of home a firm reality.

This becomes apparent in more than just his attempts to thwart Frank and the evil he represents. In numerous details Jeffrey tries to perform the roles expected of him as a 'decent' middle-class boy just as Cooper asserts the coherence of Twin Peak's idyllic surface through obsessing over pies, coffee, the great outdoors, and good old-fashioned values. In the opening of the film, when Tom Beaumont falls with a stroke, he has been performing one of the standard duties of home, watering the garden. Later, when Jeffrey repents his sins, he is seen playing out the same role in precisely the same pose, attempting to emulate and replicate the idyllic and mannered world of Lumberton that has been threatened. Jeffrey takes up this performance in an attempt to recreate the illusory calm of Lumberton's 'good' surface. It is a metonym for his overall aim to counteract and exclude not only the evil that has entered his world through Frank's violence and his father's stroke, but also the moral ambivalence created by his liaison with Dorothy.

In both *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*, however, this framework of a would-be enforcer of the moral boundaries of home is set up only to be fatally compromised with ambivalence. The hermeneutic and punitive functions of the highly conventional 'lawman' characters of Jeffrey and Cooper come unstuck in these texts, along with the moral and conceptual basis of the American home, opening it up to the *informe*.

In *Blue Velvet*, Jeffrey's 'making good' on his role at home is part of an ongoing sense of a 'cover up' that the film develops, leaving the viewer to wonder if

Jeffrey is indeed a 'detective or a pervert' (as Sandy asks him earlier in the film). Moreover, his claim that he wants to help Dorothy is muddied by his voyeuristic pleasure and eventual surrender to the same kind of urges that drive Frank (giving the latter occasion to comment: 'you're like me,' and call him 'neighbour', a name which, as Kenneth Kaleta has pointed out in *David Lynch*, 'becomes a description of the sexually aberrant bent that Jeffrey and Frank share as "neighbors"' (1993:122)). Jeffrey, although not coded as a villain, is nevertheless equally capable of sadism and power play, and the extent that this implicates him and all that he stands for is emphasised when Dorothy suddenly arrives at his house after his idyllic evening at the dance with Sandy. A transcription of the scene is included in the appendix to this dissertation, to which I refer in my analysis.

In the scene, Dorothy returns like Jeffrey's bad conscience, a sudden disruptive intrusion of the violence that he had sought to keep (and indulge in) strictly on the other side of Lincoln Avenue into the secure spaces of Lumberton. In shot 1 a. she appears almost corpse-like amidst the banal scene showing Mike threatening Jeffrey against the backdrop of picket fences. The scene is confrontational, as shots 13-24 alternate between Jeffrey coldly trying to hide his involvement, awkwardly recoiling from a vulnerable and terrified Dorothy, and Sandy's face as registering heartbreak as she finally discovers Jeffrey's previously hidden life (and the indirect consequences of her own, less harmful voyeurism). The most striking aspect through these shots is the juxtaposition of the conservative interior of Sandy's house (and the well-presented and equally conservatively dressed figures of Jeffrey, Sandy and her mother) in shots 16, 18, 20, 22, and 24, and Dorothy's stark nudity (against Jeffrey's clothed body), ugly injuries, and traumatized emotional state shown in the alternating shots. It marks the film's most potent manifestation of heterogeneity within the homogeneous space of the home, momentarily rendering the latter disturbing. It functions here to bring the two worlds of Lumberton within unnerving proximity, blurring the boundaries that normally keep Jeffrey's world, that is, the world of positively

conceived Americanness, and the world of Lincoln Avenue, or 'civilised' America's other, discrete. Sandy's mother prudently gets a coat to cover Dorothy, although it seems more for their benefit, and perhaps the viewer's too. The notion that this is a moral, rather than simply physical cover-up is signified by her decision to get the coat in shot 20, immediately after Dorothy's outburst and Jeffrey's guilty reaction in shot 19 that finally gives up the game.

Yet all of this is glossed over in the scene that follows. While Jeffrey repents to Sandy for his infidelity, the scene in which he does so deliberately strains credibility, and with it the resolution of narrative antagonisms that bring about narrative closure according to Turner (1993). In shots 29 a. and 29 b. Jeffrey receives an absurdly quick forgiveness, only four shots after Sandy has slapped him and Dorothy has been dragged off screaming. Dorothy's screams and the siren wailing are replaced with a love song, while the camera moves from a reflection of Sandy's blonde hair in a heart-shaped mirror, panning slowly over pink curlers and a frilly lampshade. This new take on the old signifier of self-reflexivity comments on the bad faith of sentimentality as a mode of resolution, and links Sandy's subjectivity as a 'forgiving' and 'nurturing' woman to the mass-produced trappings of girlishness. As Preston observes, in a realistic representation Sandy would have 'displayed the usual prolonged jealousy response of withdrawal and renunciation after Dorothy, standing naked in Jeffrey's arms, informs Sandy repeatedly that Jeffrey has "put his disease in her" (Preston 1990:171). Sandy's sobbing forgiveness played with complete earnestness is used by Lynch to undermine the diegetic integrity of this narrative scheme. Lynch hammers the point home when the action is handed back to Jeffrey as masculine protagonist in shots 29 c. to 30, where he orders Sandy to call the police as he is about to go and find Frank. In shot 30 Sandy again assumes an overtly recycled womanly role, telling the 'brave' Jeffrey 'be careful', a quote that is repeated in every *James Bond* film when Miss Moneypenny wishes Bond well on his next mission.

This effect of undermining closure and the devices used to secure it culminates in the film's closure, which throws into relief the artifice of the narrative project that conventionally restores the moral sanctity and normality of the home in its homogeneous manifestations. Looking in particular at the way the film's final scenes are constructed, reveals how the *informe* functions in the film. The scene reeks of bad faith as it flaunts its own generic artificiality, with all of the characters assuming clichéd roles and uttering wooden lines. While Jeffrey is seen relaxing in the sun, Sandy, in her 'rightful place' in the kitchen calls him inside for lunch, and on his way he greets his father, who is at *his* 'rightful place' beside the barbeque (set on a perfectly neat lawn). His father remarks that he is 'feeling much better now', as Jeffrey heads inside, a strange comment that seems almost staged for the film's picture perfect closure (it is as if he is saying it for the benefit of the viewer rather than Jeffrey, who would have seen him earlier). In the kitchen Jeffrey finds Sandy with his aunt Barbara, and a somewhat mechanical looking robin sitting on the windowsill with a bug in its beak. It seems then, that everything is in order, and both the family and the young couple are finally happily united. However, the 'mysteries of love' soundtrack that plays out in the background lends a certain air of dreamy unreality to the scene, as does the artificiality of the robin, shown in close-up.

While the robin itself no doubt represents Sandy's dream, a number of critics have commented on this scene and the way in which it foregrounds the thinness of the surface of Lumberton-as-media construct. For example, Fred Pfeil points out that:

> [g]iven the bird's obvious artificiality, the music's clichéd goopiness, and the hypercomposed flatness and stiffness of the *mise en scene*, it is also about the anxious and delightful possibility that Aunt Barbara – and Jeffrey and Sandy...are robots too. And of course they are, in the sense that they are constructions of sound, words, and light, spaces where

> Lynch & Company's meet our own; and in this sense so are all the characters in every feature film. (Pfeil 1993: 237)

This moment is, however, merely the culmination of an ongoing erosion of the credibility and neatness of the film's affirmation of domestic bliss, already set in motion in the scenes immediately preceding it, as my close reading above should illustrate. Apart from the scene depicting Dorothy's arrival already mentioned, the sheer rapidity of the film's closure strains belief in its own right. The extent of Jeffrey's involvement compromises him to the point where it seems ludicrous to find such a fast return to the secure moral certainties that the end is built on. Jeffrey also moves too easily between violent sexual encounters with Dorothy to dancing cheek to cheek at the squeaky clean school prom with Sandy and sitting at the traditional breakfast table with his mother and aunt, all the while concealing his exploits.

These inconsistencies suggest that the conception of the American home that Jeffrey – and much post-1950s film and television – attempt to secure are without any real grounding. The morally charged conceptual categories of 'good' and 'evil,' 'civilization' and 'chaos' are thereby subjected 'to the shattering of signifying boundaries' that the *informe* performs (Krauss 1993:157). Through this relegation of clear narrative oppositions to the *informe*, the home loses its ability to contain identity.

A similar result occurs in *Twin Peaks* with the failure of Cooper's project to purify and neatly circumscribe the hometown and the American way of life it represents. There are two fronts on which this can be read as an instance of the *informe* in terms of its structure and political significance. The first is a similar failure of the protagonist's project to sustain his vision of the moral stability of the American home and hometown that occurred in *Blue Velvet*. The second is the introduction in the series of numerous narrative lacunae that further distort and frustrate Cooper's attempts in this regard (an aspect that marks Lynch's

increasing interest in *informe* at the level of narrative causality and logic, which, as I will argue in Chapter Two, is especially evident in *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*).

In the first instance, on top of the series' main, and highly taboo, travesty of Leland's incest and murder, there is so much violence and abuse in the town that no one seems to escape from it. Cooper seems unable to contain or acknowledge the extent of this due to his undying idealism. As Richard Davenport points out in his article 'The Knowing Spectator of *Twin Peaks*: Culture, Feminism, and Family Violence', violence and the arbitrary exercise of power are, at times, depicted as a 'customary, even banal, feature of the average, middle-class American family' (1993:256).

Nearly every home depicted in the series is permeated by violence and perversion of the values that the town initially appears to stand for. For example, Shelley is initially caught in an emotionally and physically abusive relationship with Leo, who enacts a violent hyperbole of parental guidance/patriarchal control on her by constantly beating her when she fails to do the laundry right or tries to leave before doing her housework (in this respect Leo strongly resembles Frank in *Blue Velvet*). When Leo is shot and enters a coma, Shelley seems free, only to land up in an only slightly less abusive relationship with Bobby, originally her secret lover behind Leo's back. The situation takes on an overblown and morbid twist when the couple decide to keep the catatonic Leo at their house for government grant money, and treat him with constant derision (a grotesque parody of a daddy, mommy, and baby family found in a number of sitcoms, with Leo constantly regurgitating food and misbehaving).

Similarly, Norma, who runs the town's diner, has an ex-con and decidedly not rehabilitated boyfriend who threatens her with violence when she refuses to aid him in his criminal activities. The owner of the Great Northern Hotel, Benjamin Horne runs a brothel (One Eyed Jack's) which he regularly frequents with his

brother, and even narrowly misses committing incest with his own daughter Audrey Horne when she works 'undercover' there to look for evidence to help Cooper. In '*Twin Peaks* and the Television Gothic' (1993) Larry Ledwon also links this anxious collapse of the normative world of the American home and hometown to the traits of the characters themselves:

> Lynch uses physical and mental deformity metonymically to suggest the extent of the distorted and dysfunctional family. The strained family dinners at the Hornes' are silent except for the monotonous humming of the teen-aged autistic son, dressed in full Indian war bonnet. Donna's mother is in a wheelchair, Nadine has only one eye and limits her discussions with her husband to her obsession with silent drape runners. The Log Lady talks to her log in lieu of a husband. Sarah Palmer is subject to visions and fits of (demonic?) possession and her husband, Leland, goes insane. (Ledwon 1993: 265)

So exceptions to Cooper's idyllic conception of the town render his vision somewhat absurd. Significantly, this is a surface of perfection that Lynch plays up on in the way he has chosen to portray the town in the opening credits of each episode, complete with generic shots of waterfalls, lakes, forests and robins dissolving into each other, all shot over lilting strains of Badalamenti's stock melancholia. Even shots of machinery at work in the mill don't disrupt the harmonious representation of the town. Yet the violence this surface hides is never given narrative containment by the series. Instead it is confrontational, and often patriarchal in nature (Laura, Shelley, Norma, Cooper's lover Annie, and the prostitutes of One Eyed Jack's, especially Teresa and Ronnette all find themselves on the receiving end at various points).

As I have already indicated, the series' dramatisation of Cooper's failure to secure and define his mass-mediated conception of the American home is also exacerbated by narrative lacunae that gradually *inform* its conceptual boundaries.

For Cooper to effectively exclude it, 'evil must have a locus, an obvious and identifiable origin' (Pollard 1993: 297). Yet the malevolence that Cooper would like to contain, define, and neatly marginalize from the town (both physically and conceptually), quickly multiplies and reappears everywhere until it is in Cooper too. It therefore moves beyond the neat, designated evil that features in the narrative structuring a law maker is usually faced with in popular television, into a nebulous ambivalence.

The initial challenge for Cooper in the series is to find Laura Palmer's killer. This involves the detective's usual task of unravelling clues to construct a clear narrative of what happened and who was responsible, a process that is here rendered all the more explicit by the inclusion of letters left underneath the nails of his victims by the killer. During the course of his investigation, he is swamped with suspects, making a number of false arrests along the way (holding Laura's lovers Bobby and James initially, strongly suspecting Leo Johnson and Jacques Renault, and arresting Benjamin Horne later). However when he finally arrests the real culprit, Laura's own father Leland Palmer, things become more complicated still. Leland appears to have been possessed by another being, Bob. Here the series veers toward the supernatural. Yet even as it offers this possible solution to the mystery, it begins to complicate it, until the viewer is unsure as to what Bob is or how he fits into the story.

Bob is a greasy, long-haired, unshaven, denim-clad apparition that is never quite explained in the course of the narrative (although the series does make loose gestures in this direction by designating him as an impulsive servant to 'the circle of appetite and satisfaction' through the account of a one-armed man Mike who used to kill with Bob). Moreover, with Bob come a number of other, increasingly implausible and absurd supernatural elements that also threaten the safety of Twin Peaks, and the coherence of Cooper's investigative reconstruction both of what happened to Laura and of what is happening to Twin Peaks. Bob himself marks the breakdown of the logical identity of character so essential to

narrative logic. As a character that is assigned to the 'evil' side of the structural opposition that Cooper attempts to fix in the series, he might be seen as the violent and immoral impulses of the periphery invading the safe haven of home. He is dirty and unkempt, fitting the stereotype of the wild man or vagabond. Lynch therefore brings another of the middle-class's others into the heart of its haven, the social outcast/vagabond/'trailer trash.'[23]

Yet this paranoia is foregrounded and satirised in the series as the evil multiplies in an increasingly implausible and absurd manner in the form of ancient Indian hieroglyphs, the 'black lodge' (which the US Air Force has pinned down to a set of coordinates in the forest), aliens, and in the form of Windom Earle's almost supernaturally evil and brilliant mind. Thus, as Botting and Wilson observe, the series unravels the circumscription of American identity and its clear association with 'goodness':

> [e]vil's source, or even its transient location, remains uncertain throughout the series. At once outside, in the woods or even, as one storyline suggested, in outer space, the source of evil is also, profoundly at the core of identity, family, and society. (Botting and Wilson 2001:151)[24]

Evil cannot be pinned down and rendered discrete from the American way of life, it is as if all of network television's bogeymen stepped into the series at once, leaving Cooper and the viewer confounded and also without the comfort of

[23] Significantly, in the film *Fire Walk With Me*, 'The Fat Trout Trailer Park' features prominently as one of the sites of the ongoing, vaguely supernatural threat that menaces the middle-class world of Twin Peaks, a threat of which Bob is one of the elements.

[24] Botting and Wilson further point out that these various locations are part of the series' generic play insofar as they ironically conform to common narrative threats from television:

> These shifting limits of evil…are located in other narratives that compose the series' network of allusions. In the 1950s, at the height of the Cold War and the Red Threat, outer space was the site from which evil invaded. Recently, in a spate of media representations, literary texts and films, the 'psycho' and serial killer have become the privileged objects of cultural fascination. (2001: 152)

a final conceptual framework to deal with this invasion. As critic Richard Dienst points out, this is more disturbing than any one of the threats on its own:

> the more traumatic encounter with the Outside occurs when the townspeople's 'evil spirits in the woods' turn out to be some eruption of primal taboos and global dangers, that is, when a traditional, mystical account for things is displaced by an undecidable choice among irreconcileable options (ranging from crypto-psychoanalysis to clairvoyant rationality). (Dienst 1995: 96)

As much as Leland's act betrays the moral divide Cooper would like to keep in place (he finds it hard to conceive of a man of Leland's social standing doing such a thing), the possession starts to interfere with the very possibility of even conceptualising this divide. Bob is a categorical uncertainty, as is the Dwarf, the giant, and the other characters in the equally inexplicable art deco space surrounded by curtains (the 'Red Room' seen in dreams in the series). Bob and these other characters in the series are not strictly human, but they are never really defined as spirits either. As Birns points out in his reading of the series, this also upsets the conceptual distinction between natural/supernatural, since the series

> held out the possibility of both a supernatural and natural solution...[it] explored the allure of the supernatural without ever privileging it or mystifying it...focusing on the indecisiveness of the uncanny rather than its possession of an occulted truth. (Birns 1993: 278)

The generically evil (and good) forces in the series take philosopher Noel Carroll's idea of the monster as 'category violation'[25] (which he sets out in *The*

[25] Carroll argues that monsters are largely monstrous or horrific by virtue of the fact that they 'cross the boundaries of the deep categories of a culture's conceptual scheme', for example zombies are both living and dead, and therefore violate this basic formal opposition. He also points out that 'objects can raise categorical misgivings by virtue of being incomplete representatives of their class, such as rotting and

Philosophy of Horror) a step further, since they are never really explained at all (in most horror, according to Carroll, the origin of the monster or an explanation of its nature is a major part of the narrative (Carroll1990: 38)). They do not even fit comfortably into the (now familiar) category of monsters. By leaving their origin, ontology, and (with the exception of Bob and Mike) their function in the narrative almost entirely unexplained, they also become *narrative lacunae*, preventing its complete explanation and the stability of its moral oppositions. They become a fatal stumbling block to Cooper's attempts at establishing complete moral and conceptual clarity when drawing the boundaries that secure home, nation, and the American way of life as a 'signifying centre' (Pollard 1993: 297). And without this clarity, Cooper cannot act effectively as a 'force directed against the disrupting force' (Turner 1993: 76) that unravels the town and American identity. If, for Bataille, homogeneous human relations and moral schemes 'are sustained by a reduction to fixed rules based on the consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations' (1989:137-8), the narrative's collapse into the *informe* renders the maintenance of the home as a homogeneous principle, both morally and conceptually impossible.

While this narrative undecideability undoes Cooper's project to create and sustain a meaningful solution to Twin Peak's moral crisis, it also undoes the cohesion of his archetypal character at the close of the series, much as Jeffrey was compromised in *Blue Velvet.* The final episode ends with a scene where Cooper stares into the mirror and sees Bob in the place of his reflection. Immediately afterwards Cooper is seen sneering back at the mirror in the same way as Bob and repeatedly saying 'how's Annie?' in an empty repetition of his earlier concern for his love interest in the series. No further information is given and the viewer is left without closure. By conflating and confounding Cooper with Bob, one of the narrative lacunae in the series, Lynch leaves the conventional narrative oppositions Cooper sought to protect, and that the series

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disintegrating things, as well as by virtue of being formless, for example dirt' (Carroll 1990: 32). In this respect Carroll touches on Bataille's interest in the *informe* as a source of disruption to cultural systems.

played on, in flux. The ending therefore leaves the series' narrative diegesis without formal clarity or decisiveness; it enacts the failure of meaning, and of Cooper's meaning-making project of securing the moral and conceptual boundaries of the American home. In the process it provokes an awareness of the highly conventional nature of such representations. Botting and Wilson encapsulate this point well:

> In refusing good's resolution, *Twin Peaks* allows its diabolical ambivalence and playfulness to infiltrate other cultural screens. Leaving its audience unsatisfied, wanting, identifies them as consumers. (2001: 150)

The disruptive effect on home and identity that this chaotic mirroring generates is accentuated by an uncontrollable slippage of meaning in other aspects of the series. As Gadeba Baderoon has argued in an unpublished thesis on postmodern television, a general 'overloading of convention' occurs throughout, calling the integrity of the representation and the moral and conceptual oppositions it employs into question (Baderoon 1996:113)[26]. As Baderoon points out, 'by foregrounding conventions of transparency and naturalness, the *Twin Peaks* audience is led to reconsider the constitutive surfaces of televisual and cinematic "normality"' (ibid.). Indeed, what lends both *Twin Peaks and Blue Velvet* their textual force, and what offends so many critics who are not disturbed by other equally violent representations, is the fact that they bring taboo and violent material into a home and hometown that are represented *within the same conventions* that normally identify them as stable centres in other texts. In this

[26] Baderoon sees this as an example of 'bricolage', the collage-like combination of often incompatible or incongruent codes and conventions:

> Using the technique of bricolage, the texts consist of incomplete fragments of texts which refuse the redeeming order of realist narrative. They suggest the 'unreality' of reality by intensifying the conventions by which we know the 'real'...since bricolage plays on surfaces, the deliberate artificiality of setting and character in *Twin Peaks* undermines the verisimilitude of the camera's image. (Baderoon 1995:26)

respect, Pfeil has observed that most critical accounts of *Blue Velvet* miss the full effect of its 'de-realizing, de-naturalizing formal operations'. For Pfeil,

> What fascinates and appalls in *Blue Velvet*, what simultaneously underwrites and undermines the mixed messages of its generic play and desublimated oedipality, is the sense of the fragility of the symbolic, its susceptibility to the metonymic 'disease' of constant slippage that is always already inside it, a *gynesis* of both film and family that irresolves without ever overthrowing. (Pfeil 1993: 238)

I have already touched on this in relation to the ending of *Blue Velvet*, but I will take a closer look at how this *informing* of conventions operates in other areas of both texts.

Generic play in *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*

In my initial discussion of the American home as a form of cultural homogeneity in popular film and television, I argued that realistic techniques[27] are fundamental to maintaining its coherence and ideological stability. In *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet,* the American home and hometown and their peripheries (such as the open road, the nightclub, the brothel), are represented with a similar emphasis on the fact that they are cinematic constructs, undermining this basis of homogeneous representations. In the section that follows, I consider how Lynch's incorporation and then disruption of realist depictions of the home becomes another instance of the *informe* in film and series. Through creating a 'force or shock' of the kind that Bataille attributes to the encounter with 'heterogeneous reality' (1985: 143), I suggest that Lynch infects homogenised representations of home that viewers have grown accustomed to with the

[27] In the broader sense of 'classical Hollywood' techniques described earlier in relation to the work of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985: 4).

uncanny[28]. This in turn draws attention to the tenuousness of dominant discursive constructions of the American home and hometown as key aspects of contemporary American nationalist ideology.

Lynch's texts do not play with genre in an obvious enough way to function as parodies or 'spoofs' like recent films *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997), *Legally Blonde* or *Kill Bill* (2003), or the television series *That 70s Show* (2002 to present). This would place them neatly in another now-conventional category at a safe distance from more 'realistic' representations. Both Lumberton and Twin Peaks are ostensibly realistic towns, but something about them is two-dimensional. Their stylised generic quality seldom becomes a straightforward parody, yet it never settles for conventional realist mimesis either. Instead it leaves them hovering between the realistic and cold, dead images. Even their names and locations allude to this oddly generic quality, since they are not real American towns, but sound as if they could be.

[28] Uncanny, or "unheimlich" in its German original, is roughly translated as 'un-home-like.' It has been discussed by a number of writers; however, it was most famously explored by Freud in his essay 'Das Unheimliche' (1919). The uncanny can be described as an experience whereby that which has been familiar suddenly and inexplicably becomes strange or alien. Freud identifies a number of ways in which the uncanny can be invoked, including doubles like reflections or images that are recognized as other from the self, whereas previously they seemed to merely reproduce and affirm the self (1953:224). In such cases, as Ledwon observes, the cause is 'that which ought to remain hidden and secret, but which has become visible' (1993: 263). In this case, the shock of realising a reflection is only a dead object creates the disturbing effect. Freud also locates this effect in the anxiety created by uncertainty over whether something is animate or not, as in the case of 'waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata' (Freud 1953: 221).

This applies in *Blue Velvet* not only relative to its strangely animate hose pipes and robotic bugs and robins, but also, by the end of the film, to the characters themselves. In *Twin Peaks* the uncanny is also evoked in several respects (see my discussion below). However, Freud notes that in fantasy stories the anxiety of uncertainty is absent because the story world has its own internal logic. Magic and strange creatures 'can exert no uncanny influence' because 'this problem is eliminated from the outset by the postulates of the world of fairy tales' (ibid.: 234). This is maintained in the homogeneous discourse of film and television as well, which relies on familiarity and a sense of certainty that all things and persons presented in the diegetic world are real and alive. There are clearly links between the qualitative experience of the uncanny and Bataille's *informe*, which momentarily takes the familiar or the known, and ruptures its familiarity, revealing something other beyond its organising and comforting form. In Lynch's texts, I suggest that the *informe* creates this disruptive affect relative to the home-as-signifier-of-normality. I suggest this can be read as a political gesture that unsettles American nationalist ideology as it is supported and constituted in cinema and television.

As several critics have observed, Twin Peaks and Lumberton are like celluloid 'everytowns'. For example, Martha Nochimson describes Lumberton as

> the mass media's infinitely imitable American home town frequented by placid housewives in neat homes, polite high school students with straight white teeth, and fathers who are charged with holding it all together. (Nochimson 1997:99)

Similarly, Harold Hampton describes the town of Twin Peaks as a conglomerate of existing media constructions of the American home and hometown:

> The town of *Twin Peaks* had the feeling of a full-fledged, self-contained community – the home we've dreamed of since we were old enough to turn on the TV. (Hampton 1993:48)

While the town of Twin Peaks shares much with Lumberton in terms of how it is represented, it is depicted in this slightly wilder manner in the series' manipulation of generic conventions. On top of the major *noir* divide between home and its peripheries that it flaunts, and the conventions Hampton describes, it also draws in the supernatural sci-fi/horror elements mentioned above[29]. In this respect, Birks argues that *Twin Peaks* makes 'the sinister hooting of "Bob" as much of a received image as the reassuring presences of people like Dr. Hayward' (1993: 284).

A similar point can be made regarding the characters in *Blue Velvet.* For example, Sandy is first introduced in the film through an extreme close-up of her in a heart-shaped portrait, clad in a floral dress and smiling benignly. The camera then tracks out to reveal various knick-knacks and floral wall paper. This shot

[29] Indeed, their lack of narrative clarity could partly be attributed to their status and function in the text as stock figures of horrific 'otherness'. This as opposed to being integral parts of the narrative as such figures are in horror narratives that maintains diegetic (if not naturalistic) realism (i.e. that maintain causality, identity and rational exegesis in a view of the world that, if radically out of joint, is still comprehensible).

establishes her first and foremost as a reproduction. She appears as an almost inanimate part of the small town middle-class iconography that her image merges with, and the trappings of middle-class girlishness. When Jeffrey meets her shortly afterwards, Lynch continues to manipulate this device to suggest her generic role, as she emerges from the shadows into a bright light (a hackneyed trope of goodness) to the sound of a non-diegetic string flourish. A similar effect occurs in Jeffrey's stilted exchange with Sandy's father Detective Williams over the question of the severed ear. As Pfeil comments:

> Williams's suspiciously askew reactions and expressions...may prompt us to wonder if Father/Detective Williams won't turn out to be one of the bad guys after all; on the level of the film's enunciation, though, and in light of all else we have seen in this film so far, such a moment is apt to engender a far more fundamental distrust, less the suspicion that we have not gotten to the bottom of this, than the full-blown paranoia that there may be no bottom here at all. (1993: 236-7)

There is an impression then, that the Williams' 'all-American' home is pure textual surface, a centre that only appears so. Shortly afterward this is juxtaposed with its periphery, here an equally generic 'rough half of town', which is deliberately and artificially marked out by a shot of the signpost for Lincoln Avenue as the clean-cut characters of Jeffrey and Sandy are straying from the safe confines of suburbia into this forbidden domain. It is shown in a corny, almost cartoon-like tilt-up accompanied by an ominous brass chord drawn straight out of a 1950s or 1960s detective thriller. Many such moments occur in the film, especially in the Deep River apartments. Frank's place is also strangely lacking in reality, first seen with a spotlight throwing weird shadows of machinery and steam onto its façade while Frank and his cronies enter, laughing like a bunch of comic strip megalomaniacs.

Establishing shots that seem to be drawn straight from television sitcoms and old Hollywood detective films are also common in *Blue Velvet*. 'Arlene's', the diner where Jeffrey and Sandy meet to discuss their stakeout of Dorothy's apartment is always introduced with an extreme long shot of its façade with the same log truck driving past. The Beaumont's hardware store and The Slow Club where Dorothy sings are similarly introduced every time a scene plays out there, once again 'overdoing it'. This is also evident in *Twin Peaks*, when One-Eyed Jacks and Norma's diner are shown. In both texts these shots emphasise the impression of Lumberton and Twin Peaks as cinematic American 'everytowns', and with it the conventional nature of their simplistic moral dichotomies. Critic Martha Nochimson makes an interesting comparison of this flattened appearance of the towns to artist Edward Hopper's paintings:

> Many of Lynch's frames actually resemble the small-town scenes of Hopper's canvases...they look so mimetic and yet at the same time suggest a way in which cultural spaces like houses, cafes, and even the surrounding cultivated land are like theatre sets...a perspective from which ordinary pragmatic rituals of bureaucratic and mercantile processes are flattened and defamiliarised. (1999:28-29)

By reproducing standard television and film settings (and the way in which they are shot) in the flat and strangely wooden manner that he does in *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks,* Lynch removes their 'normality' as realistic backdrops. In so doing he raises the question of what lies beyond these forms that help to sustain the coherence and normality of the American world as Hollywood and popular television have envisioned it. It evokes the otherness of the *informe* in the heart of the American self, an uncanniness of the everyday seen without the organising conceptual categories that make it *seem* everyday. This uncanniness is carried across into domestic appliances and technology. In the Palmers' home, something as simple as a fan above the staircase outside Laura's room occurs repeatedly as a motif signifying her sexual abuse at Leland's hands. It is pictured

repeatedly in a medium long shot turning slowly with a deep rushing sound. Just before Tom Beaumont falls with a stroke in the opening of *Blue Velvet*, his hose is blocked and the tap roars and gurgles at a monstrous pitch, and when he falls, his hosepipe rears up with a life of its own like a comical phallus at his crotch. And throughout the series and the film, light bulbs, neon signs, and wires buzz and crackle, disturbingly both animate and inanimate. Most significant of these uncanny elements of the everyday in Lumberton and Twin Peaks however, are media images themselves, an integral part of the American home and society.

Through most of the first season of *Twin Peaks* the '*Invitation to Love*' soapie comments on and defamiliarises both the nature of television and its role as a domestic commonplace. The series' focus on personal relationships, its obsession with melodrama[30], and its ongoing episodic narrative are all self-reflexively commented on by the soapie within the soapie that many of the characters watch. This evokes an ironic self-consciousness around the activity of watching it. Shelley for example, finds solace in its simple fantasies after being subject to Leo's abuse, yet these fantasies do nothing to help her improve her life. It also comments on the voyeurism implicit in viewing violence when in episode eight Leo is shot by Norma's ex-con husband Hank Jennings, and slumps to the floor while watching a hackneyed scene of the shooting and slow collapse of a similarly aggressive character Montana on the television. By simultaneously showing a spectacle of violence on television while itself displaying such violence, the series infiltrates the viewer's domestic space, forcing self-consciousness around the act of watching television.

[30] The extent to which *Twin Peaks* delves into a hyperbolic reproduction of the soapie's melodrama is evident right from the first episodes of the series. At Laura's funeral, a hysterical Leland rides his daughter's coffin up and down in the grave on its motorised lowering system in an extremely grotesque parody of his earlier copulation with her body. Sarah Palmer is equally hysterical. When she first receives the news of her daughter's death she screams and wails through most of the first episode. This is 'to take TV's dramaturgy by the throat, to shake it out of its facile emotionalism and push on through to some madhouse opera' (Jameson 1990:74).

Earlier I suggested, following Abercrombie, Monaco, and Ledwon, that television plays a significant role in cementing the normality of the home through its role as a domestic medium, especially in the case of soapies and sitcoms. By simultaneously raising self-consciousness about viewing television, and distorting its normative forms beyond recognition, *Twin Peaks* has a disruptive effect on the medium and its tendency to sustain the normality of the middle-class American way of life. As Ledwon observes, since television is domestic, *Twin Peaks* '*is* the uncanny/*unheimlich* contained within the familiar/*Heimlich* of the home' (Ledwon 1993: 263). It threatens the tacit understanding of the receptive situation as part of the normal, the domestic, and risks calling the normality of the domestic itself into question. If one of the sources of the uncanny is 'that which ought to remain hidden and secret, but which has become visible' (ibid.); and if television has become so familiar, despite being a kind of 'ghost in the home' (ibid.), the contemporary, technologically complex home in itself carries the seeds of the uncanny which Lynch exploits in his buzzing electrical devices and roaring faucets. Adding to this, *Twin Peaks* brings the most taboo or heterogeneous elements into the home: 'There it is, on your television screen, in your own living room – a father assaulting and killing a "daughter" in his living room' (Ledwon 1993: 264).

While not a television series, *Blue Velvet* still incorporates and manipulates the electronic imagery of television and other media as a self-reflexive strategy. Tom Beaumont's collapse in the opening sequence is immediately preceded by a series of cuts between a sputtering tap and his wife watching a black and white *noir* thriller on TV inside the house. The screen depicts a close-up of a stalking man's hand holding a gun, building an ominous note. The television *noir* sequence is notable here in the way in which it signals the film's obviously generic use of the opposition of home and the dark world on its peripheries. Tom's stroke augurs this breakdown of the safe order of things. From here, as if to sum up this introduction of Lumberton as a formulaically dual world, the film reverts to a second establishing sequence, showing a giant 'Welcome to

Lumberton' sign. On the sign a 1950's image of a cheerfully waving housewife wearing a kerchief on her head dominates the screen, and a local radio jingle sings something to the effect of 'la, la, la...Lumberton' in a warbling chorus that for a moment seems to be emanating from the monstrous mouth of the image. Media images seem to be what sustain Lumberton's moral divides, divides which are overtly artificial.

This is borne out shortly afterward when a *noir* image is used again to comment on Jeffrey's foray into the bad side of town and its secrets. After he has found the severed ear in a field and taken it to Detective Williams at the police station, he goes out to pursue the mystery. On leaving, he is first seen opening the door to his room and descending a dark staircase lit as a silhouette from behind. This blatant use of *noir* lighting in his home is immediately reinforced with a chiaroscuro black and white image of an ominous, long shadow slowly descending a staircase on the television, which Jeffrey's mother and Aunt Barbara are watching. Several further shots show the feet of a man creeping down the stairs, while Jeffrey arrives at the foot of the stairs himself and tells his mother he is going out. Barbara warns him not to go to Lincoln avenue, the first mention in the film of the 'wrong side of town'. The image thereby once again metacinematically aligns Jeffrey's pending journey into the dark world beyond Lincoln Avenue with the now conventional circumscriptions of the periphery beyond the safe world of home and family that has been lifted from the *noir* chronotope discussed earlier.

Conclusions

To recap, I have argued that an analysis of film and television representations of the American home through the lens of Bataille's concept of homogeneity reveals some of the ways in which these representations have historically been situated within, and situate, American nationalist ideology. I have pointed out that for Bataille, homogeneity organises society and individuals' positions within

society according 'to fixed rules based on the consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations' (1989:138), a consciousness that is formed and shaped by shared representations, and that has taken on new dimensions with the proliferation of film and television. I have used Richard Fox's notion of a 'nationalist ideology', which is grounded in 'the production of conceptions of peoplehood' (1990:3), to describe the way in which representations of home have helped to produce a particular 'identity of delineable persons' that has come to be understood as American, or 'Americanness'.

With this in mind, it should be evident that the various textual strategies that *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet* employ, which I have argued can be compared to Bataille's *informe*, gain a particular political charge in disrupting this formation of ideology and identity.

Critical responses to these texts vary radically and, if anything, this can be attributed to the semiotic ambiguities created by the disruptive movement of the *informe* as it occurs in their narrative and stylistic systems. Pollard reads *Twin Peaks* as 'a narrative of redemption' (Pollard 1993:301), however, this cannot explain the gradual erosion of Cooper's status as pure romantic hero, culminating in his infection with the other he attempts to contain. Nor does it account for the rot that is found in almost every corner of the town. Similarly Baderoon argues that

> Ultimately the narrative redeems the signs of middle-class life. Cooper stands at the centre of middle-class normality and accrues all the features which have been in the town from the beginning. (Baderoon 1995: 118)

Pfeil's response contrasts sharply with Pollard and Baderoon, since he criticizes Lynch's perspective on the home for failing to offer either closure or a constructive alternative agenda to this hegemony. He argues that Lynch's work

wallows in the 'thrilling sublime of... "permanent revolution"' and exhibits a lack of any belief that 'individuals can come together in collective action to transform societies structurally and institutionally for the better' (1993: 255) Similarly Denzin sees these as 'dangerous texts.' For Denzin

> they reproduce the very cultural conditions they seek to criticize...They contribute to the creation of "a culture of indifference." Clearly Lynch's texts appeal to moviegoers and TV watchers who have grown sick of the entertainment they have become addicted to. (1991: 80)

Blue Velvet and *Twin Peaks* certainly do reflect disillusionment with middle-class American culture and society while failing to reflect on possible pragmatic solutions to political issues such as class injustice or racial prejudice. But they do take up issues such as violence against women, and they undermine the simplistic dichotomies that structure the somewhat sterile world of middle-class America.

In addition, while Lynch's work is not capable of overthrowing the media's constructions of American identity, it is capable of introducing a different level of awareness regarding the interpellation of this position within contemporary media discourse. It cannot undo the economic and cultural hegemony of the American media per se, but it can work *within* this field to shift ideological perspectives by playing on its margins and fissures. To use Bataille's perspective, these texts are closer to heterogeneous cultural practices.

Perhaps it is precisely this aspect that gives Lynch's texts a certain kind of political force. By looking at these texts in terms of a performative akin to Bataille's *informe*, they can be seen to create a certain shock within the target audience of the conventional texts they '*declasser*', that is, dislodge from conceptual structure (Bataille cited in Bois and Krauss1997:5). In this receptive context they become 'heterogeneous objects' that force a certain uneasy self-

awareness by revealing the limits of the self. They may not present an agenda, but they certainly threaten the hegemonic stability of a problematic existing one. Perhaps, in this respect, Harold Hampton comes closest to articulating what Lynch has done in *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*. While the nationalist rhetoric of Bush and Reagan invokes images of America's 'civilization' 'the values of which are uniquely universal' (in Rice 2004: 65), Hampton observes that Lynch 'takes irrational spasms and turns them into instant Americana'. As a result, for Hampton Lynch's small towns 'loom as heartfelt, perverse monuments to the Reagan Era's back-to-the-futurism, a period that has outlasted the false endings of 1988 and 1992, and shows no sign of abating' (Hampton 1993: 38).

Chapter 2: *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*: Fissures in Patriarchal Eroticism

In the previous chapter I suggested that *informe*, although without a specific *project* in its own right (since it is the undoing of all forms of rational or useful project), is a textual practice that takes on a political dimension in its disclosure of the limits and provisionality of social narratives that do support certain social patterns, power relations, agendas, or projects.

I have observed that for Bataille, *informe* reveals these limits when it defines the margins of pre-existing forms, interrupts agendas, and unsettles the sense of normality and order that fixed narrative structures work to construct. In the current chapter I will consider how Lynch adopts this textual strategy to unsettle film conventions and narratives that construct eroticism around gender relations that objectify women.

In *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001) Lynch stages the kind of generic contemporary erotic stories that attribute erotic gratification to these gender relationships, only to destabilise these narratives, suggesting that they are constructions of eroticism that are hopelessly plagued with contradictions. In each film a desiring protagonist that would normally guarantee the unity of the narrative is driven to frustration by unfulfilled desires and alienation, and all sense of identity and agency is lost. In each story, too, the relationship is set within the context of a highly materialistic world in which wealth and objects take precedence, a selfish and utilitarian logic which also infiltrates emotional relationships in the films.

In this respect these films are notable instances of a small but growing movement in American cinema away from the repeated and homogenised patriarchal circumscriptions of women and heterosexual relationships. As Jack Boozer has observed in 'Seduction and Betrayal in the Heartland: *Thelma & Louise*' (1995),

while woman's representation as an object for male desire has formed 'a basic uneasy model which is right at the heart of American culture', a number of films with active female protagonists and films demonstrating the problems with patriarchal gender roles (Boozer gives the example of *Thelma and Louise* (1991)) are instances where gender relations and eroticism have 'commenced to develop in an interesting and troubling way, revising the opposition of action and icon' (Boozer 1995: 162). Lynch's cultural intervention in this regard occurs at the level of cinematic discourse itself, as well as thematic content.

Mulholland Drive and *Lost Highway inform* the ideological suture at work in mass media narratives, such as those underlying advertising and much of mainstream Hollywood, that objectify women as the ultimate commodity. In this respect, I will argue that they call for an eroticism that lies beyond the hopelessly alienating social narratives that are pervasive in the American mass media. In addition, by unworking the cohesion of narrative, they disrupt narrative fulfilment of patriarchal desire. In this regard much of my analysis draws on key ideas in feminist film analysis. However, while these studies emphasise the implications of objectification and commodification for the economic and political agency of women, the following chapter shifts the focus slightly to consider the implications of this for contemporary cultural understandings and practices of eroticism vis-à-vis Bataille's notion of eroticism[31]. I outline this problem first as a general background for the analysis of the films that follows.

The Mutual Exclusivity of Eroticism and Objectification

In *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, one of his last works, Bataille argues that eroticism 'unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children' (1977:11). For

[31] This is not intended to diminish the significance of the feminist agenda; in fact it merely adds a further reason for its value.

Bataille, 'we suffer from our isolation in our individual separateness' while eroticism holds out the momentary experience of 'a total blending of two beings....a continuity between two discontinuous beings' (1977: 20). It is through eroticism that human beings experience the moment of *communication*[32] wherein the discontinuous (i.e. individual) self experiences intense closeness with the other, and the sense of boundaries between individuals weakens for those individuals. This emotional bonding occurs in love but also in moments of religious ecstasy. Throughout Bataille's work there an emphasis on this '[f]eeling of complicity in: despair, madness, love, supplication', and that is the 'Inhuman, dishevelled joy of *communication*' (Bataille 1988: 37). It is this *communication*, he argues, that enables genuine human bonds in love and in a religious community.

Bataille's notion of eroticism suggests that *communication*, beyond everyday, utilitarian communication of ideas, is a basic and necessary experiential impulse. In other words, the individual, discontinuous self is driven to find *communication* (or *communion*) with an other. This is not possible in patriarchal relationships where women are reduced to *things* for male subjects[33]. Objectification implies a subject maintaining a certain distance relative to an object, while '[t]he whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participants as they are in their normal lives' (Bataille 1988:101).

Objectification is a potentially multivalent phrase as it has featured with various nuances of meaning in critical literature. I use it here in Martha Nussbaum's sense as 'making into a thing, treating *as* a thing, something that is not really a thing' (1995:257). This definition is useful insofar as it evokes the specific problem that Bataille has identified at various points in his work with the

[32] Where I have used the terms 'communication' and 'thing' in Bataille's sense I have italicised them.
[33] Bataille's notion of 'thing' forms the basis of my understanding of the terms 'object' and 'objectification'. By 'thing' Bataille denotes a self-identical object that has a use-value for a subject, that serves a purpose beyond itself, such as a tool (see *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1* 1992:264 and 313).

reduction of a person to being a tool or item of utility. In *The Accursed Share* Bataille points out that a man is 'a thing, at least temporarily, to the extent that he serves'[34] (1992:314), while in his essay 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism' he argues that when a person ceases being 'an existence *for itself*' and becomes an existence *'for something other than itself'* a 'tendential reduction of human character takes place, making it an abstract and interchangeable entity: a reflection of the *homogeneous things* the individual owns' (1985:138). For Bataille, then, whether someone is using a tool for productive and goal-oriented purposes, or being used *as a tool* to work (in the case of slavery, for example), they are still alienated within the function of cognition for the duration of the task. Bataille considered this a major problem in capitalist society since this logic infiltrated and undermined social relationships, and in Lynch's film it is this 'tendential reduction of character' in a materialistic late-capitalist America that leaves the women in his films, especially in *Mulholland Drive*, alienated and dehumanised.

Thus objectification denies the desires and agency of the individual who is reduced in this way, subordinating him or her as an object *for* the use of the objectifying subject. Communication is not possible within the objectifying and commodifying relation, and both the person reduced to an object/commodity *and* the agent of objectification are alienated as a result, unable to communicate in Bataille's sense.

De Lauretis (1984), Mulvey (1989) and a number of other authors have seen the desire behind this narrativisation of the feminine as a desire to escape the threat posed by the other, by difference. For example, in *Visual and Other Pleasures* Mulvey states that 'Difference produces great anxiety. Polarisation, which is the theatrical representation of difference, tames and binds that anxiety' (Mulvey 1989: 161). Anxiety of feminine 'otherness', especially the fear of vulnerability

[34] By 'serves' Bataille refers here to *serving a useful or productive purpose*, as in the case of working toward a goal, be it in the form of a mental or physical task.

in the face of sexual desire for the feminine, is dealt with in narratives that seek to know this 'otherness' by reducing it to a fixed idea of what it means to be female, and how this forms part of heterosexual relationships. Among other things, narratives that investigate the woman and reveal her mysteries, that fetishise the feminine, or that save her or punish her while accentuating masculine control and power in the process are various examples Mulvey describes at work in cinema. Mulvey associates the latter with the glamour of stars and the spectacle of the female body which 'builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself' (Mulvey 1989: 21).

Looked at from Bataille's perspective, the desire to inscribe the feminine is also linked to the way in which narrative reflects the desire to realise a certain goal, often associated with law or legitimacy, as Hegel observed in *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (De Lauretis 1984: 128). Bataille's Hegelian and Kojevean perspective is that narrative plays a key role in bringing a sense of order and limits to a world in which death and sexual impulse threaten to unsettle human endeavour. Objectification is often an attempt to escape the loss of the self in eroticism, and place sexuality on a par with other forms of utilitarian transaction which do not threaten the self. In *Death and Sensuality* Bataille points out that 'man runs in fear from his impulses' (1977:1) and that

> [h]owever reasonable we may grow we may be mastered anew by a violence no longer that of nature but that of a rational being who tries to obey but succumbs to stirrings within himself which he cannot bring to heel. There is in nature and there subsists in man a movement which always exceeds the bounds, that can never be anything but partially reduced to order. (1977:40)

Objectification is an attempt to deny emotional vulnerability and the giving up of oneself to *communication* that Bataille sees as movement of 'exceeding the

bounds' of the self in eroticism. However, what remains – and this is a core contradiction in much of contemporary forms of eroticism – is a hollow desire for sensory gratification without any emotional element. Thus contemporary representations of eroticism seem to end up encouraging gender roles that exclude rather than facilitate erotic *communication.*

As feminist critic Audre Lorde has argued, the logic behind pornography 'is the direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasises sensation without feeling' (cited in Nussbaum 1995: 283). This also applies more subtly in a number of generic narrative schemas both in the classical and contemporary Hollywood mainstream which combine the spectacle and narrative positioning of femininity within closure that fixes the patriarchal status quo, and in its most vulgar instances plays up to frightened machismo (this despite ongoing challenges from alternative and so-called art cinema).

This objectification has been taken to hysterical, convulsively reproduced proportions in American consumer capitalism. Bataille helps us to see the link between capitalism as an 'unreserved surrender to *things*, heedless of the consequences and seeing nothing beyond them' (1992:136), and the compulsive reduction of women to things in media representations[35]. In both cases there is an increasing inability to deal with erotic *communication* and its links to the dissolution of the individual and ultimately death[36].

The impulse to objectify and remain unthreatened by assuming this position of power is most obviously expressed and pandered to in popular American culture by 'men's magazines' and 'soft core' pornography such as *Playboy* magazine.

[35] A reduction that has also been extended to the male body and that carries similar implications, although a discussion of this is beyond the scope of the current chapter.

[36] In *Death and Sensuality* Bataille argues at length that eroticism and death share a link insofar as they both involve the dissolution of the individual. Death, for the individual, 'means continuity of being' (1977:13); the cessation of discontinuity and the separation from otherness that this implies. In death individual being's limits are violated and dissolved, and it returns to the continuity of existence in general (or, as Bataille terms it in *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1*, 'the totality of the real' (1992:264)).

As Nussbaum points out in relation to *Playboy* magazine: 'the male reader is told, in effect, that he is the one with subjectivity and autonomy, and on the other side are things that look very sexy and are displayed out there for his consumption, like delicious pieces of fruit, existing only or primarily to satisfy his desire' (1995: 283). Such representations, as in pornography, tend to depict 'a thoroughgoing fungibility and commodification of sex partners, and, in the process, severs sex from any deep connection with self-expression or emotion' (ibid.).

This objectifying mode of eroticism is also prominent in advertising campaigns, which regularly feature scantily clad models, and also in narrative films across all genres that parade glamorous stars. These operate far more insidiously though, since they are more socially acceptable than pornography. In all of these instances, femininity is more often than not laid out for male desire. As Laura Mulvey puts it in her groundbreaking essay

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly...Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease...she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire. (Mulvey 1989: 19)

This nurtures a culture where power and quasi-ownership are eroticised, and where women become complicit in their own objectification by playing into the hands of the cosmetic and fashion industries in an effort to remain desirable for men. This is an issue taken up in *Mulholland Drive* where Betty is seduced into being exploited in Hollywood.

The common instances where women are reduced (more or less vulgarly) to a thing or object in cinema usually involve two interrelated gestures that are both problematic. The first is through the association of closure and the 'happy' return to or achievement of patriarchal 'norms' in narratives with a sexual relationship where a women is in her rightful place as a thing *for* the male protagonist. In these kinds of hegemonic texts, woman are shown to play out a specific role in the narrative *for* the desire of the male protagonist, and in some cases – via the male viewer's identification with the male protagonist – presumably also for the male viewer himself. As Teresa De Lauretis observes in *Alice Doesn't*,

> Typically, the female character may be all along, throughout the film, representing and literally marking out the place (to) which the hero will cross. There she simply awaits his return like Darling Clementine; as she indeed does in countless Westerns, war, and adventure movies, providing the "love interest", which in the jargon of movie reviewers has come to denote, first, the singular function of the female character, and then, the character itself. (De Lauretis 1984: 139)

This kind of scheme is played out in so many films it would be impossible to list them here. However, some obvious examples include films as diverse as *Cold Mountain* (2003), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), *Legends of the Fall* (1994), and even the cartoon *Shark Tales* (2004). In the traditional narratives of the kind analysed by Graeme Turner in *Film as Social Practice* (1993) (discussed in the previous chapter) there is a disruption of an existing status quo, followed by a crisis or disruption of the 'laws of everyday normality'. This often marks a transition in relationships or a social situation where 'social and/or economic change needs to be given the ideological force of order and be integrated into a new expectation of everyday normality...absorbing the abnormal back into a sense of an order that is altered but still recognisably subject to the law' (Mulvey 1989: 170). Where such forms of closure become problematic is when they imply something of a power differential where the

objectified female is 'produced as the end result of narrativisation, is the figure of narrative closure...in which the film..."comes together"' (De Lauretis 1984: 140). In such cases, the attainment of the objectified female marks the satisfaction of male desire and the resolution of all crisis and tension in the film.

Augmenting and playing to this patriarchal desire is the presentation of the feminine as a scopophilic fetish for a presumed male spectator, a gesture that reinforces the narrative position of femininity. Together these cement the passivity of the feminine as an acceptable norm, and cultivate femaleness as a commodity to be 'acquired' by a man. In particular then, '[m]ainstream film neatly combines spectacle and narrative' (Mulvey 1989: 19)[37]. De Lauretis terms this combination the 'narrative image'. It is a major selling point in drawing viewers back to what Gledhill, in *Stardom: Industry of Desire* has called 'the same old scenario of patriarchal subjecthood and bourgeois consumption', and it is a ploy that has filled Hollywood's coffers (Gledhill 2000: xv)[38]. Thus:

> What the promotion stills and posters outside the cinema display, to lure the passers-by, is not just an *image of woman* but the image of her narrative position, *the narrative image* of woman – a felicitous phrase suggestive of the join of image and story, the interlocking of visual and narrative registers effected by the cinematic apparatus of the look. (De Lauretis 1984: 140)

While pornography is a more extreme instance of this, most forms of objectification of women are also based on a logic that perpetuates cultural narratives wherein women feature, like other commodities, as trophies: 'women

[37] For Mulvey (1989: 25) and Turner (1993:81), there are very specific devices at work in film that arrange women's appearance as a spectacle for male desire. A detailed discussion of this follows later in the chapter.

[38] In this respect Gledhill also argues that 'the construction of the patriarchal bourgeois subject is a hegemonic project rather than an achieved dominance, needing constant reassertion, contested by groups who cannot develop within it, and open to transformation' (2000: xviii). The same can be said for the construction of an objectifying and commodifying eroticism that is under discussion here.

become very like cars, or suits, namely, expensive possessions that mark one's status in the world of men' (Nussbaum 1995: 284). Such representations play up to insecure male spectators' aspirations to possess 'the signs of exalted status that they think of as in real life reserved for such as Donald Trump' (ibid: 286).

To sum up, when it is considered in terms of Bataille's analysis of eroticism as an impulse toward *communication*, a deep contradiction emerges in this particular strain of 'eroticism' that is evinced in media texts. By constructing femininity as a fetishistic spectacle[39] for masculine consumption, such generic objectification is deceptive precisely because at the moment when it seems that eroticism is being presented, what is really produced is simply an object for a desiring subject's use, much like an expensive car or rich exotic cuisine. The only kind of gender roles this can encourage are ones centring on power and control. The result, in terms of Bataille's understanding of eroticism, can only be alienation for *both* sexes.

Lost Highway: Patriarchal Desire in Crisis

Lost Highway explores the mutual exclusivity of objectification and eroticism outlined above by dramatizing the hopelessness of the kind of masculine desire that is pandered to and reinforced by instances where 'the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form' (Mulvey 1989: 14). In many ways the film builds on *noir* pessimism in its depiction of the dark side of American life. It parades objectifying masculine desire as hopeless by depicting it in a narrative trajectory that could be described as a downward spiral into the fragmentation of a male protagonist's identity and his alienation rather than comforting closure. In this way, Lynch manipulates the defamiliarising impact of

[39] Fetishism normally refers to the displacement of sexual desire onto an object or a part of the body other than the genitals. I use the term 'fetish' here to indicate that in the objectifying representations under discussion here, desire is displaced from its real aim, that is for *communication* that dissolves both self and other, onto the feminine as a conceptual and physical *thing* for the male self to 'possess' and control for his pleasure while remaining a self-possessed subject.

the *informe* to unravel the normative hold of objectifying media discourse and the gender roles and relations it entrenches.

Lost Highway does not have a narrative in the traditional sense, because major characters inexplicably turn into other characters in the story, logical contradictions and ambiguities are numerous and fantasy and reality are indistinguishable in the film. However, it does locate itself within a specific discursive field despite its lack of narrative sense.

In *Lost Highway* Lynch presents a world made up of scenarios and cinematic elements that are familiar from the legacy of Hollywood film, and that stage objectifying masculine desire in various forms, some more generally treated as acceptable in generic film than others. In the previous chapter I discussed the way in which *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* manipulated the generic opposition between the safe home, society, and family on the one hand, and the amoral, often violent world outside of this safe sphere on the other, which was a structuring principle in many *films noir*. In *Lost Highway* the boundary collapses again, since Lynch suggests an uncomfortable proximity between the objectifying desires of mobsters on the one hand, and male figures that fill more 'normal' social roles on the other.

The most obviously pernicious instances of male subjugation of women are by characters such as Dick Laurant (Nicknamed Mr Eddy) and Andy. Andy pays girls to 'party' with him and makes porn films with them, while his colleague Mr Eddy, who seems to be the leader of a gang, similarly exploits women. Foremost among these is Alice (Patricia Arquette), an archetypal Hollywood blonde who is one of the two main female characters in the film. On their first meeting Mr Eddy forces her to strip for him at gunpoint, a violent scopophillic reduction of her to an object that is repeated later when she is seen in one of his porn films on a huge screen at Andy's house. Mr Eddy also seems to make violent porn films where injury is inflicted on actors (Mr Eddy is shown a video of himself

watching one with Andy and others on a small screen before he is shot). Mr Eddy also seems to have a similar relationship to another woman, a quintessential vamp brunette Rene, who may or may not be the same woman as Alice (since they are both played by Arquette).

Apart from his objectification of Alice through scopophilia, Mr Eddy also treats her as a commodity. He allows her to 'party' with Andy for a price, yet he declares 'I swear I love that girl to death. If I ever found out someone was making out with her...I'd take this [his gun] and shove it so far up his ass it would come out his mouth...'

However, while these characters are obviously driven by anti-social impulses, Lynch's portrayal of ostensibly more normal characters Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) and Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty) blurs the line between norm and perversion. Pete seems to be 'rescuing' Alice from Mr Eddy and his cohorts, while Fred would (initially) seem to have a more legitimate relationship with Rene since he is married to her. However, part of the film's subversive thrust is in the way it refuses to grant any sense of normality or possibility of narrative affirmation (through closure) to either of these conventional and normalised scenarios. Instead it critically scrutinises their basis. Where *Blue Velvet* showed an uncomfortable proximity between a typical all-American boy Jeffrey Beaumont and the sadistic underworld figure Frank Booth, *Lost Highway* suggests that popular cinematic narratives of pursuing and rescuing women or of possessing them as glamorous trophies – and cultural eroticism based on women as spectacular objects generally – are in the same ballpark as the exploitative objectification and rapaciousness of Mr Eddy and Andy.

Lynch conveys this by amplifying and foregrounding the generic male gaze identified by Mulvey, assigning it to Fred and Pete not as function of their rightful and 'natural' masculine desire, but rather as an indicator of their obsessive and fetishising way of relating to the women. For Mulvey:

> Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. (Mulvey 1989: 25)

In the first part of the film, Fred is depicted as jealously fixated on Rene, who is framed for him and for the viewer as an alluring sex object at various points, less obviously at first, where Fred gazes upon her with a mixture of desire and suspicion while she sleeps, or when she flirts with Andy at a party. However, details in the film increasingly betray the way Fred sees her, for example, when she talks on the phone to the police after an apparent intrusion into their house, her carefully painted lips are sensually depicted in extreme close up. Also, in a scene where she gets undressed, her body is carefully lit from the side, recalling Turner's observation that Hollywood film focuses on 'the moulding produced by lighting; and a greater use of *mise-en-scene* for display' in order to 'turn the female form into a spectacle, an exhibit to be scanned and arguably possessed by the male viewer' (Turner 1993:81). Her full naked form is momentarily framed in Fred's point of view, and is followed by a shot of him gazing upon her longingly. His desire ignited, he makes sexual advances upon her despite their frosty relationship. Significantly, Fred is never seen from her point of view.

Similarly, while Fred has sex with Rene, a shot of her face is shown in extreme close up from above but with a slightly softened focus and careful lighting, which in turn fades to a slow motion shot of the couple from the side. Fred's position on top looking down at Rene implies that Rene is being seen from his point of view, while, in keeping with the rest of the film, he is never seen from hers, but is rather shown either from the side or from below from next to the bed.

Lynch uses the soft-focus image of Rene to parade the conventions of the fantasy/sex scene, establishing Rene as a erotic spectacle for Fred rather than an emotionally intimate partner.

Pete's encounters with Alice are very similar to Fred's in this respect. He first sees Alice at the garage where he works when Mr Eddy, a regular client and acquaintance, brings his prized black and chrome Cadillac in to be serviced. Framed in a point of view shot that conflates her with Mr Eddy's Cadillac, she first appears to Pete as a quintessentially American icon of desire, Mr Eddy's feminine commodity.

The sequence is rendered self-consciously conventional by Alice's 1940s hairstyle, the classic Cadillac itself, and the rockabilly guitars of Lou Reed's 'this magic moment', which start to play on the soundtrack as Alice steps from the car (one line of the song appropriately proclaims 'everything I ever wanted, everything I ever need'). As Laurant helps her out of the car, a series of slow motion shots show Alice tossing her carefully groomed golden locks slightly (which are lit so that they glow, heightening the spectacle), and stealing alluring glances at Pete, recognising his desire.

Later she arrives at the garage, once again framed by Pete's gaze at the doorway in a figure-hugging dress, and initiates an affair.

Toward the end of the film, Pete has sex with Alice after they have finally escaped Mr Eddy and Andy, a scene that is played out on the ground in the beams of their car, which illuminates their bodies to a blinding intensity. The similarity between Fred's desire to possess Rene and Pete's desire for Alice is brought together in the cinematography and Pete's repeated whispers 'I want you!' To refer to my transcription of the scene (included in the appendix), this point is illustrated by looking at the way in which Pete's gaze is established in shot 21 a., which starts with him looking up at Alice, followed by the frame's

slow movement up Alice's body following his hands in shot 21 b. The shot ends by focussing on her face, as she tosses her hair in slow motion while his hands touch her breasts. Shots 22, 24, and 26, show her poised and tossing her hair in slow motion, and alternate with shots of Pete looking up at her, shown in standard film speed. Alice, astride Pete, is therefore the focus of these shots. Pete's body is hardly shown. She is captured in the beams of the car's headlights, and she assumes various poses, tossing her hair in an altogether too mannered and self-conscious way that recalls Pete's first vision of her. This is reinforced by isolating her as a spectacular image through the contrast between shots 21 b., 23 and 25 of her in slow motion, while Pete is shown in normal speed. With maximum emphasis on her glamour and poise, Alice is again presented as an archetypal object of desire.

Lynch sets up these instances of the male gaze at work in the sex scenes to comment critically on the fact that this is a mode of fetishising women which cannot deliver real *communication.* He does so by pointing to the fact that it is both Fred's and Pete's respective routes to solipsistic and anguished worlds of failed intimacy.

When Fred has sex with Rene, Lynch carefully manipulates stylistic techniques to suggest Fred's initial enjoyment of the moment, but its dismal failure on the level of *communication* between the couple.

While Fred is on top of Rene, the impassioned strains of 'song to the siren' fade in (a tender ballad which is repeated in the film, and which comes to be associated with the promise of love). The use of a 'reverb' effect on the song helps to give the impression that it is being played in a large space. Fred's heavy breathing, which starts out as a straightforward diegetic sound, is also placed through the same effect at this point, and it seems to occupy the same open space as the song. Along with the brief fade to brilliant white, which momentarily dissolves the couples' physically distinct figures on screen, this use of sound

becomes a metaphor for Fred's momentary experience of an 'opening out' beyond the confines of his isolated and claustrophobic state of being, the qualitative experience that Bataille describes as the dissolution of subject and object sought in eroticism (1977:20). However, this fleeting experience of rapture seems to belong entirely to Fred, as Rene shows little reaction and her breathing is silent. It is also cut short with Fred becoming aware of Rene's coldness and the real distance existing between them. She merely stares up at him without any sign of passion.

Fred's failure to realise intimacy even though seeming to *physically* 'have' what he desires is conveyed by a resumption of normal speed film and a reduction of the spatial effect on Fred's breathing to what sounds like a closet-sized space, as 'song to the siren' fades. Fred seems to be trapped within his solipsistic enjoyment of Rene, without achieving *communication* with her, and his horrified response is emphasised a few seconds later when a close up reveals Rene's hand, with black fingernails, trying to comfort Fred as she repeatedly whispers 'It's okay'. A tremor enters Fred's breathing while a series of quick cuts alternate between his increasingly distressed face and the hand which now seems to taunt him. Crashing cymbals and timpanis crescendo with faintly scratching violins as he pulls away from her, revealing his horror and anxiety at his helpless entrapment within himself and his desires. 'Song to the siren' takes on a sense of irony here (that will be repeated later), with its chorus tenderly proclaiming 'here I am, waiting to hold you'.

This scene is mirrored by the one between Pete and Alice. To return to my transcript, the 'lovemaking' scene opens (shot 1) with Alice putting a tape into their car's stereo system. The tape plays 'Song to the Siren', which only begins a few shots later, as the couple embrace in shot 7, and swells to dominate the soundtrack. By initiating the sex scene with this shot, Lynch uses the radio and the song as a self-reflexive device that becomes a powerful allusion to the artificial nature of their involvement. The failure of Pete's project is summed up

through his exchange with Alice in shots 4 to 7, where he asks Alice 'Why choose me?' Alice does not affirm that she *has* chosen him, and instead taunts him slightly: 'You still want me Pete, don't you?... more than ever'. The failure of Pete's desire is confirmed in the change in the sex sequence between the couple's kissing and embracing in shots 15 to 20 in a series of dissolves, to the more rapid shots 22 to 26 coinciding with Pete's fixation on Alice as an object of his gaze (as mentioned above) and the end of the sex scene in shot 29. While the dissolves create a blissful effect that works with the music to produce an idealised love-making scene, as Pete calls out 'I want you', the editing reverts to cuts, breaking this flow of images and signalling the rupture of the illusion as his objectifying desire takes hold. In shot 26, an ominous note is struck on the soundtrack, and, as in the sex scene between Rene and Fred, eerie strings crescendo in shot 29 when Alice tells him he'll never have her. She walks off leaving him alone and frustrated in the frame. In shot 32 she disappears into the cabin becoming, as Reni Celeste puts it, 'the receding destination of desire incarnate' (Celeste 1997: 6).

The fact that the sex scene smacks of artifice through the use of a recorded, sentimental song, and through its sheer mannerism, suggests that this is no more a moment of genuine passion for Alice than her other sexual encounters, while for Pete it has more to do with an attempt to possess Alice as an archetypal 'narrative image' than with true closeness and erotic connection. The audience is already cued for this outcome before the couple even begin to have sex, not only by the taunting manner in which Alice lays bare Pete's helpless desire to 'have' her ('You still want me'), knowingly exposing the objectifying nature of his desire, but also by the earlier image of Alice's equally empty performance in a porn film. The scopophilic relations sets up between male viewer and female viewed in the porn film are simply reproduced in the relations between Pete and Alice.

Rene and Alice are very 'flat' characters in the film, a particularly apt critical term in this case as they are more like screens onto which Fred, Pete, the other male characters, and the viewer can project whatever fantasies they wish, without ever really seeing them or relating to them. They are interchangeable media 'archetypes', blonde and brunette. Alice does at one point explain to Pete how she got mixed up with Mr Eddy, but there is no hint as to what kind of person she is. Rene remains entirely mysterious. In 'Finding Ourselves on a *Lost Highway*: David Lynch's Lesson in Fantasy' Todd McGowan has argued that in this respect Lynch draws on the figure of the *femme fatale* so common to *film noir*:

> In the figure of the femme fatale, desire and fantasy operate simultaneously: on the one hand, she is mysterious and enigmatic (the hero is never quite sure what she really wants); on the other hand, she fits neatly into the male hero's fantasy frame insofar as she is a femme fatale, a representative of transgressive pleasure...When we see her as femme fatale we have an initial phantasmatic frame through which to make sense of her and her desire. (McGowan 2000: 52)

As *femme fatales* Alice and Rene lack a voice in the film, with the exception of one significant scene that emphasises the basic problem of failed *communication* that is common to all the relationships in the film. While searching for a bathroom to clean up a bleeding nose in Andy's house, Pete enters a room where he is confronted by a blurred scene, shot with a red gelled light, of Rene having sex with someone. She turns to him and says, in a high pitched, almost electronic sneer, 'Did you want to talk to me? Did you want to ask me why?' This image calls Pete and Fred to account for what they have failed to do, and that is seek real intimacy and communication with Alice and Rene. Instead they have pursued relationships with them that are, although less obviously exploitative, qualitatively the same as those sought by Mr Eddy and Andy in their lack of real connection.

This gains a particular significance relative to generic and established narrative forms that normalise the masculine pursuit of an objectified woman. Here the pattern leads into male vulnerability and frustration rather than satisfaction.

Martha Nochimson has pointed out in *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood* (1999) that 'Fred is doomed by his relationship to Rene not because of *her* inconsistencies but because of *his* obsessions' (Nochimson 1999: 209). The same can be said for Pete. Each is shown to exist in their own hopeless trap of objectifying possessiveness in spite of the fact that both initially occupy what is normally accepted as a desirable scenario for a male protagonist in much of Hollywood. Fred's yuppie lifestyle includes a trendy home, a relatively successful music career, and an active nightlife, and it is completed with a glamorous 'trophy' wife. Yet the couple are aloof and distant, and their house is more like a dark prison in the suburbs than a comfortable middle-class home (here Lynch develops his characteristic disillusionment with contemporary American living, which he began exploring in *Eraserhead*'s industrialised wasteland). Fred never addresses Rene about his suspicions of her infidelity or the state of their relationship. From the outset, their clipped and distant conversation suggested a breakdown of communication and emotional intimacy in their marriage. This lack of warmth between them is also reflected in the austere and sparsely furnished interiors of their home where 'something seems lacking' in its dark silent spaces (McGowan 2000: 54).

Fred's obsession with Rene becomes especially evident after their failed sexual encounter when Fred has a disturbing dream that shows a point of view shot of someone, possibly him, rushing upon her violently, with her recoiling and screaming, her hands raised in defence. He also dreams of her face taking on the appearance of an uncanny, almost comical 'mystery man' that he later sees at a party, literally projecting his own fantasies, fears, and confusion onto her in the process. When he plays at the 'Luna Lounge' Fred's sax roars out his anger, and

he also becomes subtly aggressive toward Rene whenever he sees her, speaking bitterly and jealously about her sleazy friend Andy, while she remains aloof and passive.

As things fall apart in their relationship, the narrative slips further and further away from closure or even coherence. Fred's world of patriarchal desire becomes fragmented and whatever fleeting illusion of bliss it might once have offered starts to come apart.

The first sign of this appears at a party the couple attends when Fred meets a 'mystery man' (Robert Blake) whose face is part clown part death mask with pale paint and black beady eyes. Before Fred's eyes, and with a mixture of taunting humour and pent-up aggression, the man violates logical possibility by proving with his telephone that he is simultaneously in two places: at the party with Fred, and in Fred's home. In addition, and perhaps related to this (since the mystery man is later seen chasing Fred with a video camera), video tapes start to arrive at the couple's doorstep each morning, first revealing intrusions into their home from an impossible angle while the couple sleeps, while a final tape, which arrives the morning after Fred has met the 'mystery man', depicts a frenzied Fred kneeling over Rene's dismembered corpse.

While Fred's world suggests the collapse of the conventional narrative ideal of living the 'good life' of status and a 'trophy' wife, Pete on the other hand is part 'stud' (who 'gets more pussy than a toilet seat' according to one of the detectives assigned to follow him after he is released from jail), part would-be adventure hero and 'rescuer' for Alice, a key motif in patriarchal film discourse (Mulvey 1989: 21). The narrative dealing with his pursuit of Alice provides particularly rich commentary on how male desire structures film narratives depending on the feminine as 'narrative image'. After his release, Pete's character is shown relaxing in the sun in his garden and enjoying the freedom of carefree youth and the open road associated with the 'rebel without a cause' he embodies. Replete

with slick hair, leather jacket, tattoos and motorbike, he is the epitome of a trendy and sexy youth, and is seen clubbing with his friends, and 'cruising' in his car with his girlfriend Sheila, later having sex with her on the back seat.

It is possible to read his pursuit of Alice as a typical case of a man being ensnared by an evil *femme fatale* because of the threat imposed by Mr. Eddy. Yet what differentiates Alice from a straightforward *noir femme fatale* is that even when this barrier is overcome and escape does become possible, intimacy is still out of reach because of the nature of their relationship itself. Both are caught up in the structure of objectifying male desire. Pete is obsessed with possessing Alice but offers nothing of himself, while Alice is equally closed. He mistakes possessing Alice as his idealised object of desire with his need for erotic communication and love. As a result, he becomes deeply alienated even though he is able to obtain sexual gratification on a purely sensory level. This is evident when, unable to see Alice one night, an anxiety-ridden Pete drives on his motorbike to a hotel where he has empty and callous sex with Sheila. As she cries out in pain beneath his frenzied body, he looks past her, a low-angle close-up of his face from beside the bed (as opposed to Sheila's perspective) showing his anguished lack of rapture. It becomes evident at this point that he is heading toward the same state of hopeless desire that plagued Fred.

In the kind of films that Laura Mulvey and Teresa De Lauretis critically discuss, patriarchal desire is most obviously consolidated through the narrative movement toward the final satisfaction of a positively identified male protagonist's desires in a 'happy ending' that he engineers. However, the conventional projection of male desire onto woman as 'narrative image' becomes associated in *Lost Highway* with a fall away from masculine power and subjectivity (instead of its consolidation through closure and the re-affirmation of gender roles and relations) into alienation and dislocation. The fragility of the contemporary patriarchal psyche and the consequences of its dependence on an emotionally vacuous objectification of women is thrown into relief in *Lost Highway's* frigid

world governed entirely by a commodified patriarchal logic of eroticism. Lynch thereby hints at something dark and obsessive at the very basis of the particular masculine identity that the film and advertising industries unfortunately often count on as their target market in selling their products through women as a 'narrative image'. The film infiltrates and *informes* this homogenised field of discourse and the gender roles and relations it supports.

Mulholland Drive: the Failure of the Feminine Project

In *Mulholland Drive,* Lynch continues to open up fissures in eroticism predicated on objectification, although here it is not a narrative of masculine desire gone wrong, but the alienating consequences of a female protagonist's overriding ambition to become an object for that desire within Hollywood's cut-throat industry. The film thereby comments on the alienating effects of women's interpellation within the patriarchal cinematic discourse that is produced – and reproduced – in Hollywood, an interpellation epitomized by the role of the female star. The female star embodies both an economic and social position in itself, and is also presented for the male viewer to desire and the female viewer to identity with. In this respect, as Gledhill (2000) has observed, cinema is an important addition to the discourses that help to gender the human subject. Both language passed down by parents to children and cinema discourse involve 'identification with human figures – parents and stars' (Gledhill 2000: xv). Also,

> Both, through mechanisms of fetishism and voyeurism, produce apparently coherent, complete, and fixed identities through the denial of *difference* – that 'otherness' which femininity, ethnicity or divergent sexualities enact for white, patriarchal society...In this analogy, a film's 'ideal spectator' is a masculine construct, offering identification with the male star as a narrative position of illusory mastery; the female star, as object of the cinematic gaze, is reduced to a male fetish . (ibid.)

The majority of Lynch's film is focused on the personal experiences of an aspiring young actress Betty Elms (Naomi Watts), who later disappears and is replaced by Diane Selwyn (also played by Watts). Diane is a washed-up bit player who is left without recognition, love or social belonging, and seething with frustrated ambition and desire due to Mr Roque's interventions[40] and her lover's decision to reject her in order to pursue a life of banal materialism among Hollywood's elite.

What gives *Mulholland Drive* its critical edge relative to Hollywood's discursive construction of eroticism, and makes the film more than just a bleak portrait of Hollywood as a place, is the way in which the first part of the film flaunts its conventional Hollywood narrative and stylistic features not as a standard feature of reality but as a fragile cinematic illusion that manipulates identity. The first part of the film gives literal expression to the phrase 'living a lie': Betty's project is to live out the Hollywood dream on Hollywood's terms. Like Cooper in *Twin Peaks*, she also aims fix her vision of how the world should be (in this case by helping Rita 'find' her identity, even though in the end she narcissistically disguises her to look almost like herself).

This becomes evident from the opening of the film when Betty enters a generically idealised Los Angeles. My transcription in the appendix to this dissertation should give some sense of how this impression is created. In shots 1 a. to 5, everything at the airport seems to sparkle, while gentle and uplifting music blocks out nearly all diegetic sound. Lynch exploits the optimism of the romantic comedy genre and even Hollywood musicals to set an unreal tone to

[40] In the film women's careers are at the mercy of a group of mobsters lead by a mysterious man in a dark office (Mr Roque). The group, which is never identified but could be part of a powerful corporation or a studio, has taken control of director Adam Kesher's film (played by Justin Theroux), shutting down his film and threatening him if he refuses to accept their choice for a lead actress. Thus, as Philip Lopate points out in his article 'Welcome to L.A.: Hollywood Outsider David Lynch Plunges into Tinseltown's Dark Psyche', Hollywood is thereby shown through Lynch's paranoid lens to be an old boy's club where 'pretty young women are passed around by old men, chewed up and spat out, their spirits broken' (Lopate 2001: 47).

Betty's arrival. Her face is shown in close up through shots 1 a. to 1 b. to reveal that she is the protagonist in the scene, and her child-like wonder is revealed in her joyful smile and her comments, and she cranes her neck eagerly in shot 4 to look at the 'Welcome to Los Angeles' sign. She is overwhelmed with enthusiasm while talking to an effusive and warm elderly couple, and the highly conventional shot-reverse shot sequence from 6 to 12 creates a feeling of normality and familiarity, while Betty and Irene share a string of movie clichés:

> Irene: Well, its time to say goodbye Betty, it's been so nice traveling with you.
> Betty: (effusive) Thank you Irene, I was so excited and nervous, it was sure great to have you to talk to.
> Irene: Remember I'll be watching for you on the big screen.
> Betty: (laughing) Ok Irene...Won't that be the day!
> Irene: Good luck, Betty dear, take care of yourself...and be careful.
> Betty: I will, thanks again.

Even when her bags disappear in shot 13, they are immediately restored in the next shot, where a helpful taxi driver is offering to load them into his cab for her. This friendliness continues throughout the first part of the film, with Betty being warmly welcomed at the flats where she will be staying, and at the audition that she attends. There is a distinct sense that Betty lives in a world that is patched together out of fragments from upbeat Hollywood (much as the small towns of *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* drew on sitcoms and soapies).

Betty's character is also an obviously conventional type, and this is used to explore the dependence of her identity on her aspiration to become a star in this 'dream place'. The deep-seated nature of this desire is evident in her near hysterical excitement to be in Los Angeles, her impersonations of actresses for Rita's amusement, and her adeptness with make-up and costumes when she transforms Rita into a spitting image of herself. It is also evident in the opening

sequence, where dancing couples are seen, followed by what appears to be an award ceremony with Betty's face brilliantly lit in the limelight, smiling ecstatically while cheers are heard and she is applauded by the same elderly couple seen in the airport. A conversation later in the film establishes this as a representation of Betty's victory in a 'jitterbug' contest, that perennial gauge of an American girl's potential to 'be somebody' by becoming a spectacle. Betty reveals to Rita that this is the proud moment that sent her from her home town Deep River Ontario to Hollywood.

As Amy Taubin has pointed out in her article 'In Dreams', there is something archetypal about Betty, she is 'another version of Sandy Williams, the good-girl-next-door' (Taubin 2001: 53). Yet Lynch explores the less positive flipside of this, which is the potential for her to succumb to the depersonalising effects of the kind of patriarchal discourse that attaches a girl's self-worth to her ability and willingness to become an object for male desire, a discourse mainstream cinema has historically entrenched according to Mulvey, De Lauretis and others.

While the consequences of such desires being denied are explored in the second half of the film, Lynch already generates uneasiness about Betty's obsessions in the way he represents the dancing couples in the jitterbug contest. They are endless duplicates in 50s clothing set against a blue screen normally used for 'keying' in a background in filmmaking. Here the couples are shown in a crowd, reminiscent of Andy Warhol's repeated Marilyn Monroe images, with flat silhouettes often overlapping their forms until no foreground or background is discernable. These cookie-cutter couples, form a mechanically repeated *type* on the blue screen, the genesis of a mechanistic circumscription of Betty's subjectivity and identity within the 'cogs' (De Lauretis 1984: 106) of the social narratives that Hollywood endlessly churns out. Betty is linked to these figures through the fade-in of a close-up of her in the 'limelight' against this backdrop. The opening scene therefore anticipates the problematic nature of Betty's desire

to transform herself into a spectacular object to be consumed within the Hollywood industry.

This is also alluded to when she auditions, since she has to practise and then play out a classically tawdry scene where a young woman is manipulated by her father's friend and impotently threatens to kill him before breaking down and crying. The man she will play the part with is a weathered has-been called Woody Katz, who is sleazy and patronising, commenting 'I want to play this one real close, like the other one...nice and close heh heh'. Yet she freely embraces her role as object for him, pulling his hand onto her buttocks and coaxing the lascivious old man into kissing her, who is both taken aback and thrilled at her willingness to subject herself to his desire in this way. Betty, it seems, is happy to be a beautiful plaything for the industry, and sees her part as playing this job well.

In this respect, Lynch engages with the legacy of Hollywood as a major force in consumer capitalism from the 1920s onward. Within this world, both outside, but especially inside the films it creates, femininity has increasingly come to be conflated with the fungible and consumable object, a point that Charles Eckert makes in 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window':

> The cycle of influence made up of films, fashion articles, 'beauty hints', columns featuring stars, ads which dutifully mentioned the star's current film and tie-in advertising in stores, made cosmetics synonymous with Hollywood...No more potent endorsements were possible than those of the women who manifestly possessed the most 'radiant' and 'scintillant' eyes, teeth, complexions and hair' (Eckert 2000: 35).

Betty is depicted in this way throughout the first part of the film. She dresses stylishly and is always made 'radiant' with brilliant lighting on her fair skin, clean white teeth, and golden hair. This is especially evident in the opening of

the film and in the airport, but it continues when she is auditioning, and while she helps Rita search for clues to her identity. It is thrown starkly into contrast with the second part of the film, where Diane is gaunt, shabbily dressed, and has dirty teeth and hair.

Through these devices Lynch suggests that the world Betty is placed within is one characterised by what Harold Hampton calls the 'gradual erosion of the line between the organic and the inorganic'(1993: 39). Betty, like the 50s cut-outs and the do-wop auditioners for Adam's film, is more celluloid than person. The consequences of Betty's initiation into this world are that she cannot access real *communication.* By the end of the film it becomes evident that she has attempted to find social belonging in a world that does not suit her. If, for Bataille, capitalism risks being 'an unreserved surrender to *things*, heedless of the consequences and seeing nothing beyond them' (1992:136), Lynch's Hollywood exemplifies this logic in its commodification of the female as a spectacle. Moreover, its various key players only seem to understand values, including erotic ones, in terms of wealth and possessions. When Adam Kesher finds his wife cheating on him with a pool repairman in their nouveau riche home, his reaction is to coolly take her jewellery box and pour pink paint into it. His response is a transaction, wryly reflecting the nature of their relationship, as does his comment on their divorce later in the film: 'she got the pool guy, and I got the pool!' In Lynch's Hollywood, *things* are given precedence over people's needs and the generosity of erotic *communication*, and people 'are moulded into fetish objects' (Hampton 1993: 39) by cosmetics, surgery and celluloid[41]. As I will point out below, this logic also underlies Adam's relationship to Camilla in the second part of the film, leaving Diane suicidal.

[41] It is worth noting that this mode of reducing the feminine to a commodity has been taken to extremes in the mass media, where several stars and models have even had sexualized body parts like legs and breasts insured, literally transforming themselves into commodities with economic value (for example model Heidi Klum's legs were recently valued by jewelers and insured for $1.2 million by Braun for its adverts, while actresses like Jennifer Lopez and Demi Moore have taken out insurance on body parts, which, in the case of Moore, have been cosmetically 'improved') (See Haider 2004).

It is within this milieu that Betty ultimately wishes to identify herself with Hollywood's stars. Identification can be described as

> 'the psychological process whereby *the subject* assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and *is transformed*, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified' (Laplanche and Pontalis cited in De Lauretis 1984: 141)

Betty tries to identify with the feminine role so commonly played by actresses in Hollywood narratives, but in a homosexual context. Betty not only tries to position herself within Hollywood by pursuing a career as a movie star that will bend herself to the desires of men like Woody Katz and male viewers generally, but also by setting up her own version of a Hollywood narrative, in which she can realise her own 'happy ever after'. For De Lauretis

> Subjectivity is engaged in the cogs of narrative and indeed constituted in the relation of narrative, meaning, and desire; so that the very work of narrativity is the engagement of the subject in certain positionalities of meaning and desire. (De Lauretis 1984: 106)

Betty has engaged herself within the 'cogs' of one of Hollywood's key myths of femininity by attempting to find subjecthood for herself as a star and as a loving, nurturing woman[42]. While Betty and Rita play detective together in an attempt to find out about Rita's accident, who she is, and where she might live, Betty's main ambition is to help Rita. She is self-sacrificing in this pursuit, to the point where she misses a major opportunity to meet director Adam Kesher because she promised to search for clues with Rita. She also helps Rita disguise herself, making her into a mirror image of herself and attempting to get Rita to return the

[42] I am assuming, along with De Lauretis, Mulvey, and psychoanalysis, that femininity and masculinity 'do not refer so much to qualities or states of being inherent in a person' but rather to positions occupied in relation to social narratives and the desires that shape them (De Lauretis 1984: 142).

same love for her. Focused on becoming Rita's path to realising her identity and subjecthood, Betty wishes more than anything to be Rita's love interest, her 'Darling Clementine' (De Lauretis 1984: 139). If she can do this, she 'will have made herself indispensable' (Taubin 2001: 53).

However, this love affair is doomed because it does not sit well with the demands of Hollywood's patriarchal power structures. Betty's story in the first part of the film is driven by her desire to find narrative closure by becoming a star and patriarchal object of desire, while simultaneously trying to find genuine intimacy and closure with a woman, which clearly locates her outside of this conventional role. The overtly conventional first part of the film, which provokes scepticism on the part of the viewer, culminates in a collapse of Betty's world and the disappearance of her character. This occurs, as in *Lost Highway* at the moment she comes closest to realizing the satisfaction of her desire for intimacy. Betty and Rita have sex, and Betty passionately declares her love for Rita (although Rita does not return the sentiment). The scene is shot in classic Hollywood style with careful lighting on their naked bodies for maximum sensual and softening effect, while rousing music plays. As cinema goes, it 'is a beautiful moment, made all the more miraculous by its earned tenderness, and its utter distance from anything lurid' (Lopate 2002: 49). Yet, for all its feeling of being genuine, it is disclaimed as wishful thinking immediately afterward when Rita awakens and demands that they go to a place called Club Silensio.

Club Silensio is a grubby midnight theater where lonely insomniacs drift in to watch a bizarre show that is more 'a veiled lecture on cinematic illusionism' than anything else (Taubin 2001: 54). A man comes on stage introducing musicians who appear to be playing instruments, but are only performing to a tape recording. Whenever they stop acting and the sounds continue, the presenter emphatically repeats 'there is no band...it is all a tape recording'. He also introduces a haggard diva who sings a Spanish rendition of Roy Orbison's 'Crying' that brings Betty and Rita to tears so beautiful and tragic is her

performance. Yet she collapses half way through the song, perhaps because of drunkenness or drug-induced stupor, only to leave the voice she was miming to playing on the tape recording. This comment on the emotional power of illusion sends Betty and Rita from being deeply moved to disillusioned and self-conscious. At this moment too, Betty finds a metallic blue box in her handbag. The couple go home, find a matching blue key that had initially been carried by Rita (although she did not know its purpose), and open the box. As they do so, Betty disappears, and shortly afterward the camera tracks rapidly into the darkness of the box, which falls from Rita's hand as she also disappears. The next shot shows Betty's aunt return to the flat to find it empty and without a trace of the couple, and the scene falters and dissolves into another space, almost like a screen image blinking off on a faulty television set. Club Silensio is therefore cued as the moment in which the entire diegetic world created in the first part of the film comes apart, along with Betty's idealistic vision of Hollywood and her desire to realise closure in a happy ending with Rita. It 'is a site of disintegration...[it] directs attention to its insubstantiality and silence; no one on produces the sounds they seem to produce' (Nochimson 2002: 43). This 'hollowed-out image' (ibid.) suggests that the entire first part of the film is equally illusory. By doing so Lynch is also 'reminding us of the fragility of cinema's hallucinatory power' (Fuller 2001: 16). This gesture gains political force in the way it subjects the conventional narrative framework within which Betty has attempted to realise her subjectivity as a woman to the dislocating effects of the *informe*.

In some ways this outcome had already been anticipated in the sheer artificiality of the first part of the film, along with the uncanny moments and paranoid sub-plot that occasionally interrupt Betty's optimistic story, blemishes in an otherwise cosmetically perfect façade. It seems like the closure that Betty would like to see brought to her world is very much at odds with the nature of Rita, and also the reality of Hollywood. The accident that cost Rita her memory saved her from being murdered (since a car full of drunk teenagers hit the stationary car

that she was about to be shot in), and she seems to have a shady past that puts her and Betty in danger. Also, to return to the transcribed scene of Betty's arrival, after Betty meets the couple at the airport, they are seen driving off in a limo in shots 18 to 20 with grotesque sneers frozen on their faces, Irene repeatedly slapping the old man on his knee, almost as if they had pulled of a delightful scam. This ominous scene is radically at odds with the shots preceding it, which seem closer to the romantic comedy genre in their use of conventions. It ends by dissolving into shots of palm trees and then into the time-honoured, and endlessly reproduced, establishing shot of the Hollywood sign in shots 21 and 22, a coding of Hollywood that is dissonant with traditional representations of its glamour. Later, a blackened figure, who looks something like a monstrous vagrant, emerges from a dirty graffiti-covered alleyway and gives a man a heart attack, almost like a hyperbolic representative of the dark side of Hollywood's consumerist world – the social and economic outcast. A short scene where a hit man kills several people is also shown. Most significantly Betty and Rita find the decaying body of Diane Selwyn while they are searching for clues to Rita's identity. By the end of the film Diane commits suicide because of her bitterness and guilt over failing in Hollywood and hiring an assassin to kill Camilla. The fact that her corpse is shown at this point, like the monstrous vagrant, seems to suggest the invasion of something disruptive and 'other' into Betty's familiar and comforting world.

It is significant that Lynch has chosen to leave the mystery narrative concerning Rita's identity unresolved, along with the story of Betty's progress in acting and the love story. In this way he deliberately unravels these narrative threads, denying the closure to Betty's attempts to turn herself into an object of desire for the film industry. Instead Dianne is depicted as the new protagonist watching from the outside as Camilla lives out the Hollywood narrative and social identity of the star that Betty sought in the first part of the film. In 'Lost on *Mulholland Drive*: Navigating David Lynch's Panegyric to Hollywood' (2004) Todd McGowan reads the second part of the film as 'a world of desire without fantasy

to supplement it' (McGowan 2004: 74). It is a world where the protagonist's unrequited desire has no comforting fantasy narrative where Hollywood identity and a happy ending are guaranteed[43]. Instead

> Diane feels the perpetual sense of lack caused by her desire: she longs for Camilla but cannot have her; she wants a career as an actress but struggles in bit parts; and she sees the opulent lifestyle of Hollywood's elites but lives in relative squalor. (ibid.)

This time around the protagonist Dianne is shunned by Hollywood in-circles and by her lover Camilla, who, despite telling Dianne 'you drive me wild', also declares that 'we mustn't do this anymore' because she has chosen to assimilate herself into Hollywood's patriarchal social structure and cannot afford to carry on an intimate relationship with Diane. Being close to a 'loser' in Hollywood's game, and perhaps also being involved in a close homosexual relationship, would compromise her (even though she callously flirts with another woman at a party to taunt Diane). Diane is furious at this rejection, screaming at her 'it's him isn't it?' The complete opposite of the demur and vulnerable Rita, Camilla is a vampish and calculating opportunist who has secured her place in Hollywood in part by agreeing to marry Adam Kesher. She fits, quite well, Nicholas Nicastro's description of the ostensibly sexually empowered Hollywood woman in 'A Lust: Actresses and Ambition':

> Tinseltown feminists put out. Certain men have long visualized this silver lining of sexual equality – the prospect that the powerful, confident woman can afford to shed her maidenly inhibitions and, flush with worldly independence, to lunge for male zippers...How far is today's ambitious young woman expected to go? Now, as then, it's clearly all the way. (Nicastro 1996:4)

[43] Several critics, including McGowan, have read the first part as Diane's escapist fantasy, which comes apart, returning her to her failed life in the second part of the film. I discuss this at length later.

Los Angeles and Hollywood are also no longer the warm and friendly 'dream place' that they were for Betty. Instead they have become cold and unwelcoming. At a set where Adam Kesher is making a film starring Camilla, she is forced to watch as Adam 'demonstrates' to a young actor how to create the perfect cinematic spectacle of romance by kissing Camilla in a red Cadillac. He and Camilla turn it into a sadistic show that tortures Diane not only by rubbing salt in the wound caused by her rejection by Camilla, but also through the extent to which it confronts Dianne with the success Camilla has become as an actress, and which she herself so badly wanted. The two act out the scene carefully, Adam instructing her and being deliberate in his actions as he tells the young actor watching 'just let her lean into the kiss...it's a single motion'. Yet the scene is also 'real' as well since their kiss heralds their developing relationship. The line between the two has blurred, and once again, as in the case of Club Silensio, Lynch makes a commentary on cinematic illusionism. Here it is used to highlight the extent to which Camilla has molded herself into the patriarchal matrix of both the social and commercial world of Hollywood, and its cinematic discourse as well (as 'narrative image' in the film that Adam is making).

Dianne is also forced to watch as Camilla is equally successful in finding closure in the patriarchal social setting of Hollywood's movers when she and Adam announce their plans to marry. However this relationship is 'a travesty of romance' (Nochimson 2002: 44), it is based more on appearances than anything else, a fact suggested by the scene in the Cadillac and also Camilla and Adam's cynical laughter as they taunt Diane with their wedding announcement.

This 'travesty' leads to similar disastrous consequences to those precipitated by the objectifying eroticism explored in *Lost Highway*. The blackened vagrant-like monster is seen in the alleyway, and he places the blue box seen earlier in the film onto the ground. A minature version of the old couple from the beginning of the film emerges. While in the beginning of the film they were warm and

supportive toward Betty, here the couple seems to represent Diane's conscience or perhaps the memory of the aspirations that she has failed to fulfil and that have now come back to torment her While Diane is staring at the blue key that the hit man left at her house as a sign that he had done the job, a loud knocking eventually drives her to screams, and the small couple crawls under the door, and grows rapidly back to full size, chasing her and laughing sadistically as she runs screaming to her bedroom and shoots herself, landing in the same position Betty and Rita had seen her in and upsetting the clear logic of the film.

Through this trajectory of desire, *Mulholland Drive* takes on the quality of 'a cautionary tale' about the dangers of being absorbed within Hollywood's cut-throat world and identifying too closely with its brand of femininity (Taubin 2001: 52). There is also a 'larger conspiracy that Lynch is always hinting at: everyone is in on It, everyone one is related, and they are all in the business of manufacturing dreck. *That's* show biz' (Lopate 2002: 49). In *Mulholland Drive*, Hollywood's objectified feminine position is associated with disaster and a falling away from intimacy and *communication* despite what its comforting narratives of closure promise as a reward for identifying with this role. On the one hand, then, the film becomes a direct critique of Hollywood's industry of the spectacle, and the 'ugly works concealed at the heart of [this] dream machine, fueled by a steady supply of innocent young... Betties' (Jones 2001: 36). Yet on the other it also comments on this tendency in mainstream film generally. As Martha Nochimson points out, while 'Lynch ostensibly sets his sights specifically on Hollywood, the contempt he heaps on its ludicrous power structure conveys the heinous absurdity of the entire entertainment industry' (Nochimson 2002: 37).

Furthermore it interrogates the way in which Hollywood has linked its modes of closure to the commodification of the self. While fashions have changed, the basic structure of Hollywood's industry and the discourse it produces has endured because it is a 'sales method that was essentially covert, associational,

and linked to the deeply gratifying and habituating experiences that films provided' (Eckert 2000: 39). One of the most powerful of these responses is elicited by narratives that promise consummation of true love, erotic *communication* and the sense of 'exceeding the bounds' of the self that is a basic human need, according to Bataille (1977:40). The dubious promise of attaining love through making oneself into a desirable object for the opposite sex provides a market for products that will help the spectator be a 'better object'. In this way, 'Hollywood...did as much or more than any other force in capitalist culture to smooth the operation of the production-consumption cycle by fetishizing products and putting the libido in libidinally invested advertising' (Eckert 2000: 39). Lynch takes these modes of narrative, and turns them into a nightmare of illusions that are so pervasive, the formal 'reality' that Hollywood's narratives normally weave are nowhere to be found. All that is left is an irresolvable formlessness that refuses the satisfaction of desire or sense. The end of the film strengthens this impression, with moving flashbacks of Betty's happier moments while Diane dies in a theatrical mist of smoke, obviously produced by a machine, and a figure from Club Silensio is seen whispering 'silensio'. Here the self-reflexivity is not cynical pastiche; rather it suggests the bitter-sweet end of denial and illusion.

Interrupting Visual and Narrative Pleasure

In *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, the consequences of objectification of women are emphasised through the depiction of cold, unstable worlds bereft of *communication* despite all of the ingredients for closure normally used in patriarchal narratives being present. Looked at from another perspective, this problem is also tackled on the level of narrative structure and logic within the films, where complications and lacunae confound the logic of identity and the resolution that would bring the satisfaction of patriarchal desire.

The series of events in *Lost Highway* lead to a number of contradictions and lacunae. The detectives investigating Fred and Pete find Pete's fingerprints on a crime scene, making it unclear whether Pete is real or Fred's fantasy. Alice disappears from a photo of her with Rene, leaving the viewer uncertain as to whether they are one and the same or not. The greatest contradiction in the film occurs when Fred arrives at his own house, ringing the intercom and telling the listener on the other end 'Dick Laurant is dead', the same words he had heard through the intercom in the opening sequence of the film (before he had transformed into Pete). When the police arrive and he drives off with the sound of screeching tyres and sirens, it becomes clear that this *is* the same scene that the film opened with, since these sounds are also heard outside by Fred in the beginning of the film. The narrative therefore confounds sense, and is not even strictly circular, since it closes with an explosive car chase on the desert highway where Fred undergoes yet another metamorphosis which this time does not resolve itself into another identity.

Apart from this, the distinction in the film between an empirical diegetic 'reality' and subjective fantasies imbedded in this reality is tenuous from the outset[44]. Fred recounts a dream in the beginning of the film, but, as Elsaesser and Buckland illustrate in their analysis of the film in *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis*, it is not quite clear when the dream returns to reality since 'the scene ends inside Fred's dream; the narration does not return to the image of Fred in bed narrating the dream' (Elsaesser and Buckland: 2002: 178). Instead, the 'mystery man' that Fred meets shortly afterwards violates the ontological integrity of Fred's world by being in two places at once. It is also never clear whether Fred killed Rene or not, as the killing is only seen on a short, fuzzy video sent to Fred's home. As a result, the

[44] The distinction between objective and subjective realms in film has become homogenised in contemporary narrative cinema to the extent that prominent film theorists such as Bordwell and Thompson (2003) can speak about subjective and objective modes of narration, while Murray Smith can differentiate between 'central' and 'acentral imagining' (Smith 1994). The subjective/objective distinction tends to remain as a guiding narrative and conceptual framework, reducing or containing the subjective within a more empirical diegesis that extends beyond the individual and is granted a superior epistemic status.

crucial line between fantasy and reality that is fundamental to the assertion of closure and ideological values as part of 'reality' in generic film is obscured:

> A large part of what has confounded spectators in Lynch's enterprise is how to distinguish between scenes that reflect the character's fantasies, and those that belong to the narrative "reality." *Lost Highway* is a film that would appear to have a complete disregard for differences in ontological levels. (Rhodes 1998: 57)

The ending of the film seems to prevent a straightforward reading of it as having a 'real' section and a 'fantasy' section, although, as some critics have pointed out, the Pete/Alice narrative reads as Fred's fantasy initially, because in the transformation scene in jail Fred suffers from severe headaches before finally staring at his prison door and seeing images that aren't there. This would seem to flag the scene as Fred slipping into a hallucinatory, disassociated world.

Todd McGowan's analysis sees the film as being divided between the world of unanswered desire (Fred's world) and fantasy (Pete's world). For McGowan, the world of desire is fragmented because it is dominated by Fred's hunger for intimacy and his need to know what Rene wants, without any fantasy that would join the various events together in an organized narrative thread of cause and effect toward the attainment of the desired object. On the other hand, the fantasy world in which Fred becomes Pete takes on the contours of generic Hollywood narrative in *Lost Highway*, especially through its use of cinematography and *mise en scene*, but also through a narrative that 'flows' better in terms of continuity editing and overall causality to give the illusion of the male protagonist's desire being satisfied.

McGowan reads *Mulholland Drive* in a similar way, arguing that 'Betty offers Diane a way of seeing herself as she wants to be seen' (2004: 77), while the second part of the film 'shows the originary, dissatisfying events of Diane's life'

(McGowan 2004: 74). Other critics have also adopted this literal reading of the film, for example according to Fuller,

> That Rita and Camilla are both played by Laura Elena Harring and Betty and Diane by Naomi Watts is the audience's key to understanding that the film has jack-knifed from Diane's wishful dream of herself as a confident, happening starlet with a passive lover she can control to an ugly reality in which neither Betty nor Rita exists. (Fuller 2001: 16)

For McGowan this lends *Lost Highway* (and *Mulholland Drive*) a certain political force within Hollywood:

> Most films, at some point in the narrative, depict a similar turn from desire to fantasy (when they enact some sort of resolution); *Lost Highway* actually enacts this turn within the formal structure of the film itself, replacing one character (Fred Madison) with another (Pete Dayton). At this point the film fully immerses itself in fantasy, which has a paradoxical effect. Because the film becomes imbricated in Fred's fantasy...it jolts the spectator out of viewing through a comfortable lense of fantasy. (McGowan 2000: 60)

McGowan's analysis is compelling; however, in both films Lynch has resisted such a straightforward interpretation. I have already identified various elements in *Lost Highway* that undermine this reading, especially those in the closing scene. To speak of fantasy and reality in *Lost Highway* is problematic since the viewer is never allowed to get to the bottom of what really happens, or of what is 'subjective' and what is 'objective' in the film. Even where some scenes, such as the images in Fred's dream, are cued as 'subjective', these are subsumed within the larger collapse of the film world. As Celeste points out, the film therefore 'resists closure hermeneutically as well as structurally' and 'defies the laws of a logic that could stabilize it' (Celeste 1997: 15).

Mulholland Drive is also difficult to categorise in this way due to its inclusion of a number of metacinematic elements that deny a fundamental diegetic 'reality' in the film, including the Club Silensio scene. Also, some elements in the beginning of the film precede events in the second half, such as the moment when Adam catches his wife in the first part of the film, which he talks about in the second part, or the attempt on Rita's life, which starts the film, but which occurs at the end. This makes it hard to read Betty's world as a pure fantasy. Even if these are taken as real events from Diane's memories that have been included in her fantasies, characters such as the blackened vagrant/monster, the old couple, and the lady with the blue hair from Club Silensio still turn up in the second part of the film, as does the blue box. It seems then, that reality and fantasy are indistinguishable in both parts of the film: '[i]f all the events we see are subjective, be it daydream or nightmare, whose subjective consciousness is being tapped?' (Lopate 2002: 50) This is question is made even harder to answer by the sheer number of narrative lacunae in the film. The vagrant, the box, Club Silensio, Mr Roque and several other elements are never given proper narrative explanation.

The resistance to meaning these films develop, their insistent tendency toward formlessness, clearly must be acknowledged in its own right. Celeste has indicated that the narrative breakdown in *Lost Highway* does not necessarily mean the film achieves a 'privileged epistemological status' (ibid.) (a point which applies equally to *Mulholland Drive).* However, Bataille's notion of *informe* proves valuable in allowing an understanding of *how* both films go about 'jolting the viewer out of the comfortable lense of fantasy' normally at work in Hollywood and other mainstream film, and what the 'use' of this might be. *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* adopt conventional narrative and stylistic elements that are used to sustain ideological constructions of femininity and of patriarchal desire, and bring them to the point of the uncanny, much as *Blue Velvet* did in the case of the home and family (see previous chapter). It frames

them as fantasy at first, but then undermines this act of framing, which is itself a device of conventional narrative that helps to stabilize 'reality' by contrast.

If one of the major pillars on which the Hollywood mainstream constructs eroticism is the perspective of a desirable female object as 'the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image in which the film...comes together' (De Lauretis 1984: 140), *Lost Highway* intertextually incorporates and parades this objectifying perspective and then *informes* its formal and ideological stability. Here the objectifying male protagonist is the 'narrative image' through which the film *comes apart*. The conventional narrative trajectory toward the satisfaction of male desire that this logic usually guarantees is violently denied. Instead it leads to the fragmentation of identity. Similarly, *Mulholland Drive* adopts a narrative of a young woman's attempt at self-realisation through becoming an object for patriarchal desire, which eventually becomes a narrative of a fragmented, unravelled and isolated self.

The carefree and irresponsible promises of erotic union and sexual adventures endlessly repeated in cinema are intertextually complicated in this way, infected with unease. *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* are texts that intervene in this popular discourse of eroticism, disrupting the narrative passage through crisis to the fulfilment of desire in resolution and closure that typifies commercial cinema. The films therefore adopt the *informe* to unwork this entrenched form of masculine desire and its ideological force in American culture.

Informe also operates here to disrupt the narrative pleasure derived from identification with characters, since the identity of the characters in these films comes apart. On the one hand, identification with a male protagonist is usually the means by which a male viewer enjoys the fantasy of realising closure through the female 'narrative image':

> The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator...This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify...the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look. (Mulvey 1989: 20)

Yet identification is also the means for women viewers to be 'seduced into femininity' (De Lauretis 1984) by identifying with a female character that wins love and acceptance from a male protagonist by assuming the feminine position that will make her desirable to him. Lynch's films disrupt this process of investing desire in characters through tacit identification with their gender roles and ways of relating. It is not only difficult to identify with these protagonists, and therefore to internalise their values or their roles, there is also no teleology through which desire will be realised. Conventional paths of desire in these films lead nowhere near the satisfaction they normally offer.

Conclusions

By foregrounding the mutual exclusivity of eroticism (in Bataille's sense) and objectification that I have outlined, and by refusing to grant narrative closure or even coherence through popular modes of patriarchal cinematic eroticism, Lynch's admittedly sanguine and pessimistic films do have the subversive potential to open up space for an eroticism that is open to women as the other in their own right. It also calls for a representation of eroticism as *communication*, as connectedness rather than an instrumental use of the other as a tool for sensory gratification. In this respect, these films harness some of the potential that Mulvey envisions for a revised form of narrative:

If narrative, with the help of avant-garde principles, can be conceived around ending that is not closure, and the state of liminality as politically significant, it can question the symbolic, and enable myth and symbols to be constantly revalued. (Mulvey 1989: 175)

Chapter 3: *Wild at Heart*: Rethinking Rebellion

I have already observed that Bataille's *informe*, insofar as it is a 'performative' that collapses formal systems and conceptual categories (Bois and Krauss 1997:18), is able to foreground the limits and the 'constructedness' of film discourse and coherent narrative. In the often uncanny moment wherein it reveals that cinema's photographic verisimilitude and narrative coherence are provisional and fragile, it breaks the logical continuity and illusion of coherence of realism. I have argued in relation to *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* that this effect created by the *informe* encourages an awareness of how identity and ideology are constructed through these cinematic conventions, intertextually disrupting their power to interpolate subjectivity and to set social agendas.

In the current chapter I consider how the *informe* in Lynch's film *Wild at Heart* (1990) operates to reveal and critically interrogate the constructed nature of a relatively new ideological scheme in popular American film that is best described as 'rebellion'. I will focus mainly on the way in which Lynch engages with rebellion as it has come to be defined and popularised in a number of films within the 'road movie' genre, since *Wild at Heart* is itself a revision of the road movie. This genre includes films like Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), whose narrative format centring on an outlaw couple is intertextually incorporated by *Wild as Heart*, and also Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969), Terrence Malick's *Badlands (1973)*, Tony Scott's *True Romance*, Nicholas Ray's *They Live by Night* (1948) and Laszlo Benedek's *The Wild One* (1954).

Drawing on existing studies of road movies and counterculture, I will suggest that road movie rebellion is characterised by a narrative flight from the restraints imposed by work, responsibility, and even the body, along with a flouting of prohibitions associated with religion, tradition, and authority figures[45]. I argue,

[45] The term 'rebellion' as I use it here must therefore be distinguished from organized rebellion or revolution against an official political regime.

however, that by foregrounding the genealogy and conventional mechanisms of this cinematic discourse through the *informe*, *Wild at Heart* highlights the fact that this discourse's agenda of transgression and ecstatic release is merely another form of cultural homogeneity[46]. In making this point I will draw on Bataille's analysis of transgression, in which he argues that the latter is, by definition, in excess of organised systems and laws (see Bataille 1977: 40). In contrast, I will argue that road movie-style rebellion, despite its message of explosive release, has become a social construct in its own right with its own set of restraints and conceptual systems that organise identity.

In my analysis of *Wild at Heart*, I will argue that the film parades this contradiction within road movie rebellion by staging an archetypal road film scenario that flaunts its flat reproduction of media types, and a highly conventional plot depicting an 'outlaw couple' on the run to California. This scenario is played out by rock 'n' roll by-products Sailor Ripley (Nicholas Cage) and Lula Fortune (Laura Dern) travelling together in a Cadillac, Sailor jumping parole, Lula fleeing her mother and her broken home.

I will carry out my analysis of the film in two areas. On the one hand I examine its deliberate scrutiny of how the figure of the rebel is constructed within contemporary culture, and on the other I analyse its self-reflexive critique of spectacular violence, both of which demonstrate the potential of the *informe* to act as a subversive intervention within the now-homogeneous industry of cinematic 'transgression'. In addition, I suggest that *Wild at Heart*'s emphasis on the alienated nature of the couple's journey comments on the way in which the road movie rebellion is incompatible with transgression as Bataille describes it. At several points in his work, Bataille argues that, apart from eroticism, socially sanctioned transgressions are a means by which humans address their need to

[46] To recap, for Bataille, homogeneity is the aspect of social existence geared toward production and that is governed by laws and reason. In homogeneous society, 'human relations are sustained by a reduction to fixed rules based on consciousness of the possible identity of delinealable persons and situations' (1985: 137) and, 'in principle, all violence is excluded from this course of existence' (ibid.: 138).

overcome isolation as 'discontinuous' beings and their reduction to *thinghood* in the world of work, laws and production (see, for example, Bataille's 'Sacrifice, the Festival, and the Principles of the Sacred World', 2000 b: 215). Transgression constitutes the sacred aspect of society, and plays a crucial role in holding communities together. Festivals, sacrifice and other religious practices are among these. I argue that in outlaw road films, however, rebellion is a construction of transgression which glorifies the *individual's* step beyond limits and 'fearless' mastery of violence. They affirm rebellion as an American cultural identity that serves individualism and consumerism rather than the communitarian impulse that Bataille associates with transgression. In subverting this discourse, then, I suggest that *Wild at Heart* exposes the emptiness of the narcissism and solipsism it conceals. In order to illustrate this point, I will start with a discussion of the history and characteristics of rebellion as it features in the road movie.

Road movies, Rebellion and American Identity

When the historical development of rebellion is considered alongside key themes and motifs running through a number of popular road films, it becomes evident that it has been produced as a socially acceptable *lifestyle* and identity position that can be 'bought into' via the consumption and internalisation of media meanings (a lifestyle which is often affirmed by the consumption of fashion items and other products that signify an individual's belonging to a particular group within this larger subculture, for example, bikers, hippies, punks, etc)[47]. I will illustrate this point by drawing on the work of Bindas and Heineman (1994), Roberts (1997), Hebdidge (1979), and Leong, Sell and Thomas (1997).

[47] See Dick Hebdidge (1979: 2-3) for a discussion of the way in which style acts as a marker of cultural identity and subjectivity.

The development of road movie rebellion is best understood against the cultural backdrop of the rise of individualism and of youth culture or counterculture[48], both of which created a demand for media representations of rebellious, individualistic characters. In 'Image is everything' Bindas and Heineman argue that rebellion became a mass media commodity in America following the assimilation of the counterculture by marketers and corporations in the early 1970s, which 'discard[ed] troublesome, unprofitable political ideals' from the movement, and 'sold it as a safe form of entertainment' (1994: 35). They suggest that in turn this helped to create a situation where 'many middle-class Americans had adopted some aspects of the youth culture, holding new attitudes toward sex, drugs, and politics, even as longer hair, rock music, and bell-bottom jeans became fashionable' (ibid.). However, as Tim Dirks observes in 'Film History of the 1950s' (2005), as early as the 1950s American film makers were already tapping into the demands of a growing youth market, with fiercely independent characters such as James Dean and Marlon Brando rising to fame as a result (Dean in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and Brando in Laszlo Benedek's *The Wild One* (1954), one of the earlier road films produced).

The mass media's construction of rebellion and its assimilation of the counterculture was therefore first and foremost determined as a product of the market, of consumption, and of individual desires, falling outside of specific political concerns. Film legends and national heroes such as Dean, Brando and Presley (not to mention an entire rock 'n' roll industry) came to straddle the contradictory poles of being rebels rejecting staid social restraints and materialism on the one hand, and on the other existing as corporate goldmines and celebrity idols used to sell products to the young and old the world over. From at least the 1960s to the present, the legacy of the youth- and

[48] The 'counterculture' is a term that has been used to describe a loose and diverse cultural movement in America during the 1960s that mostly consisted of youths, and whose commitment was to 'communitarianism, peace, sexual liberation, and racial equality' (Bindas and Heineman 1994: 22). Moreover the movement was 'bound together' by rock music and its opposition to the Vietnam War, and 'stood outside society, resistant to the entreaties of the White House, Kremlin, and Madison Avenue' (ibid.).

counterculture has seen several multibillion-dollar industries. Apart from successful road movie hits like *Bonnie and Clyde* and Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994), these include music sales, posters and paraphernalia of rock and film icons, fashions, MTV, and TV shows on rock bands (for example, animated series featuring groups like the Beatles, weekly programmes dedicated to rockers like *The Monkees*, and, most recently, reality shows like *The Osbornes*) (see Bindas and Heineman 1994).

The case of Elvis Presley especially epitomises this contradiction between ostensive rebellion and homogeneous assimilation, and is also important to understanding *Wild at Heart*'s engagement with this cultural movement in America, since the film's protagonist, Sailor Ripley, is moulded on this figure (a point I return to in my analysis). Presley's macho roles in movies such as *Love Me Tender* (1956) and *Jailhouse Rock* (1957), his legendary musical career, and his suggestive dances and posturing secured his status as one of the first great symbols of 'liberated' sexuality, and also as the champion of excess, exuberance, individual freedom and loose living. Yet he was eventually converted into a palatable commodity along with so many other rockers and 'cultural revolutionaries'. As Bindas and Heineman observe, 'by the latter part of the 1950s mass marketers had cleaned up rock's image, the best example being Elvis Presley' (1994: 24). However, this is not to say that he was rendered entirely clean (indeed this would have made him boring to consumers. His dramatic demise through excessive alcohol and drug use, like Dean's death in a sports car, is part of what made him a legend). Rather it means that Elvis (his look, his clothing styles, and his ethos) has been framed, through positive representations, as an acceptable cultural artefact in mainstream society. The result has been that he overcame initial scepticism from more conservative quarters at the time of his first appearances.

Shari Roberts's essay 'Western Meets Eastwood' (1997) reveals that, alongside Elvis and rock 'n' roll, the thematic concerns of a number of road films clearly

also catered for the growing American market for rebellion. Roberts points out that the road movie has tended to depict characters using the road as a means of 'escaping a threat, the law, and/or an unwanted lifestyle' (1997: 53). He argues that this discourse of crossing social and physical limits was initially made famous in American cinema by the Western, which later diminished in popularity as 'the focus changed from a hero travelling across the frontier to the searcher hitting the road' (1997: 50). This change coincided both with the rise of youth culture, with *Easy Rider*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Badlands* and *The Wild One* taking up some of the Western's motifs and adapting them to the desires and the emerging iconography of the youth market (with motorcycles and fast cars, and rugged characters dressed in the latest fashions). The underlying agenda of these road films is best summed up by Marlon Brando's reply in *The Wild One* upon being asked what he was rebelling against: "Whadda ya got?"

In 'Mad Love, Mobile Homes, and Dysfuntional Dicks: On the Road With Bonnie and Clyde' (1997) Leong, Sell and Thomas describe how various sub-genres or styles have emerged around this basic theme. *Bonnie and Clyde* initiated a particularly popular form of the road movie that glamorized violence and the achievement of exuberant love by a stylish couple on the run outside of social constraints. According to Leong *et al.* the defining characteristic of the film is that it 'constantly seeks to escape its own ideological boundaries, challenging canons of taste and good behaviour' (1997: 85). In this respect the film marks one of the key texts that shaped the meaning of rebellion in American popular culture as a rejection of prohibitions in the name of liberty, exuberance, ecstasy and glory. In *Bonnie and Clyde* this theme is borne out when the couple go on the run from the law, surviving through robbery, and in the process attempt to escape the limitations of the 'square' world in their pursuit of 'mad love' and the thrill of crime. Clyde seduces Bonnie into joining him in the name of rising above the banal depression-era society the two inhabit. The fact that they are gunned down in the end by the police does not detract from their project at all. Their killing is over quickly, and pre-labelled by Bonnie's poem as a violent

consummation for the couple, propelling them into legend. Leong *et al.* argue that the film caters for audiences seeking thrills in the theatre. Its road trip, which is charged up with violence and crime, makes 'their love feel revolutionary, even if they still have to go to work in the morning', offering an alternative to 'restraint by the demands of both biological and social reproduction' (Leong, Sell and Thomas 1997: 86). In this respect the film also plays on the appeal of the liberated individualist, an extreme version of American neo-liberal values, with Warren Beatty's repeated emphasis that Bonnie is 'different' from the common 'rabble' with their mundane workaday lives, and that she should leave her waitressing job and join him in aspiring to legendary status.

Other classic road trips that are less violent than *Bonnie and Clyde* have still emphasised the excess and rebellion of individualist characters, as in the case of *Easy Rider* and its derivatives, which celebrate sexual and narcotic adventure. Roberts points out that these films, along with 'outlaw couple' films have become a source of inspiration for several generations of movie-goers as a 'statement of youth, rebellion, and counter-culture' (1997: 51).

Easy Rider and *Bonnie and Clyde* have left a legacy that includes films like *The Getaway* (1972), *Pursuit* (1981), *Natural Born Killers* and countless others which depict characters on a similar violent and/or idealistic quest, where the road creates pace and a sense of freedom, and in some cases 'lends structure to a parallel, spiritual quest for...freedom from restrictive traditions, mores, and social norms' (Roberts 1997: 51). Taking up the radical impulses of the counter-culture and also the liberalist call in America for a loosening of conservative social restraints, these films offered up packaged 'transgression' and commodified rebel icons for consumption (a packaging that Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* self-consciously critiques through its satirical depiction of an outlaw couple becoming celebrities via a sleazy television programme 'American Maniacs'. Ironically, the film helped to propel its own characters to

fame and was blamed for copy-cat killings). Roberts also observes that these films have increasingly tended to marry experimentation with unconventional film techniques (unusual camera angles, discolouration of the image, breaches of continuity editing and the like) to narratives in which 'the characters simultaneously experiment with sex and drugs in an attempt to break through old boundaries and create a revitalised set of values' (ibid.).

In spite of the recurring theme of rebellion against homogeneity that drives the road films mentioned here (along with many others), they have helped, alongside icons as diverse as Elvis, Marlon Brando and Madonna to make rebellion as much an American product and marker of national identity as Harley Davidson and Route 66. This can partly be attributed to the fact that the road resonates with historical narratives on the origins of America as a 'new world', built through an escape from Europe and a heroic push beyond the frontier to settle in new lands. As Reni Celeste argues in *'Lost Highway*: Unveiling Cinema's Yellow Brick Road', 'the American landscape was always well-mapped for metaphysical and theological metaphor' since it is a nation 'founded on a journey West, an escape through the desert of adversity toward the promised land of a mythic California' (Celeste 1997: 3). One could even argue, as Roberts does, that the road 'has commonly come to symbolize a conceptualization of America', although an updated one that has superseded the frontier (1997: 52). According to Roberts, this is evident in the link between the road film and the Western, which for all their historical distance, both rely on frontier symbolism 'propelled by masculinity and a particular conception of American national identity that revolves around individualism and aggression' (ibid: 45).

From this perspective, the fact that rebellion (as it has featured in the road film and elsewhere) has become both an acceptable national trait and a lucrative commodity should come as no surprise. The road film has been particularly important in promoting and lending ideological credibility to this identity

through cinema's spectacular effects and its conventions of verisimilitude[49]. It has also helped the ideology of rebellion to proliferate across the world via film theatres and television, making it an increasingly global phenomenon. This is not to say, though, that the ideology of rebellion and the subcultures it has generated is internally uniform or static. As Dick Hebdidge points out in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), '[t]he meaning of subculture is...always in dispute' (1979: 3). Skinheads, punks, hippies, bikers and the like all form separate groups. These movements come and go, and new trends rise as a challenge to 'the establishment', and then are assimilated or 'tamed', a pattern that Hebdige describes in terms of either commodification ('the conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects') or ideological recuperation ('the "labelling" and redefinition of deviant behaviour by dominant groups – the police, the media, the judiciary') (1979: 94). However, I argue that most of these movements share a common ideological basis in rebellion against the dominant social order regardless of their immediate forms. I will now examine this underlying ideological agenda and its political implications by comparing it to Bataille's analysis of social transgressions.

Rebellion vs. Transgression

As I have argued so far, road movie-style rebellion has been repeatedly represented as the result of film characters' desires to 'exceed the bounds' of work and prohibitions, the same impulses which motivate transgression, according to Bataille (see 1977: 40). However, as I have already demonstrated, rebellion is still an organised system of cultural meanings, and the rebel has become a coherent source of identity, no matter how frenzied or decadent. Elvis, Bonnie and Clyde, Marlon Brando are all markers of social identity in American culture, a fact that *Wild at Heart* scrutinises in its self-conscious characterisation of Sailor and Lula as rock 'n' roll by-products. From this perspective, transgression and rebellion are very different. Far from being a form of

[49] See Chapter One for a discussion of this relationship between realist cinema conventions and ideology.

transgression, rebellion is an extension of prohibition and still falls within social homogeneity. Its tendency to emphasise the supreme agency of the subject also means that it is an individualist phenomenon, while social transgression, for Bataille, should bring about communal fusion (whether through ritual, the festival, or the sacrifice) (Bataille 2000 b: 215).

The differences between rebellion and transgression become evident when looking at Bataille's views on the relations between prohibition, cognition and transgression. For Bataille, prohibitions make practical and systematic thinking possible by controlling violence. In *Death and Sensuality* he states that '[p]rohibitions eliminated violence, and our violent impulses (those which correspond with sexual impulsions can be counted among them) destroy within us that calm ordering of ideas without which human awareness is inconceivable' (1977: 38). As a result, for Bataille 'man' has only become what 'he' currently is through work and prohibition, that is, within the realm of homogeneity (1977: 44-45). Bataille argues that prohibitions, at their root, are based on the desire of 'man', as a conscious individual, to avoid death and the bonds of flesh. In 'The Festival, or the Transgression of Prohibitions' (originally published in *The Accursed Share*), for example, he states:

> [n]ot wanting to depend on anything, abandoning the place of our carnal birth, revolting intimately against the fact of *dying*, generally mistrusting the body, that is, having a deep mistrust of what is accidental, natural, perishable – this appears to be *for each one of us* the sense of the movement that leads us to *represent* man independently of filth, of sexual functions and of death. (2000 c: 249)

For Bataille, awareness of selfhood, and of identity in general (which features as the basis of logical thought and discourse) cannot be sustained without these prohibitions. This is because awareness of being a singular, self-identical individual implies a concomitant awareness of the destruction or violation of this

identity wrought by sex and death[50]. Reproduction and death are different forms of a 'contradiction that enters into the edifice of man's activity' (2000 d: 313). By excluding conscious awareness of the violation of the self and of identity, prohibition keeps out the contradiction and the threat, and blocks the distress these cause. It allows the restriction of thought to the world of *things*, isolated in time and seen outside of their ability to change and lose their self-identity: 'the rejection of the disturbing object and the disturbance itself... [are] necessary for the clarity, the untroubled clarity, of the world of action and objectivity' (Bataille 1977: 38). In this way, abstract thought, by 'separating the objects of reflection from the concrete totality of the real' is able to 'construct under the name of science, a world of abstract things copied from the things of the profane world, a partial world dominated by utility' (Bataille 1992: 264). Discourse and identity are therefore not simply what assist prohibition, but are inseparable from it, and this applies equally to the discourse of rebellion.

Philosopher Philippe Sollers sums up the implications of this well in his essay 'The Roof: an Essay in Systematic Reading', arguing that 'the mode of discourse is prohibition's mode of being' (1998: 76). Discourse itself sustains and is sustained by prohibitions even though it would do away with them for being unnecessarily limiting. As Bataille puts it, while organised discourse 'owes its existence to them' it also simultaneously 'disclaims them because taboos are not rational' (Bataille 1977:37).

Road movie-style rebellion largely affirms the freedom of the individual from all limits and is grounded within this lacuna; with the figure of the rebel seeking to overthrow taboos but while *still in full control and possession of his or herself as an individual, conscious being.* From Marlon Brando in *The Wild One,* to Dennis Hopper in *Easy Rider*, to Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis in *Natural Born*

[50] Bataille sees sex and death as being linked insofar as they are 'simply the culminating points of the holiday, nature celebrates, with the inexhaustible multitude of living beings, both of them signifying the boundless wastage of nature's resources' (1977:61).

Killers, rebels take to the road with a clear project to reject all rules as a matter of principle, *defining* themselves on the basis of this project. Sollers argues that this kind of ideological conundrum is rooted in an illusory rejection of 'conservative' or 'repressive' values in the name of a complete liberation of the human subject:

> Our era...on the basis of a scientific self-assurance, believes itself to be the one that has *finally* lifted prohibition and recognised desire. On the plane of banal, day-to-day activity this pretension (that of the neo-capitalist society) becomes a demand for the satisfaction of needs at any cost, as well as, concomitant to an unprecedented glut of consumption, a demand for "leisure", for a "return to nature", or indeed for "drugs". What leisure, nature, and drugs have in common is that they place work *out of bounds*...and the psyche becomes the "all-encompassing" milieu of an increasingly hallucinatory fantasy of information. (Sollers 1998:76)

The road movie rebel corresponds to this vision of the human subject in a number of ways, especially in its representations of individuals that seek to transcend unnecessarily staid laws to realise a higher state of being (*Bonnie and Clyde*, for example, seek out legendary status and wild excitement). From this perspective, the ideology of rebellion, epitomised by the contemporary identity of the rebel without a cause, could be seen as an extreme version of the neo-liberal notion of the self-determining and self-controlling human subject.

Drawing on Bataille's understanding of the prohibition, Foucault has observed that since the rise of liberal humanism and Modernity, the discourse on sex and transgression has 'multiplied rather than rarefied' in the West (Foucault 1978:53). The advent of the road film and other related genres is, in many ways, the latest addition to this. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault argues that this field of discourse, along with others claiming to have done away with

superstitions and irrational fears of death, is more 'a screen-discourse, a dispersion-avoidance' than anything else (ibid.). He asks:

> [d]id the critical discourse that addresses itself to repression come to act as a roadblock to a power mechanism that had operated unchallenged up to that point, or is it not in fact part of the same historical network as the thing it denounces (and doubtless misrepresents) by calling it "repression"? (Foucault 1978:10)

At its core, the discourse calling for the end to all forms of prohibition in the name of the unfettered, autonomous individual, sustains the conceptual separation of this individual from the body, otherness, and 'base matter'. Even the figure of the rebel that is portrayed in road movies (and other genres) still sustains an identity that is based on the taboo (as do rock 'n' roll stars and the like). The rebel is interpellated in language, a subject position that the cinematic spectacles of the 'outlaw couple', the rebel without a cause, the liberated seeker after forbidden knowledge, the macho crusader, and other prominent road movie personae have all shaped and helped sustain.

Ironically, these figures and their now relatively safe status within acceptable society are still far from overthrowing the taboo (even if the film in question does not reinstate the social order through a narrative closure that punishes or reigns the rebels in). As seemingly self-determining, 'liberated' individuals, they exist within prohibition and its fear of biological necessity and the perishable (see Bataille 2000 c: 249)

This also highlights the political implications of the contemporary discourse of rebellion. For Bataille the transgression proper, while driven by a desire to exceed prohibition, is not based on the same desire for individual autonomy which underlies the figure of the road movie rebel. The rebel tends to maintain rational control, detachment and independence, even in the face of violence and

death. In contrast, the communal transgression – which Bataille argues is the form transgression has taken throughout pre-modern societies – answered to the basic human need to escape the state of being a *thing* within the world of work and the isolation that this imposes. This is why the festival is a key form of transgression for Bataille, who claimed that '[t]he constant problem posed by the impossibility of being human without being a thing and of escaping the limits of things without returning to animal slumber receives the limited solution of the festival'. (2000 b: 215). The festival is a temporary transgression which allows true *communication* with others (and otherness). It operates within a *dual* social world that defines humanness in terms of prohibitions[51], and transgression *only in relation to* the taboo[52].

The discourse celebrating freedom from limits that structures the road movie genre is fundamentally different from this kind of transgression. The individual's rebellion is not only rooted in the desire for exuberance and 'freedom' from being an instrument, subject to 'restraint by the demands of both biological and social reproduction' (Leong, Sell and Thomas 1997: 86), but also – as Sollers has observed - to the belief that prohibitions are unnecessary limits and should be done away with in lieu of the sole agency of the subject. Michael Richardson, another commentator on Bataille, points out that because 'transgression has come to be associated with the idea of the rebel, the one who refuses to accept the authority of the taboo', it 'does not regulate the taboo within society in the way the festival once did. It now becomes the prerogative of the individual who, in rebellion, seeks not to maintain the taboo but destroy it' (Richardson 1998: 51).

To sum up, the discourse of rebellion espoused by the road movie is itself still within discourse's 'mode of being' and in turn feeds the ideology of the

[51] As I have illustrated in the introduction to this dissertation, throughout his work Bataille maintained this idea (see especially 1977: 67-8).

[52] Transgression only gains meaning and emotional force in relation to the limit set by the taboo/prohibition. According to Bataille, the excitement of the transgression lies in the fact that it violates the taboo while bringing the individual within proximity of death and dissolution of the self, an encounter normally kept away by the taboo. Hence '[t]he *transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends and completes it*' (1977: 63).

supremely rational individualist, displacing collective transgression[53]. Thus, when looked at in terms of Bataille's analysis, the discourse of rebellion is both an extension of the prohibition, even as it claims to eradicate it, and, as a result, undermines the real social and experiential purpose of the transgression. While seeming to answer to the desire of the individual to overcome the state of being isolated as a *thing* in the 'square' world of work, it actually serves to maintain this state in a covert form, enforcing isolation and alienation of the individual. I will now consider how Lynch engages with this problem in *Wild at Heart.*

The Road Trip Reinterpreted

In spite of broader trends in the road movie and related genres, *Wild at Heart* has been one of a growing number of films that problematise the discourse of rebellion. While the road has become a well established metaphor that has married the distinctly American push beyond the frontier with the affirmation of the rebel identity, as Reni Celeste points out, it is perhaps 'only fitting that it should also become the chief vehicle for its unravelling' (Celeste 1997: 3). Along with films like Godard's *Weekend* (1967), Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and Stone's *Natural Born Killers*[54], *Wild at Heart*'s use of the format of the road movie foregrounds some of the contradictions and consequences of the ideology of rebellion that I have identified above. In the analysis that follows I will consider how the *informe* functions in the film both to foreground the essential 'constructedness' of rebellion as a product of commercial cinema, and to reflect on the inevitable failure of road-movie rebellion to deliver real transgression as a result of its solipsistic agenda.

[53] The festival contrasts to the individualist pursuit in that it allows *communication* through collective experience of 'exceeding the bounds' of prohibitions that govern the world of utility (1977:40). Festivals become the chief manifestation at a *social* level of the same urge to exceed the bounds of the self and to *communicate* or lose oneself in the other, as that which lies behind eroticism (see Bataille 2000 b).

[54] For a discussion of how each of these films engages critically with the road film genre, see Russell (1993) for a discussion of *Weekend,* Roberts (1997) and Boozer (1995) for *Thelma and Louise*, and Leong, Sell, and Thomas (1997) in regard to *Natural Born Killers.*

The failure of rebellion is already evident at the level of the film's narrative trajectory insofar as the film is driven by highly conventional masculine aggression and violence, as well as sexual and criminal libertarianism, but offers neither closure nor glorious death as their end points. Instead *Wild at Heart* reworks the ideology of rebellion glamorised as a journey to freedom in the road movie. Bravado and individualism repeatedly end in the enforced stasis of jail, free sex ends in unwanted pregnancy, and the utopian journey away from social constraints leads not to glorious freedom in California, but to a penniless breakdown in an unflatteringly portrayed Middle American town, Big Tuna. In this regard my argument follows Martha Nochimson's analysis of the film in *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood* where she states that while the road film 'is dedicated to the reality of the damn-the-torpedoes heroic assertion' Sailor and Lula on the road 'permit us to see the futility of such disconnected derring-do' (Nochimson 1999: 48).

The film unravels the identity of the rebel through incorporating key formal elements that have helped to establish it, and then foregrounding their artificiality through the *informe* within this larger narrative assertion of their failure. In the first instance, it sets up a dialogue with the *Bonnie and Clyde* road movie formula in its use of the popular 'outlaw couple' narrative (which has also been reproduced in *Badlands*, *True Romance* and others). Sailor jumps parole with Lula, and the couple interpret this escape in terms of a glamorous road trip to 'sunny California', filling their time with rampant sex in various motels, and becoming involved in several violent incidents where Sailor repeatedly asserts his all-American brand of machismo.

However, the delusional and ideological nature of this trip is made evident through its juxtaposition with the 1939 classic American fantasy tale *The Wizard of Oz*. The core theme of *Oz* is a rejection of the dream of a utopia beyond home, the frontier and society, which clashes with the road movie's celebration of 'boundless' freedom. As Celeste puts it:

> The traditional American fantasy that *Wizard of Oz* admonishes is the one invested in the gesture of escape, the flight from home, the striving toward a better place which appears as a linear trajectory usually westward toward California as "mythos". (Celeste 1997: 4)

In the 1939 film, when Dorothy hits the yellow brick road in search of answers to all her questions, she arrives in the coveted destination of Emerald City only to discover that the Wizard and the city itself hold none of their promise, and that to be 'over the rainbow' is to be hopelessly lost. Her discovery replaces the American emphasis on crossing the frontier with an affirmation: 'there's no place like home'.

The couple, like Dorothy, are driven by the hope of finding something beyond the frontier of social limits. They, also like Dorothy, mistake the road as a means to obtaining answers and gratification, an exciting fantastical trip to a better place with Emerald city and the world of Oz being ends in themselves. However, unlike Dorothy, Sailor and Lula's characters are determined, and overtly interpellated within media discourse. As Kenneth Kaleta points out in *David Lynch*, it is 'in the movies, not in reality that Sailor and Lula find substance' (Kaleta 1993: 182). Their actions, goals, mannerisms, and even dress sense are guided by *Oz* and other texts from the history of American film, which becomes something akin to a how-to guide for them. In this way, Lynch depicts the couple's rebellious journey as one based in contemporary American mythology, not a transcendent quest beyond prohibition.

Their reliance on this iconography is evident at several points in the film. After one of the many raunchy sex scenes in the film, most of which are lit in rainbow colours and culminate with the flare of a hugely magnified match as the couple light their cigarettes, Lula muses to Sailor 'Sometimes Sail honey, when we're making love, you almost take me right over that rainbow'. The fire and the

rainbow, the latter referring to Dorothy's optimistic song in the *Wizard of Oz*, are images that seem to celebrate the exceeding of all limits – of imagination and social constraint. They signify the utopia that the couple seek through their formulaic trip beyond boundaries and their rebellious and hip lifestyle. However, later in the film, Lula discovers she is pregnant, and is left to raise her son alone while Sailor is in jail. This misuse of iconography from *Oz* is also shown to have unfortunate consequences when Sailor is offered the opportunity to rob a bank by the devious hired gun Bobby Peru. While discussing the robbery with Peru, and admiring the weapons they will use, he justifies the decision to participate in the robbery by saying that the meagre sum they will grab will 'sure get us a long way down that yellow brick road'. Later, however, Sailor is forced to admit to Lula that Big Tuna 'ain't exactly Emerald City', and Lula clicks her red shoes together when she realises the gravity of their situation. Thematically, then the *Wizard of Oz* is used as a means to highlight the essential error at the heart of the road movie.

This reworking of the road film and rebellion goes beyond a narrative warning of the perils of moral degeneration, however. If *Oz* is used to subvert the integrity of the road film format, it is not simply reproduced as a preferable alternative or more accurate version of reality. If it were, it would be easy to read *Wild at Heart* as a reactionary or neo-conservative gesture calling for a return to conservative values, home, and Aunty Em. Instead, through the incorporation of the *Wizard of Oz*, and a multiplicity of other intertextual elements that are in constant tension with one another, the film *informs* the cinematic realism that has come to affirm both rebellion *and* the kind of conservative ideology *Oz* propounds. The film's chaotic patchwork includes intertextual references to music videos, horror, Westerns, and Hollywood musicals. This juxtaposition denies the diegetic integrity of any of these elements, *informing* the conventions that allow them to function as realistic portrayals by juxtaposing them in a disruptive manner. In this way, the film points to the fact that rebellion remains a part of discourse and prohibition, a social narrative that affirms individualism

and individual interest, and that cannot offer real *communication*. This is evident in the close of the film, where it appears as another interchangeable myth that is not only inadequate to deliver the couple from the harshness of the American world they occupy, but that is also easily substituted for the *Wizard of Oz* or the happy-ever-after ideology of the nuclear family.

By the end of the film the outcome of the couple's journey is much like the deliberately artificial-feeling closure of *Blue Velvet* in that it foregrounds the constructed nature of the various ideologies that the film traverses by *informing* the mechanisms of realist diegesis. The film's ending relies on a whole series of clichés running one after another.

When Sailor is finally released a second time from jail, he meets Lula and his son Pace at the station, and they leave in the Cadillac. Shortly afterwards, however, Sailor decides 'this ain't no good', leaving Lula with Pace after giving the latter an empty lecture in Macho heroism by quoting *The Cisco Kid* series (1950-1956): 'lets went, before dancing at the end of a rope without music'. Sailor's advice to his son is based on the same phyric closure characteristic of Westerns such as Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Bonnie and Clyde*-style road films, and Sailor walks off in keeping with this principle.

Lynch burdens the cinematic text with further blatant intertextuality in the scene that follows. On his way to nowhere, Sailor is surrounded by a gang of street punks, a moment straight out of an alley fight in the 1973 Bruce Lee classic *Enter the Dragon*, complete with Lalo Schifrin-style jazz, and alternating shots of the roughly dressed youths approaching on all sides and stopping to encircle Sailor in a high-angle extreme long shot. With his characteristic macho swagger, Sailor lights a cigarette and asks: 'what do you faggots want?' After they have finished beating him, Sailor lies unconscious on the ground and has a vision of the Good Witch Glinda from the *Wizard of Oz*, who tells him, 'if you are truly wild at heart you'll fight for your dreams...don't turn away from love'. Glinda is

depicted as a blonde woman in a frilly bright pink and silver dress, resembling a Barbie doll with a wand and hat, and her voice is mechanically altered to helium pitch. This deliberately absurd juxtaposition with the violence preceding it, and its over-the-top supermarket kitsch, is made even more absurd when Sailor awakens with a hugely swollen nose that is 'patently created by cosmetic alteration' (Nochimson 1999: 69). With this overtly theatrical visage, Sailor stands up and is asked 'had enough?' He responds, politely, 'I have now', and issues a formal apology (that is still laced with homophobia) and thanks them for teaching him 'a valuable lesson in life' before running off to find Lula. As Nochimson has observed, this 'signals that stock Hollywood moment when the hero gathers his resolve', an 'entrenched mass-media, infantile fantasy of omnipotence that is routinely gratified by Hollywood's standard controlling hero' (1999: 70-71). This deliberately artificial style culminates with him running over cars in a traffic jam (again a stock Hollywood image) and serenading Lula on the hood of the Cadillac with Elvis's 'Love me tender', the song he said he would only sing to his wife. As the song begins, the credits roll and the screen's aspect ratio is squashed, distorting Sailor and Lula's embracing figures and further undermining the realism of the film's 'closure' by recalling the adaptation of wide screen films to television in the 1960s (a point I explore in more detail below).

The overt artifice of the scene therefore encompasses the musical, the road film, the kung-fu movie, the folktale, and the Western. For as Kaleta puts it, at this point (and indeed throughout the film) the couple 'find their destination – their solution – in movie tradition...in the conventional happy Hollywood musical ending' (Kaleta 1993: 171). However, by drawing attention to the nature of closure as artifice, and painting it in such absurd terms and in such direct contradiction to everything that had gone before, this ending ultimately disavows closure, instead extending the film's awareness of the mystifying effects of generic cinema. A sense of ambivalence is thereby generated in handing closure to the rebellious couple, especially since this closure is engineered by an overtly

fantastical product (Glinda). Reni Celeste points to the significant de-realising and distancing effect that this has: '[w]e begin to get the feeling we are being mocked, just as we did in the 'closure' of *Blue Velvet*, when we travelled out the ear and awakened back into the wax-like diorama of the suburban home' (Celeste 1997: 5). Moreover, Sailor's song is couched within the same discourse he has always resorted to for security. He still buys into the 'mad love' of Elvis and the road film, and he still wears his snake-skin jacket. Through the mechanism of the *informe* – which unravels the conventional markers of semiotic and narrative closure – rebellion, family values, and cowboy-style machismo all emerge as nothing more than different facets of American cinema ideology.

As a result, the film is not simply the other extreme of the road movie's loose life. As Kaleta points out: 'If the conclusion of the film, with the good witch (in the bubble) reigning and Marrietta, the wicked witch, defeated, is *Wild at Heart*'s message, Lynch has merely remade Fleming's film' (Kaleta 1993: 171). Underneath the fanciful events it portrays, *The Wizard of Oz* is meant to be taken as a serious American fable, and it is structured around a coherent narrative and internally consistent ideology. In *Wild at Heart* it loses this coherence and the credibility it sustains. Its signifying basis, which articulates and vouchsafes its message, is *informed* in the same way as the textual basis of the road movie and the various other texts that the film incorporates. By placing these elements in such concentration, they all appear disembodied, unable to retain their ability to mean or secure identity.

This aspect of the *informe* also operates within the characters themselves, especially in the modelling of Sailor's macho male persona on Elvis. By using Elvis as a template for Sailor's character, *Wild at Heart* exploits the obviously commodified status of The King's brand of rebellion as a means to make the larger point that the discourse of rebellion in the road film has itself been subject to the same process of assimilation, that it never was anything other than the extension of capitalism and of the prohibitions that govern its logic. As I have

already observed, Elvis is a prototypical American rebel that virtually marked the birth of an entire culture of rebellion insofar as he 'embodies rock-and-roll America' (Kaleta 1993: 183). However, I have also pointed out that Elvis is, at the same time, a commodified rebel, embodying the contradiction that is inherent in the identity of the rebel insofar as he was so easily converted into a palatable commodity along with so many other rockers and 'cultural revolutionaries'. Sailor is therefore fashioned as little more than a recycled version of an already commodified rebel.

This is repeatedly emphasised in Sailor's highly image-conscious references to his snake-skin jacket as 'a symbol of my individuality and my belief in personal freedom'. Ironically, as Kaleta observes,

> Sailor's "individuality" is neither his nor is it individual. The jacket screams origins of stock equipment in the hyped persona wardrobe of every rock-and-roll rebel. It is distributed through outlet racks in shopping malls. The mass-produced costumes of rock fantasy, like the hyped sounds of rock, determine Sailor's reality. (Kaleta 1993: 183)

However, Sailor's commercially produced trappings are not the only aspects of his character that are portrayed as overtly 'reproduced'. Michael Dunne, in '*Wild at Heart* Three Ways: Lynch, Gifford, Bakhtin', points out that Lynch also deliberately portrays Sailor's mannerisms and his speech, even the monologue on his jacket itself, as recycled texts. He argues that Sailor's character, along with various other aspects of Lynch's film[55], self-consciously foregrounds the manner in which texts always echo other texts (a notion which he draws from the work of Russian theorist Mikhail Bahktin) (1995: 25). For Dunne, this is evident during

[55] For example, Dunne points out that through the use of alternating full screen shots of the lovers recognising each other at the station (following Sailor's second release from jail), Lynch conjures up "already uttered" shots from film musicals. This style controls the film through the next several shots until Sailor walks away...Surely we have seen Elvis do this in an atmosphere as hermetically unrealistic as the one enclosing Sailor and Lula (Dunne 1995: 26).

Sailor's speech, which the latter repeats by rote in the same deadpan manner every time, even after he has been in a fight during a concert at a roadhouse (ibid.). He speaks in uniform repetition, like a repeated playback of a recorded Elvis or Brando sound bite. During his speech, 'viewers encounter pure language rather than representation', language dissociated from its usual function (ibid.).

According to Dunne, Lynch repeats this gesture at the level of *Wild at Heart's* cinematic language as well. In terms of *mise en scene*, Cage's character strongly resembles the Elvis of *Jailhouse Rock* with his shiny hair, black shirts, turned-up collar, boots, jeans and macho swagger (Dunne 1995: 21). He also carries out several musical renditions of Elvis classics, with the entire film world veering into classic movie moments.

In the roadhouse where Sailor and Lula go to strut their stuff on the dance floor while a heavy metal band plays, Sailor calls the band to a halt and performs his own rendition of one of 'the King's' hits, while the spotlight falls on him and the screams of adoring female fans fill the air in a space that is clearly larger than it was when the concert began, 'filming the performance as if it were concert footage' (ibid.). By doing so, Lynch 'destroys any illusion of realism' and instead takes the film into the realm of the commercially reproduced image (ibid.). As noted above, this gesture is repeated in the close of the film on the hood of the Cadillac.

Dunne's Bakhtinian analysis of the 'already uttered' quotes from film history that the film foregrounds and manipulates effectively reveals the extent to which the film *informs* the signifying work of film language and its construction of an internally consistent diegesis. As Fred Botting and Scott Wilson have argued, the *informe's* 'work' 'is the work of un-working concepts that make discursive work possible' (2001:7) (see the introduction for a detailed discussion of this point). By 'flattening out' the characters, the film reduces them from being cinematic signs that articulate concepts of real people in a real world to signs of the signs

(or 'ingredients') conventionally used to make such realistic representations. However Dunne's reading does not consider the broader political significance of this move in Lynch's film. Lynch's quotations, which are stripped of their cultural capital, are not neutral, but rather steeped in a specific set of ideological associations centring around the glorification of rebellious individualism.

This gesture is disruptive to identity since, as I have observed in the Chapter Two, identification in cinema usually centres around the protagonist or protagonists in a film narrative. As Leong, Sell and Thomas have observed, rebellious protagonists in earlier road films like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Easy Rider* 'spawned an oppositional taste culture for a generation of young, voracious consumers who saw history not as a burden or a responsibility, but as a source of lifestyles, fashion tips, and vicarious adventure' (1997: 80). In contrast, *Wild at Heart* renders this ideological positioning of the consumer of film texts open to scrutiny.

The recycled language of rebellion that is used to articulate the characters is not limited to Sailor or Elvis, however. Overall, '*Wild at Heart* is a rock-and-roll film' (Kaleta 1993: 174), its entire iconography of the open road and violence cut from the cloth of Hollywood conventions. Even Lula is equally determined within the logic of this ideological framework. She sports gaudy make-up, paints her nails bright colours, wears tight revealing clothing like spandex and fish net stockings, constantly chews bubble-gum and talks with a deliberate trashiness that complements Sailor's posturing. She also enjoys copious amounts of sex, and talks dirty to Sailor on several occasions. In one sequence he shares a pornographic story with her about his exploits, which is played out as a sequence for the viewer to watch (and which gets her 'hotter than Georgia asphalt'), and in another bedroom scene she speaks explicitly about his 'cock' as if, to use Catherine Russell's point,[56] 'sex talk and the naming of sex were a necessary

[56] In 'Decadence, Violence and the Decay of History: Notes on the Spectacular Representation of Death in Narrative Film, 1965 to 1990'.

supplement to the performance of sex in order to insure its authenticity' (Russell 1993: 187). Yet her desire to identify with rebellion and 'coolness' is shot through with contradiction insofar as she is clearly young and vulnerable even as she tries so hard to live out a predetermined role. Lynch exploits Laura Dern's innocent and fresh face to the fullest, and has her reduced to a whimpering wreck by Bobby Peru's vicious advances, clicking her red shoes together like Dorothy to go home because the world is 'wild at heart and weird on top'. Later in the film she is again reduced to soap opera tears by Sailor's abandonment. Thus, to Sailor's Elvis/bad boy, she plays a recycled pop vamp/sex kitten (a la '80s popster Cindy Lauper). However, within Sailor's patriarchal scheme, she also plays the adoring groupie and ever-supportive 'girl', right down to her hysterical impersonation of 'Beatlemania' at his performance of Elvis, or her overblown soap opera screams when he walks away from her. Right up to the closing credits, she continues to occupy this pre-ordained role, barely standing up to Sailor and his damaging machismo.

Apart from these instances, perhaps the strongest indication of the manufactured nature of their characters as identities is in the squeezing of their figures at the end of the film, which refers to the 1960s phenomenon of wide aspect ratio films being squashed onto television screens. This gesture emphasises the nature of the filmic body itself as a product of cinema technology, and the extent to which this body as a historical product has determined their characters and the narrative itself. The various ways in which Lynch overtly portrays these characters as recycled cinema conventions rather than three-dimensional – or even two-dimensional – characters, undermine the viewer's ability to internalise or passively accept Lula or Sailor's identities in the same way as they might accept Bonnie, Clyde, James Dean, or Elvis. While rebellion often features in the road movie as a source of pleasure and narcissistic affirmation, here it merely results in a banal and bleak 'closure' depicting a young family stuck in traffic with nowhere to escape to other than American consumer mythology. Sailor's song rings out as the sound of denial, not of happy ever after.

The couple does not find the freedom and social *communication* of the festival in their road trip. Instead their project leads them into the depths of isolation. While *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Easy Rider*, and just about every 'rebel without a cause' film made, framed rebellion in terms of a glorious principle free from affiliation to anything and rejecting the alienated and materialistic 'square' world, Sailor and Lula's trip reveals this for the narcissistic and solipsistic pursuit that it is. As Kenneth Kaleta observes, the film revises this formula:

> Lynch alters the sixties couple: a depression Robin Hood and Maid Marian are nowhere to be found in his 1990 film. The qualities that lionize Bonnie and Clyde, elevating their road trip into an American fable, are annihilated. In an age of agoraphobia and cocooning, Sailor and Lula are concerned with themselves and only themselves. (Kaleta 1993:165)

Lynch's depiction therefore points to the same thing that Bataille's analysis suggests: that rebellion is an individualist – and, ultimately, self-serving – pursuit that cannot fulfil the same needs as the transgression. The couple's painful trajectory is the source of alienation and anguish, afflictions which are only blunted by the comforts of mystification. There is an amount of sympathy in Lynch's portrayal of Sailor and Lula, and the film's tone is at times tragic. However, behind Sailor's 'Mr Cool' act, Lula's sex kitten, and the overtly artificial closure, is a hopeless lack of real human connectivity, save the couple's desperate refuge in one another. They have nowhere to go, no community to be a part of, and no sense of who they really are. They are stranded in a traffic jam and, as I have argued, have not escaped their interpellation within the ideology of rebellion (Sailor still wears his jacket, and still adopts his macho Elvis persona, while Lula still puts him on a pedestal, playing his adoring fan and ever-faithful 'girl'). While Catherine Russell has criticised the film for being 'so obsessed with its affirmative project that it is unable to articulate a future free of

the trappings of American bourgeois ideology' (Russell 1993: 175) [57], when looked at in terms of Bataille's notion of the *informe*, the unworking of discursive and signifying structures in the film shows that it destabilises both rebellion and bourgeois morality as ideologies, even if it does fail to offer any obvious solution to the situation. Sailor and Lula's momentary reunion and solace in love while standing on the bonnet of a Cadillac, is shown as the only thing that they have in an otherwise hopeless situation, but even this moment comes *in spite* of, rather than because of, the rebellious project Sailor (and to a lesser extent Lula) adopts. Moreover, it is shown to be fleeting at best[58].

Rebellion, Violence and the Cinematic 'Presentation' of Transgression

Augmenting this disruption of identity and ideology, the *informe* also functions in *Wild at Heart* to unwork the 'spectacularisation' of violence and transgression, helping to create critical distance toward it. The extent to which the representation of graphic violence is tied up with the ideology of rebellion as it features in road movies and elsewhere illustrates the political significance of this textual strategy.

[57] Russell also interprets *Wild at Heart's* closure in very literal terms:

> The traffic jam at the end of *Wild at Heart* is a symbolic desire for progress in a stagnant culture and Sailor and Lula fulfil this desire. Their romantic reunion is a transcendence of the stagnation. Insofar as the film's trajectory is towards L.A., it is a Western in which the morality of the wilderness has been fully eclipsed by the civilizing force of the nuclear family. (Russell 1993: 197)

[58] In this respect it is worth noting the difference between Lynch's film and the novel on which it is based, *Wild at Heart: the Story of Sailor and Lula* (1990) by Barry Gifford. Gifford's novel ends with the couple going separate ways, while Lynch tacked on the 'happy ending' of the film in the improbable fashion already described. However, this accentuates the film's critical disruption of the ideology of rebellion, rendering the ending unsatisfying for the viewer insofar as it lacks the affirmation that would be provided by a more convincing closure. The opening sequence of Lynch's experimental music video *Industrial Symphony No. 1* adds an interesting intertextual twist to this reading. Released in 1990, shortly after *Wild at Heart*, the video starts with Sailor breaking up with Lula, a scene which seems to function as a kind of tragic coda to *Wild at Heart*.

Film analyst and education theorist Henry Giroux has argued that a distinction can be made between media violence that functions as a 'site of voyeuristic titillation and gory spectacle' on the one hand, and depictions of violence that provide 'an opportunity to think through and scrutinize the mechanisms and implications of violence' on the other (1995: 300-301). This distinction also underpins the pejorative terms used by film critics and reviewers such as 'gratuitous' or 'excessive' versus 'hard-hitting', 'unflinching' or 'gritty' when discussing the relative merits or demerits of depictions of violence, death and other transgressions in film. However, as insignificant as 'gratuitous' representations of transgression might seem vis-à-vis more responsible depictions that reveal 'how forms of self and social agency are produced within a variety of cultural sites' (Giroux 1995: 307), in the road movie gratuitousness itself has become a key factor in the production of rebellion as an American social identity and ideology.

While Bataille argues that all taboos have the same root in that they exclude violence and violation of the self[59], one of the core demands of the ideology of rebellion as it features in the road movie is for this basic taboo to be done away with. In many road films, this has translated into a call for unlimited access to violence, both in terms of what protagonists are able to do/get away with or 'handle', and in terms of what the films make available to the viewer as spectacle. On the one hand, films like *Doom Generation* and *True Romance* depict protagonists who are almost fearless in the face of violence, and in some cases revel in it as a form of recreation. Trauma is something reserved for 'weak' victims, and merely serves to emphasise the 'strength' of protagonists by contrast. On the other, the idea that violence and death should be transparent and demystified as an easily available cinematic spectacle for the viewer has become an axiom in road movies and other genres within a broader cultural moment that

[59] According to Bataille, 'This amorphous and universal taboo is constant. Its shape and objects do change; but whether it is a question of sexuality or death, violence, terrifying yet fascinating, is what it is levelled at' (1977:51).

has called for the casting off of all prohibitions. As French critic Jean-Francois Rauger (2000) points out, following films like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Wild Bunch* (1968), the 1970s especially were characterised by:

> the ideology of a progressive and definitive unveiling of the truth, or at least what could pass for it. Sex, violence, and politics, now open to view without mediation, were seen as a something repressed that had at last emerged. A new neorealism in film was accompanied by gore, pornography, and the supernatural. (2000: 78)

In terms of my above discussion of the underlying agenda of rebellion, this unleashing of violence that seems to be beyond 'laborious rationality' (Sollers 1998: 79) and 'restraint by the demands of both biological and social reproduction' (Leong *et al.* 1997: 86) has also become a key facet of the commodification of rebellion in the media, existing alongside the glorification of rebel icons. As Susan Sontag has observed in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, violent images and sequences in film are at present 'part of the normality of a culture in which shock has become a leading stimulus of consumption and source of value' (2003: 20). Electronically constructed 'transgression' that is coded as recreation to be enjoyed and consumed by viewers has generated an industry where 'to ask that images be jarring, clamorous, eye-opening seems like elementary realism as well as good business sense' (ibid.).

The extent to which graphic violence, murder and sex/rape have escalated is clear when it is considered that films like *Base Moi* (2002) and *Natural Born Killers*, which construct severe mutilation of the body and sexual violence against both men and women as spectacles for the viewer, are freely released on the commercial cinema circuits in shopping malls, while the relatively tame violence of *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *Bonnie and Clyde* was rigorously scrutinised by censors at the time of the films' release in the '50s and '60s respectively. *Bonnie and Clyde* was notorious for 'opening the "bloodgates" of

American film', considered by many to be the most violent film made at the time (Russell 1993: 181), while in *Rebel*, even scenes involving relatively harmless fights were censored. In one case 'unnecessary' kicking was removed, while in another, which involved a knife duel, an onlooker's warning 'no killing' had to be changed to 'no sticking' in order to remove the more serious implication[60]. In the past 50 years, with the advent of the road film genre and others, graphic violence has come to be used quite unapologetically as a titillation that augments the thematic emphasis on negating prohibition, and that is commercially consumed in its own right, along with trendy clothing, alcohol, music, and drugs, as one of the trappings of rebellion.

One of the reasons for this success is that cinema epitomises the 'hallucinatory fantasy of information' that Sollers argues has become a major part of our contemporary culture (Sollers 1998:76). The photographic image, the illusion of movement, synchronised sound, and continuity editing all contribute a sense of realism to film, transporting the viewer into an imaginary diegetic world where transgression seems to be *present*. Film seems to affirm that transgression is there, available, be it sex, death, violence, or the infinite journey on the open road that offers no barriers. This is especially the case where the protagonist has unlimited ability to inflict and control transgression as an instrument of his (and less often her) subjective will. Through identifying with such a protagonist, the viewer is able to indulge in a fantasy of omnipotence. However, as I have observed already in the case of rebellion, this apparent availability of the violent transgression, an appearance created in the language of film, is little more than an extension of 'prohibition's mode of being' (ibid.: 79). It remains within homogeneity, ontologically speaking, insofar as it still unfolds in an organised semiotic system comprised of narrative structures (particularly logical causality) and realist conventions (such as 'continuity editing', which supports narrative

[60] These changes were prescribed by the Production Code Administration (PCA) in America, whose primary function was to ensure that films did not contain anything 'offensive', such as graphic sex and violence, or vulgarity. The code was curtailed in 1966 leading to the ratings system, and increasing tolerance of violent and sexually explicit material. (See Simmons 1995: 56).

causality). Moreover, it is homogeneous within the broader context of culture insofar as it has come to serve a specific set of cultural meanings linked to rebellion as an identity position.

In *Wild at Heart* this process comes to the fore through the overtly conventional and overblown reproduction of 'realist' techniques normally used to 'present' violence (including shock tactics and dramatic effects that, although not always 'realistic' in that they heighten the action, have come to be accepted as such through sheer repetition). Simultaneously, the film also holds up for scrutiny the narcissistic gratification and fantasies of omnipotence that Hollywood violence has come to offer to the viewer through identification with a violent protagonist. This is evident in the opening sequence of the film, which depicts an absurdly abrupt explosion of violence. Sailor and Lula are depicted walking down the stairs in a Hotel when they are approached by Bobby Ray Lemon, a sleazy well-dressed thug paid by Lula's mother to kill Sailor. The moment Lemon threatens Sailor with a knife, the latter responds by beating him to death with superhuman strength. As Michael Chion has indicated in *David Lynch*, the scene lacks credibility due to the stylised way in which Sailor dispatches the much larger man so easily (2003: 67). This is deliberate, however, as Lemon is shown to be absolutely unable to put up any resistance to an invincible Sailor. The scene thereby reproduces, in a blatant form, the narcissistic identification encouraged through the valiant male hero's protection of himself and 'his' woman '"by beating the hell" out of his opponent' in the 'time-honoured Hollywood way' (Nochimson 1999: 47-48).

The self-conscious reproduction of media images mentioned earlier in regard to Sailor's incorporation of Elvis's persona is also used here to drain the violent event of all reality. After beating Bobby Ray Lemon to death, Sailor assumes a pose that is a 'performance-like gesture' recalling Elvis's stage show, his sweaty face fixed with defiance and his finger rising slowly and dramatically to rest on Marietta, while the 'excesses of Lula's physical gestures of fear and horror also

display the same performance-like body position' (Nochimson 1999:53). This effect is heightened by the use of sound. While soft lounge jazz plays as a diegetic soundtrack at the opening of the film, the moment Sailor begins attacking Lemon it is roughly cut by a non-diegetic burst of heavy metal guitars that continue precisely to the point when Sailor has finished beating Lemon to death, after which the soft jazz resumes to heighten the contrast. Accompanying the heavy metal music are Lula's hysterical screams and the amplified sound of Bobby Ray Lemon's skull crunching as Sailor bashes his head into the floor. In this way, Lynch exaggerates the violence of the scene to increasingly incredulous levels, while also using the hardcore sounds of metal to parade the ideological nature of the violent spectacle as rebellious/ 'transgressive' indulgence. Immediately afterward, Sailor is shown being locked up in the 'Pee Dee Correctional Facility', which completes the unravelling of glamorised media violence during the opening scene, especially since the jail's infantile name (recalling a crèche rather than an adult prison) contradicts the rugged associations that have accrued to jail in the movies from the likes of *Jailhouse Rock* and gritty prison dramas.

While this scene goes some way to commenting on the ideological implications of glamorised violence through the exaggeration of film conventions, this is taken even further in the robbery that forms the culmination of Lula and Sailor's journey. Here Lynch hollows out the violence of *Bonnie and Clyde* and other road films by articulating the heist and the ensuing shoot-out within 'the generic conventions of the splatter film' (Russell 1993: 193). These conventions serve to *inform* the apparent presentation of violence that affirms rebellion because, as Michael Arnzen argues in 'Who's Laughing Now?', the genre 'self-consciously revels in the special effects of gore as an art form' (Arnzen 1994: 176). For Arnzen, splatter films portray violence as a 'simulation' because 'each special effects crew competitively revises another's vision of violence'. As a result, 'it destroys the effect – via effects – of terror' (ibid.: 179-80). In *Wild at Heart* a blatantly over-the-top bloodbath begins after Sailor and Peru have taken money

at gunpoint from two men running a feed store. Bobby Peru empties his shotgun at the men severing the hand of one of them and leaving a gory mess. As he turns on Sailor, he laughs through his mask, baring disgustingly disfigured teeth and glistening gums, and chases him outside, only to be mowed down by the local sheriff, and, in an improbable move, blow his own head off with the shotgun. The camera follows his head as it flies into the air with the stocking mask trailing behind like some grotesque comet tail. It hits the wall and then lands with a wet crunching sound in the dust, bursting like a rotten pumpkin. As if this were not enough, the next scene shows the two men in the feed store slipping around in their own blood, one encouraging the other, who is looking for his hand, by telling him 'they sew them things back on...you'll be as good as new'. As the amputee replies that he 'can't find the damn thing' there is a cut to a small dog running triumphantly out of the store with the hand in its mouth, a final comical gesture. During this sequence then, Lynch tries to push the violence as far as he possibly can to force an awareness of the construction of violence as spectacle. By resorting to the conventions of b-grade horror, he strains to breaking point the credibility of the exciting violence often used to elevate road movie protagonists and to titillate viewers with voyeuristic and 'transgressive' pleasure.

In addition to these visual tactics, Sailor's macho posturing is again manipulated here to subvert the glamorising of violence in the road film and other genres. Lynch emphasises the way in which his '"heroic" will is seduced into an illusion of asserting itself' (Nochimson 1999:58) through the robbery (despite his insistence that no-one should be hurt). He uses outlaw bravado to spur himself on into joining Peru for the robbery, drawling out one of his characteristic media clichés: 'they say the eagle flies on Friday' when Bobby Peru coaxes him with a challenge to his manhood: 'Come on Mr Big Round Balls, let's make us some easy money'. During the robbery itself, Sailor is also shown 'roaring a battle cry', his gun held in the air like a cowboy (Nochimson 1999:69). However, his machismo is revealed to be ridiculous when he discovers that his weapon is

impotent, and even more ridiculous when he appeals to the code of a 'fair fight' by challenging Peru, who is preparing to execute him, 'why don't you step up here and I'll wipe that smile off your face'. The sheer excess of macho cliché therefore functions alongside B-grade horror conventions to undermine the reality value of the scene still further. In this way, the *informe* applied to cinematic realism effectively foregrounds the 'constructedness' of rebellion as a cinematic discourse, along with the violence used to affirm and glamorise it.

Significantly, other instances of violence in the film are handled in a completely different manner to the scenes discussed in detail here. For example, the murder of Lula's father is deliberately obscured, only shown in one or two brief flashes with shaking and blurred images of flames. Also, Lula's rape at the hands of Uncle Pooch (her mother's 'business associate') and her subsequent abortion are not shown, but merely hinted at through images of their aftermath, which include Lula's distorted face grimacing in agony through an operating theatre magnifying glass. In another instance, when Bobby Peru manhandles and threatens to rape Lula, Lynch critically comments on the viewer's voyeuristic gaze by having the camera follow Peru's violating hand down Lula's body while it touches her breasts and vagina. Instead of making good on his (and the film's) promise and offering up a rape scene however, Peru jumps back and makes a joke of the exchange. In this way, Lynch prevents the violence in these scenes from being held out for enjoyment by the viewer, and invites a self-consciousness regarding its voyeuristic consumption. This is especially the case when Johnny Farragut is killed by Juana (an eccentric and sadistic hitwoman working for gangsters Marcello Santos and 'Mr. Reindeer'). The scene is dominated by shots from Farragut's point of view, and, as Martha Nochimson has observed, 'everything that attacks him also attacks the viewer' (Nochimson 1999: 61). As a result, 'the spectator cannot enjoy this scene as a scandalous, secret transgression' (ibid.) despite its sexual overtones. Instead Lynch reverses the viewer-viewed relationship normally set up the act of consuming violence as spectacle, and the viewer becomes the site for Juana's perverse pleasure instead, and is targeted by

her obscene gestures and threats. This complication of voyeuristic pleasure is extended when Farragut is shot, since there is a cut to the oscillating Big Tuna sign that withholds the spectacular image of his death.

If *Wild at Heart* deliberately subverts the spectacularisation of violence in the road movie, it also emphasises the fact that, in general, the obsessive return to transgression and violence in the film and media is actually, to return to Foucault's phrase, a 'screen discourse' that keeps real violence at a distance by containing it within discourse (Foucault 1978:53). Thus, as Kenneth Kaleta has observed, at several points the film alludes to the way in which 'turn-of-the-century U.S society trivializes anything and overkills everything' and reduces death and violence to 'disposable, digestible media segments' (Kaleta 1993: 184). In one scene on the road, for example, Lula is shown to become bored and frustrated as she flips through channels on the car radio and is unable to find anything except news stories of murder, necrophilia and abjection. In another scene, a severe road accident is reduced to a newspaper story and an obnoxious remark by a drunkard in Big Tuna's seedy bar. The contrast between the event and its representation/reception in this case is striking. The accident leaves a car wreck whose headlight beams dimly illuminate several broken bodies and a young girl dying horribly, staggering around while digging at a hole in her head and complaining about 'sticky stuff' in her hair. In spite of her situation, she is preoccupied with looking for her handbag and bobby-pin, and begging Sailor and Lula not to tell her mother about what happened. Lynch uses this banal detail to heighten the impact of the scene, and along with poignant music and Lula's tears the situation gains a melodramatic and even tragic intensity that goes beyond the deliberately artificial violence operating in the 'action sequences' of the film. Yet the following day the accident hardly raises an eyebrow, and is lost among conversations about what a 'dumb fuck' one of the accident victims was. Lynch therefore abandons his textual deconstruction of violent spectacle in this instance in order to highlight the extent to which representation has retained, rather than

removed, the distancing role of prohibition by rendering violence and death 'transparent'.

To return to Bataille's analysis, then, the illusionistic presentation and narration of violence and killing contain these transgressions within discourse, even as they seem to answer the audience's desire for excess, sacrifice, or the festival. As Bataille points out, to 'present' violence, eroticism and transgression as objective phenomena as 'transparent', is to obscure them: '[w]e put them on the same level as things known from the outside if we yield albeit unwittingly to the taboo' (1977:37). Through the *informe*, an undoing of the spectacular mechanisms used to construct on-screen violence and cinematic diegesis itself, *Wild at heart* reveals that this mode of violence and rebellion is simply a different facet of the same ideological cinematic mechanisms that are self-reflexively deployed in the service of the film's closure. Where violence is made graphic and explicit for the viewer in the film, it is often complicated through an *informing* of signification, and usually in relation to Sailor's heroics, contributing to the overall interrogation of the mythology of American rebellion in which he participates. While some critics have argued that *Wild at Heart* is itself guilty of gratuitous violence or meaningless spectacle[61], they have tended to stop short of considering this nuance.

Through these mechanisms the film is also able to critically distance itself and its viewers from the ideology of rebellion that is often affirmed *for the viewer* via the enjoyment of the spectacle of violence that the film and its characters produce. While the exuberant killings of *Bonnie and Clyde* and its derivatives offer identification and vicarious involvement with individuals that not only face violence and sexuality head-on without fear, but also control or 'own' these prohibited areas of human experience, *Wild at Heart*'s interference with the

[61] Among the usual criticisms and calls for censorship, there have also been arguments that the film affirms violence and rebellion as spectacular commodities. For example, Catherine Russell argues that the film's 'transgressions of visual pleasure are still in the service of a closure of visual representation' (1993: 185).

process of identification may disrupt this means of enjoying the spectacle of 'transgression'. In addition, by disrupting the staging of violence as 'voyeuristic titillation and gory spectacle' (Giroux 1995: 301), the film undermines the cynical celebration and consumption of the prohibited that is justified, and even demanded, by the contemporary ideology of rebellion.

Conclusions

As in *Blue Velvet*, the *informe* functions in *Wild at Heart* to undermine the consolidation of identity and ideology through realist diegesis. While it incorporates conventions that have, in earlier films, been used to create a coherent world view and narrative stability, in *Wild at Heart* these conventions are reproduced in a manner that violently undoes their ability to secure sense. For Bataille, *informe* disrupts textual systems and in *Wild at Heart* this is made manifest in an uncanny dislocation of well-entrenched myths and cinema discourse. Violent heroism, 'regenerative violence', the nuclear family, America's great rebel heroes, and even the commodified spectacle of violence itself, are all shown to co-exist within the same matrix of disposable, mass-produced textual systems that circumscribe identity and give form to the world.

In this case, the world in question is late-capitalist America (although this could equally apply to global media culture), where the rebellion of youth or counter-culture, and indeed of the 'liberated' subject of rationality itself, have been subsumed by the very system they sought to escape youth culture and counter-culture, and rebellion in general have changed the shape of American society, bringing a proliferation of 'alternative' cultural identities that seem to offer escape from the homogeneous world of production, discourse, the isolated self, and authority. But in Lynch's film, they are not shown to offer anything more than a momentary fantasy of escape from an otherwise alienating and alienated world. The film remains sceptical that rebellion, or any of the other discourses it

manipulates, can deliver on their promise to provide either a yellow brick road or an idyllic Kansas.

In this way, then, Lynch's film explores the conundrum that Bataille's analysis reveals within the contemporary ideology of rebellion and the various cultural identities it has helped to generate. In *Wild at Heart* rebellion is framed as an inadvertent extension of the taboo that affirms the individual as the highest measure of value. It is depicted as a withdrawal from the real implications of transgression, most notably genuine *communication* and the exuberance of the festival, which the couple are not quite able to reach.

Final Comments and Conclusion

In *Death in Sensuality* Bataille states that

> Human society is not only a world of work. Simultaneously – or successively – it is made up of the profane and the sacred, its two complementary forms. The profane world is the world of taboos. The sacred world depends on limited acts of transgression. It is the world of celebrations, sovereign rulers, and God. (1977: 67-8)

I have argued in my dissertation that Bataille sought to reassert the importance of the sacred aspect of this balance within what he saw as the overly profane or homogenised capitalist society of his time, and that in many respects David Lynch's work is marked by a similar agenda. I made this link by comparing the disruption of film conventions and forms in Lynch's work to Bataille's *informe*, which he saw as a means to undermine homogeneous systems and discourse through undoing conceptual thought (and the solipsistic separation of the subject from others).

To review my main arguments, I have supported this contention by comparing narrative and stylistic aspects of Lynch's work to Bataille's description of the *informe*, which he describes loosely as 'a term that serves to bring things down [declasser] in the world generally requiring that each thing have its form' (Bataille in Bois and Krauss1997:5). Through my various analyses I have pointed to some ways in which Lynch has used the 'force or shock' generated by the *informe* in the same way as Georges Bataille, to create an awareness of the limits and provisional nature of established modes of discourse, and to unsettle the familiar through the uncanny (Bataille 1985: 143). Drawing on several film analysts and critics, I argued that by so doing, the *informe* dislocates the seemingly 'natural' status of ideology as it is constructed within the conventions of realism.

However, while Bataille's homogeneous targets were reductionist philosophy and science, religious fundamentalism, and the various rationalisations for self-serving forms of capitalism, I have looked at how the disruptive force of the *informe* within Lynch's films engages with some dominant trends in American film that have risen with the standardisation of realist narrative and stylistic conventions in film and television, especially since the 1960s and 'Classical Hollywood cinema' (see Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985: 4). I pointed out that in their construction of gender, history, national and cultural identity, among other things, these conventions have built basic maps for conceptualizing the world that are, in many instances, incredibly difficult to challenge or even see. I have singled out several examples of such constructions and analysed them through Bataille's theoretical work in order to illustrate their limiting effects on human relations. I examined representations of the home and their role in cementing exclusivist and over-simplistic forms of American nationalism and bourgeois ideology, representations of women that encourage objectification and which in turn entrench alienating gender relationships, and, finally, self-indulgent and self-defeating forms of rebellion and hedonism that have become part of a widespread trend since the rise of youth culture and counterculture in the 1950s and 1960s. I have argued that each one of these has, in its own way, contributed to the same kinds of limiting effects on human relations as those created by the overdeveloped homogeneity Bataille was so critical of.

In each analysis, I also outlined ways in which the *informe* operates in Lynch's work to intertextually disrupt and re-evaluate these pervasive cultural forms, along with their entrenchment of power relations and alienating social relationships. I indicated that Lynch's rereading of the American home in *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* subjects this signifier of national self-assurance to the uncanny, and dismantles its conceptual boundaries. This, I contended, constitutes a re-evaluation of the limits of the American self-construct and what it excludes,

questioning the simplified rhetoric of 'us' and 'them' that has driven America's nationalist political agenda during the Reagan and Bush eras.

In my analysis of *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* I argued that Lynch's use of the *informe* revealed the hollowness of the media's construction of woman as object for patriarchal desire, unravelling the construction of this object, and disrupting the flow of narrative that caters for this desire through various logical contradictions and lacunae.

Finally, in reading *Wild at Heart*, I demonstrated that the *informe* subtly undermines the conventions that lend weight to the discourse of rebellion, a discourse that ostensibly sets itself up as a rejection of homogeneity, but that is actually a form of the latter in disguise. I pointed out that Lynch's story demonstrates how this self-conscious agenda of rebellion for rebellion's sake precludes, rather than vouchsafes, the exuberant spirit of the transgression and the spectacle by making sustainable emotional connectedness impossible.

In each case, the value of reading Lynch in terms of Bataille is that it makes it possible to go beyond merely categorising these texts as 'weird' or 'perverse', and gives some sense of what drives Lynch's disruption of 'the norm'. However, such a reading, I hope to have shown, also does so without having to downplay the textual instability of his work and its manifold ambiguities. Instead, it finds significance within this disruption of meaning in its own right. What gives Lynch's films their force is often not any definite and internally coherent project or ideology that they put forward, but rather the ideological projects that they destabilise or defamiliarise.

However even in the most disturbing or disruptive of Lynch's moments, there is something of Bataille's exuberant aspirations at work insofar as he demonstrates a desire for a more vital way of representing and conceiving of the world. In *Wild at Heart* for example, despite the violent and fragmented America the film

portrays, and despite its scepticism toward both glamorised rebellion and quick-fix happy endings, there is a poignancy about the couple and their road trip that spells out the need for human comfort and connectivity in an absurd and often brutal world (much like the desperate stage pairs in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1955) or Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* (1973)). Also, while I do not discuss it here, Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980) exhibits a similar beauty in genuine humanity, and a longing for connectedness in its depiction of the plight of John Merrick, a man living in the Victorian era who has been badly disfigured by a rare tissue disease. Merrick's desperate loneliness, abuse, and eventual death are all portrayed vividly in the film as consequences of the seemingly inevitable social fixation on appearances and established social categories, and that divide the self as 'norm' from the alien and often vilified other. As I have observed, Bataille saw contestation as something positive, an affirmation of exuberance and of the sacred fusion of individuals, whether in the erotic union of lovers, or the collective exuberance of the festival. I hope to have shown that this impulse also lies behind the disillusionment with the status quo that many of Lynch's films exhibit.

Appendix: Scene Transcripts

Transcript 1: *Blue Velvet*, Dorothy arrives at Jeffrey's house

	Recorded Visual Image	Recorded Phonetic Sound	Recorded Music/Noise/Writing
1 a.	Extreme long shot: 1960s era cars coming to a sudden stop in front of white picket fenced house (Jeffrey's home). Mike, and drunk friends get out of car to screen left. Mike approaches Jeffrey and Sandy's car, slaps hood and drags Jeffrey out of the car. Sandy gets out on the other side.	Mike: (Drunk and angry) Get out of the car! C'mmon, get out of there....You stole my girl you bastard, now I'm gonna kick your ass... C'mmon! Right here, right in front of your own stupid house. Sandy: Mike, Stop it! Mike: (Shouts) Shut up! Just Shut up alright. (Nervous but angry) No one's talking to you ok? Jeffrey: Come on Mike, I don't want to cause any trouble.	Cars coming to a halt, screeching tyres. Crickets chirping.
1 b.	As 1 a: Dorothy stumbles into gateway in background, shown in full frontal nude shot, arms outstretched. Mike backs away from Jeffrey. Jeffrey runs toward Dorothy. Mike stands around, confused.	Mike: Who's that? Your mother? Jeffrey Dorothy!	
2.	Close-up: Sandy	Sandy: (Disbelief) Dorothy Vallens?	
3.	Close-up: Dorothy falls into Jeffrey's arms.	Jeffrey: C'mmon	Sombre brass music begins. Continues until shot 10.
5.	As 1 a: Jeffrey assisting Dorothy, Mike steps aside and gets back into his car.	Mike: Hey, I'm sorry man, ok? I didn't mean.., Jeffrey: It's ok	
6.	As 2: Sandy looks on, anxious. Jeffrey and Dorothy cross screen, unfocused, as she follows them with her		

	gaze.		
7.	As 1 a: Jeffrey loads Dorothy into the car		Footsteps
8.	Medium (3) shot: with Dorothy (wrapped in a blanket and with visual injuries) in between Jeffrey and Sandy inside the car. Jeffrey is closest to the camera, Sandy is in the background helping wrap Dorothy.	Jeffrey: We gotta get her out of here. Sandy: We can take her to my, my father can get an ambulance. Jeffrey: His partner won't be there will he? Sandy: Probably not, why? Jeffrey: Never mind. Sandy: Watch out for Mike Dorothy: Oh god, is that you Jeffrey? Jeffrey: (Trying to be nonchalant) Yeah, its me. Dorothy: (whispers) Oh Jeffrey!	Engines starting. Sound of tyres screeching as Mike leaves.
9.	Extreme close-up: Sandy's face staring in the direction of the couple.		
10.	As 1 a: Their car pulls away, camera pans to follow it briefly. Shot holds for a second on Jeffrey's house.		Car starting, pulling away. Music stops.
11 a.	Long shot: Sandy entering home. The interior is white, and brightly lit in contrast to the street.	Sandy: (Anxious, shouting) Dad?...Mom? Mrs. Williams: (Off screen) Ok.	
11 b.	Long shot pans right: Sandy enters house, Sandy goes to door and then walks back. Mrs. Williams is seen entering the door on screen right.	Sandy: (Voice trembling) Mom? Mrs. Williams: (Off screen, relaxed) Alright honey, I'll be right there. Sandy: Is Dad home? Mrs. Williams: No honey Sandy: (Calming slightly, but still breathless) You better call him, and, um, get an ambulance.	

11 c.	Long shot pans quickly left again: shows Jeffrey stiffly holding Dorothy in medium close-up, while Dorothy embraces him feverishly. Dorothy and Jeffrey are positioned on one end of the room with Sandy on the other.	Dorothy: (Hysterical) Oh god, Jeffrey, they hurt him. Oh Jeffrey, Jeffrey, Jeffrey, hold me! Jeffrey: It's ok, don't worry.	
12	Cut to close-up: Sandy looking on, distraught.		Dorothy's breathing
13.	Medium close-up: Jeffrey with Dorothy. Dorothy begins caressing Jeffrey's face, Jeffrey recoils but still holds her.	Dorothy: Oh Jeffrey, my secret love.	
14.	As 12: Sandy looks even more distraught. Mrs. Williams walks in from screen left to join Sandy.	Mrs. Williams: The police are on their way.	
15.	As 13: Dorothy clings onto Jeffrey.	Dorothy: (Screams) Don't get the police!	
16.	As 14.	Dorothy: (Shouts) Stop him!	
17.	As 13: Dorothy shakes Jeffrey, he tries to avoid her gaze.	Dorothy: (Shouts) I love you, love me!	
18.	As 14: Sandy visibly shaken, Mrs. Williams holds her.	Dorothy: (Shouting) Tell me its alright!	
19.	As 13.	Jeffrey: (Shaking his head) Sandy please…	
20.	As 14: Mrs. Williams exits room. Sandy left on her own.	Mrs. Williams: (Coldly) I'll get a coat to put on her. Sandy: Jeffrey, what is going on here?	
21.	As 13: Jeffrey looks at Sandy, then turns to Dorothy.	Jeffrey: (Whispers) I'll tell you. Dorothy: They… have hurt his head. Jeffrey: Who Dorothy? Dorothy: Don. Help him!	
22.	As 14: Sandy trying to	Dorothy: (Shouts) Help him!	Sirens heard in the

	contain herself. Her mother passes her with the coat.		background.
23.	As 13: Jeffrey wraps Dorothy in the coat and holds it stiffly around her, looking guiltily at Dorothy. Dorothy turns to Sandy and smiles.	Dorothy: (Whispering) He put his disease in me.	Sirens get louder.
24.	As 14: Sandy breaks down. Her mother holds her.		Sandy crying.
25.	Long shot pans left: Ambulance arrives with a sharp jerk. Paramedic gets out, runs to the back of the vehicle.		Ambulance siren drones to a stop.
26 a.	Long shot: Jeffrey and paramedic loading Dorothy onto a stretcher.	Paramedic: Would you like to come with us in the ambulance or take your own car? Jeffrey: I'll take my own car.	Footsteps.
26 b.	Long shot pans right: follows Jeffrey walk over to Sandy, ends in two shot. Jeffrey faces Sandy, glances at her mother who walks away. Sandy slaps Jeffrey.	Jeffrey: I should go. Sandy: Oh yes, go. Jeffrey: Sandy…	
27.	Extreme close-up: ambulance boot, camera pans over it, to show Dorothy inside. Dorothy struggles against her restraints, and the oxygen mask falls from her face as the ambulance pulls away.	Dorothy: (Screaming) I'm falling, I'm falling, I'm falling.	Siren starts, blends with Dorothy's voice.
28.	Fade in of extreme close-up: of emergency light	Dorothy: (Continues from previous shot) I'm falling!	Siren crescendos.
29 a.	Close-up: wall with heart-shaped red		Siren echoes and fades into melodramatic

	decorations and black and white image of male film star.		string music.
29 b.	Close-up tilts down: and pans to the right to reveal Sandy's blonde hair in close-up. It continues its movement showing edge of mirror, it pans over pink curlers and a frilly lampshade to come to rest on Sandy, talking on the telephone.	Sandy: (Sobbing)You lied to me. Jeffrey: (On the telephone, voice distant) Sandy…please….forgive me…I love you. Sandy: (Sobbing) I forgive you Jeffrey…I love you….god I love you, but I couldn't watch that…	'Mysteries of love' theme music begins.
29 c.	Close-up comes to rest: Sandy on the phone.	Sandy: (Regaining some composure) Is she ok? Jeffrey: Yeah, she's ok. Get ahold of your father. Tell him to send the police over to Dorothy's apartment right away. Tell him to hurry. I'm leaving right away.	
30.	Close-up: Jeffrey in phone booth. He speaks to Sandy, then hangs up.	Sandy: Jeffrey, no. Jeffrey: I have to…I love you. Sandy: Oh god, be careful. Jeffrey: I will, believe me.	
31.	Close-up: Sandy crying.	Sandy: Where's my dream?	Music crescendos.

Transcript 2: *Lost Highway*, Pete and Alice at Desert Cabin

	Recorded Visual Image	Recorded Phonetic Sound	Recorded Music/Noise/Writing
1.	Extreme close-up: old car radio being tuned.		Radio being tuned. Wind in the background, continues until shot 8.
2.	Close-up: Alice leaning into the car and tuning the radio. She pulls back and out of the		Radio being tuned.

	shot.		
3.	Medium shot: Pete leaning against the car, his back turned to the camera. The desert cabin is behind him. Alice walks from the left to face him. Her hair is blowing in the wind, and she is illuminated by the car's headlights.		Footsteps.
4.	Extreme close-up: Pete's face as he looks at her.	Pete: Why me Alice? Why choose me?	
5.	Extreme close-up: Alice, hair blowing in the wind.	Alice: You still want me don't you Pete?	
6.	As 4: Alice's hair covers his face from screen right.		
7.	Extreme close-up: Alice facing Pete, half in shadow. Pete's face on screen left. She kisses him, teasingly at first.	Alice: (Whispering for emphasis) More than ever.	First chords of 'Song to the Siren' begin to play on car radio. Wind starts to fade. Song continues and builds through the next shots until shot 26.
8.	As 6: Pete kissing Alice back.		
9.	As 7: Alice breaks away briefly, looks alluringly at Pete.		
10.	As 6: The couple turn so that they are kissing side-on toward the camera.		
11.	Extreme close-up: Pete's hand grasping Alice's clothing.		
12.	Dissolve to extreme close-up: the couple kissing, silhouetted.		
13.	Dissolve to medium shot, extreme high-		

	angle: car's fender and headlights, with dust flying around them.		
14.	Dissolve to medium shot: couple embracing, brightly lit by car's headlights. They move out of the shot to show headlight illuminating dust.		
15.	Extreme close-up: single headlight, camera tracks in closer.		
16.	Dissolve to long shot: naked couple from side having sex on the ground.		
17.	Dissolve to close-up: couple kissing, brightly illuminated.		
18.	Dissolve to extreme close-up: Pete's face, eye closed. Screen almost white.		
19.	Dissolve to close-up: shows Pete and Alice kissing, Alice kissing Pete.		
20.	Dissolve to extreme close-up: Alice's hair.		
21 a.	Dissolve to medium close-up: Pete from side		
21 b.	Medium close-up moves up Alice's body with Pete's hands as they caress her breasts.		
22.	Dissolve to close-up: Alice's face, she tosses her hair as Pete caresses her body, then looks at Pete.		
23.	Cut to close-up: Pete looks up at her.	Pete: (Urgent whisper) I want you.	
24.	Cut to close-up: Alice's face moving in slow		

	motion.		
25.	As 23.	Pete: (Urgent whisper) I want you.	
26.	As 24.		Ominous string notes start to create dissonance with 'Song to the Siren' soundtrack.
27.	Extreme close-up: Pete whispering into Alice's ear.	Pete: (Urgent whisper) I want you…I want you.	Ominous strings get louder, 'Song to the Siren' fades.
28.	Close-up: Alice pulling Pete's head to her mouth. She pulls him up and out of the frame, leaving the image dark for two seconds.		String arrangement crescendos with Timpani drums.
29.	Extreme close-up: Alice's face as she whispers in Pete's ear, light flashing across her face. As Pete turns to her, she leaves the frame.	Alice: (Harsh)You'll never have me.	String soundtrack crescendos and then almost dies away completely. Sound of the wind returns.
30.	Low angle medium shot: Alice from Pete's P.O.V. She looks down at him and then walks off, her body still lit by the headlights and hair blowing in the wind.		Low ominous drone remains in background. Wind.
31.	Extreme close-up, extreme high-angle: Pete's face from above. He clenches his fist.		Drone and wind continue until the end.
32.	Extreme long-shot: Alice, naked, walks up the stairs into the cabin.		
33.	Extreme close-up: Single headlight seen from the front.		
34.	As 31. Pete is visibly distressed. He gets up and screen goes black.		
35.	Dissolve to medium		

	shot: Fred standing up with his back to the camera (same angle and same position as Pete in previous shot).		
36.	Cut to medium close-up: Fred turns around to face headlights.		Small flourish of piercing violins as Fred turns around.

Transcript 3: *Mulholland Drive*, Betty arrives in Los Angeles

	Recorded Visual Image	Recorded Phonetic Sound	Recorded Music/Noise/Writing
1 a.	Long shot: Betty (not yet introduced) walking slowly through crowded airport arm in arm with old, silver haired lady (Irene). Both are smiling broadly. Betty wears bright pink and has blonde bob hairdo. Betty approaches camera until her face is isolated in close-up.		Shot opens with echoing sound of telephone ringing from previous scene. Rousing and joyous string music, very faint airport sounds. Music continues through next shots.
1 b.	Close-up: camera tracks back for a moment with Betty as she looks around in wonder. Her face is brightly lit from the side	Oh…I can't believe it.	
2.	Medium (2) shot: Betty and Irene. Tilts down as the pair descend an escalator. They continue to smile and look around excitedly.		
3.	Low-angle medium shot: tracking under a large 'Welcome to Los Angeles' banner above		

	the escalator (mimics movement of escalator from Betty's point of view).		
4.	Cut back to medium close-up: Irene and Betty, the latter looking up, her line of sight linked to the angle of the previous shot. She looks back at her companion to show her happiness at arriving.		
5.	Extreme long shot: steadicam. Exterior, Betty and Irene emerge from sliding doors, now followed by an old man with a trolley. They approach camera, embrace, and exchange farewells.	Irene: Well, its time to say goodbye Betty, it's been so nice traveling with you.	Sliding doors opening, diegetic sounds become louder with traffic and footsteps heard. Music subdues slightly but continues until shot 16 b.
6.	Close-up: over-the-shoulder shot of Betty, beginning of shot-reverse-shot-sequence.	Betty: (effusive) Thank you Irene, I was so excited and nervous, it was sure great to have you to talk to.	
7.	Close-up: Reverse shot of Irene, steady cam, over-the-shoulder.	Irene: Remember I'll be watching for you on the big screen.	
8.	As 6.	Betty: (laughing) Ok Irene…Won't that be the day!	
9 a.	As 7: Irene hugs Betty again.	Irene: Good luck, Betty dear, take care of yourself…and be careful. Betty: I will, thanks again.	
9 b.	As 7: Camera pans left slightly to include old man, smiling down at Betty as he shakes her hand enthusiastically.	Old man: Betty it was so nice meeting you, all the luck in the world.	
10.	As 6.	Thank you.	
11.	As 7: Irene and old man depart and Betty waves.	Irene: Bye! Betty: Bye!	
12.	As 6: Betty waves again, smiling, turns.		

13.	Cut to close-up: Betty from other side as she turns, smile leaves her face as she looks down.	Betty: (worried) My bags!	Music takes on slightly ominous tone.
14.	Long shot: over the shoulder of taxi driver loading her bags into the boot.	Taxi driver: (friendly) Where to?	Music lightens in tone again.
15.	As 13.	Betty: (resolute) 1612 Havenhurst.	
16 a.	As 14: Betty approaches car.	Driver: Got it.	
16 b.	As 14: Camera follows Betty at a distance as she enters the car.		Music stops, only cars heard.
17.	Cut to long shot: black Limousine driving down a highway, camera pans to follow it.		Sound of the vehicle.
18.	Medium (2) shot: old couple inside the Limo, with strange, sneering smiles fixed on their faces.		Sound of vehicle fades into quieter interior sound of car. As it does, ominous and somber string music begins. Music and car interior sound continue together until shot 21.
19.	Close-up: Irene, still grinning as she turns to the old man.		
20.	As 18: Old man turns to Irene, they grin at each other. Irene slaps him on the knee.		Feint sound of old man's almost silent laughter.
21.	Cut to low angle long shot: tracking shot of row of palm trees.		Car sound fades out, music continues.
22.	Dissolve to aerial shot: slowly approaching Hollywood sign high up on hill side.		Music continues.

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