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FANTASY AND DREAM IN CINEMA

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INTRODUCTION

In a 'progressive' world of so much abundance of knowledge and wealth, it seems ironic that we are faced with an ever growing question of why so many people are unhappy? Freud would suggest that the root of this problem is the division we have made in our psyches between our conscious and subconscious thinking. He has described this as the rule of the 'Reality Principle' over the 'Pleasure Principle', where the basic drives, wishes and desires, whose main objective is gratification, have been cast aside for the logical reasoning of the conscious mind. It is in this repression that we create so much anxiety and confusion for ourselves.

But through our dreams and fantasies, we find an outlet for these otherwise overwhelming and frustrating repressed wishes and desires. Cinema has been described as 'the superior way of expressing the world of dreams, emotions and instinct'. (Bunuel- 'A Statement', 1960.) Many film-makers ignore this, and therefore '50% of real life' (Bunuel), which the Surrealists believed to be a melding of the unconscious and conscious thoughts to create a 'truer picture' of the world. Luckily, since Bunuel a growing number of directors have recognised the importance of this repressed 50%, and are exploring the concept of fantasy and dreams, and exploiting it through the medium of cinema. Dream-work, Freud claimed, is a comparable if not identical process of thought to that of art-work; can a similar comparison be made between dreams and film? Can cinema offer itself as a superior medium through which dreams and fantasy can be articulated?

Cinema-going itself has been described by recent psychoanalysts (Christian Metz in particular) as a specific kind of social

activity which has comparable psychological traits to those of dreaming. It has been described as a state of lowered wakefulness, where the ego sleeps and the senses of sight and sound are heightened. It acts on us both emotionally and sensorily, and therefore has a very strong power to manipulate its audience.

> 'The cinema is capable of stirring the spectator as, perhaps, no other art. But as no other art, it is also capable of stupefying him'. (Bunuel).

Certain areas of fantasy, and in particular sexual fantasy, have been catered for and explored in the cinema. Freud claims that there are a number of primal fantasies, which we experience when we are very young, and by repressing these desires, we are causing much misunderstood anxiety. But by channelling these fantasies through the cinema, a release is provided which might otherwise have appeared in an undesirable form elsewhere within society.

One director in particular who has consciously used the ability of cinema to explore dreams and fantasy is the American David Lynch. I intend taking two of Lynch's films, which present themselves as the possibility of being dreams, while also exploring some of the primal fantasies, in particular sexual fantasy. Thinking in terms of fantasy-makers, it is possible to theorise spectatorship in a new context, and this I hope to do in relation to '<u>Blue Velvet</u>'.

SECTION 1

CHAPTER 1

> ' If artists, art historians and critics are to benefit from Freudian psychoanalysis in any way, then they must confront the central achievements of Freud's work, and not just his more marginal writings on art and artists. In order to explain the way in which dream images are produced, Freud introduced the concept of dream-work; it is proposed that a comparable concept- art-work- would be useful in the field of artistic production.'[1]
>
> -John A. Walker.

Although some of Freud's assumptions about the functions and control mechanisms of dreams have been challenged by recent research, his theory of dream-work still provides the most illuminating model of artistic creation. Freud frequently cited pictorial and symbolic representations as examples when explaining how dreams are constructed. In his essay 'Dream-work and Art-work', John A. Walker reverses the direction of Freud's dream-pictures analogy in order to see to what extent pictures can be explained by the concepts Freud employed in relation to dreams. The underlying hypothesis of his argument is that 'dream-work', 'joke-work', and 'art-work' are three comparable, if not identical, processes. To understand the thought processes involved in the production of a film, is it possible then to suggest that a similar comparison can be made between 'film-work' and 'art-work'?

It may be objected that dream-work is an unconscious process involving internal mental operations, while artistic labour is a conscious mental process, controlling the manual manipulation of physical materials and implements. These differences exist, but the unconscious mind also plays a role in art work, and parallels between

the unconscious operations of dream-work and the physical transformations typical of artistic production can be seen. Freud himself applied the concepts which he developed in reference to dreams, to jokes, which, like art, are generated by a mixture of conscious and unconscious processes, and are the social products of individuals playing with an entity- language- that transcends individuals.

Freud discusses dream-work in 'The Interpretation of Dreams',[2] likening dreams to picture puzzles, and argues that dreams remain nonsense so long as they are regarded as literal, realistic representations . He claims that the manifest content of a dream is a kind of 'Pictographic script' which represents in an indirect manner a latent, hidden content; what Freud calls the 'dream-thoughts'.[3] The task of the psychoanalyst is to investigate the relations between the manifest dream-content and the latent dream-thoughts. The task of dream-work is the labour of translating the dream-thoughts into the concrete imagery of the dream-content and in the process, disturbing them. Freud discusses this labour under various headings of condensation, displacement, the means of representation, and secondary revision.

The correlation between art-work and dream-work is made quite explicit in Freud's frequent references to the means of representation in works of art as examples of how dreams are formed. Furthermore, the task of the psychoanalyst in interpreting dreams appears to match that of the viewer or reader seeking to grasp the meaning of a work of art or a film, a meaning which, like that of dream, often resists decoding.

On comparing the dream-work and dream-thoughts, it is obvious that the work of condensation has been carried out on a large scale. Freud points out that 'dreams are brief, meagre and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the dream-thoughts.'[4] This 'economy of expression' can be seen also in art-work. One method by which dreamers

and artists achieve condensation is by the omission of material; for example, a film with a number of scenes taking place at different times and locations will omit altogether the intervening periods of time. Every artistic representation involves omission in the sense that the world is never depicted in its plenitude; landscapes are not represented with every leaf painted on every tree; photographs show a selected fragment of a 'reality'. Indeed, condensation is inherent in pictorial representation: pictures present the illusion of a three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional plane. Both artists and viewers derive pleasure from condensation because of the economy achieved in the means of expression.

Freud claims that the relations of similarity, repetition and the possession of common attributes between two items are highly favoured by the mechanisms of dream-formation and all are'represented in dreams by unification'.[5] For instance, the dream-work of condensation often unites the features of two or more people into a single dream-image, which Freud terms 'a collective figure'. Pictorial equivalents to collective figures are commonly found in caricatures, especially in caricatures of politicians which combine the features of the politician with those of an animal. Such caricatures are disturbing because the creatures produced by the work of condensation are grotesque hybrids, in which the head is that of a human being while the body is that of an animal.

Linguistic equivalents to collective figures, also found in dreams, Freud calls 'verbal compounds'. These consist of two or more words joined together: for example, 'alcoholidays'. Because the letters 'hol' are shared by 'alcohol' and 'holidays', the word incorporates a pun comparable to that pictorial element shared by humans and animals in caricatures.

Beside collective figures, Freud identifies 'composite figures' which he explains by an analogy with the multiple exposure technique of

photography; that is, the projection of two or more images onto a single print. In a composite figure, 'certain features common to both are emphasised, while those which fail to fit in with one another cancel one another out, and are indistinct in the picture.'[6]

Freud's writings on jokes are also relevant to caricatures and photomontage, because in them he explains that jokes are: 'especially favoured in order to make aggressiveness or criticism possible against persons in exalted positions who claim to exercise authority.'[7] The joke... represents a rebellion against authority, a liberation from its pressure.

Graphic designers frequently exploit the multiple exposure capacity of photography, in order to make visible the link between products, surrogate consumers, and certain human values. For example, an advertisement for cigarettes depicts a man and a woman with their arms around one another, sauntering along a beach by the edge of the sea. Over this image is superimposed the image of the cigarette packet. The product is shown as integral to the environment which the loving couple inhabit. Thus, an identification between the values of human love, leisure time, health, the glories of nature and the pleasure of cigarette smoking is asserted pictorially: the fusion of the lovers and the melting of night and day at sunrise and sunset.

Images can be combined together in different ways, and with varying degrees of synthesis. When two images are combined in such a way that both are equal in power, an ambiguous figure is produced; that is, one which is capable of double meaning or signification.

Freud comments extensively on the way multiple use is made of a single word in the technique of joke construction, and describes various instances of double meaning: for example, 'double meaning arising from 'literal' and metaphorical meanings of a word'. A pictorial equivalent of this type of double meaning is a personification where the same form can be seen literally as the figure of a woman, and metaphorically as a

political concept: 'Liberty'.

In certain cases, sculpture is an art that can be experienced via two senses: sight and touch. Therefore, it offers the same possibilities for puns and double meaning as language does. A sculptural work exploiting the differences between sight and touch is Marcel Duchamp's 'Why Not Sneeze, Rrose Selavy?' (1921). This work, 'an assisted ready-made', consists of a small bird-cage containing, amongst other things, a quantity of white cubes. To the sense of sight, these cubes appear to be made of sugar, but when picked up, spectators are surprised to find how heavy they are. They then realise that the cubes are made of marble not sugar. In other words, the same items- white cubes- have a double meaning according to whether they are seen or touched.

In pictures, comparable instances of such puns and word-play would be: any two shapes or figures which resemble one another formally, but which are different in meaning; and the same form or figure used in different contexts to bring out different meanings, or a single form or figure having more than one meaning.

Human perception is an active process. When viewers are confronted by vague indeterminate shapes, or regimented rows of dots, they tend to project organisation and meaning onto them. There is a strong compulsion to discover figurative images in shapes which have not been intentionally designed as such. Because such images are discovered by accident, they have been called 'chance-images'. Certain artists have catered for this tendency of human perception by planting hidden images in the marginal areas of their paintings. Childrens comics and books frequently contain picture puzzles which challenge the child to find a number of images concealed within them.

Double meaning is clearly at work in hidden images; there is a marked similarity to ambiguous or alternating figures. The same configuration of marks can be read as a face or a rocky cliff. However, there is a difference: the artists generally give priority to one image,

the overt one, in order to camouflage the presence of the second one. Some viewers may never consciously notice the planted image, while those that do, will thenceforth have the opposite difficulty; the hidden image, once exposed, becomes obtrusive, and tends to dominate the overt one.

Freud observes that 'reversal', or turning a thing into its opposite, is one of the means of representation most favoured by the dream-work. He suggests, if a dream obstinately declines to reveal its meaning, it is always worthwhile to see the effect of reversing some particular elements in its manifest content, after which the whole situation often becomes immediately clear. A left-right reversal of a picture is easily achieved by holding it up to a mirror; this enables the analyst to observe the effect of reversal on the composition of the picture.

One of the ways in which the dream-work represents causal relationships, according to Freud, consists in one image in the dream, whether of a person or thing, being transformed into another: 'The existence of a causal relation is only to be taken seriously if the transformation actually occurs before our eyes'.[8] He also states that 'Causation is represented by temporal sequence'. Sequence is an integral part of all film-work. It can be argued that this narrows the flexibility of meaning to some extent, but it can allow for complex transformation or illustration of causal relationships. As Freud points out, the causal connections asserted in political statements, and specifically in filmic representations, are persuasive because the transformations actually occur before our eyes.

Freud claimed that displacement facilitates representation: 'The direction taken by displacement usually results in a colourless and abstract expression in the dreamthoughtbeing exchanged for a pictorial and concrete one.' This process exactly parallels the perpetual quest of the artist for striking images with which to depict abstract ideas and diffuse feelings. Displacement also facilitates condensation.

Freud cites Raphael's fresco 'The School of Athens' in support of his contention that dreams frequently combine into a single scene material scattered throughout the dream-thoughts, just as Raphael represents a group of philosophers in a single space, although historically they were never together at one time. In short, both dreams and pictures represent 'logical connection by simultaneity in time'.

According to Freud, there is a marked discrepancy between the outstanding features of the dream-content and those of the dream-thought, which is the result of censorship and repression. The latter only allows the representation of forbidden material in a distorted , disguised and indirect form. In the process of dream-formation, Freud argues, there occurs a transference or displacement of psychical intensities. Apparently minor and trivial details of a dream thus become important to the analyst, because significant dream-thoughts may have been displaced onto them. John A. Walker suggests that in some instances, displacement operates in artwork at an unconscious level, in an artist's characteristic brush-work for example, but in other instances it operates at a conscious level: the artist deliberately places important elements in the marginal areas of his or her work.

When Freud cites the use of symbols in dreams as one of the indirect methods of representation, it appears that another close parallel to the intellectual methods of artists has been identified, but when he adds that 'dreams make use of this symbolism for disguised representation of their latent thoughts' [10], doubts arise, because one assumes that artists employ symbols in order to make their meanings clear, rather than to disguise them. However, Freud notes that although the presence of symbols in dreams facilitates their interpretation, they also make it more difficult, because symbols have multiple meanings, and so are often ambiguous. The analyst can never be certain that the interpretation is completely accurate, or exhaustive.

Chapter 4 of 'The Interpretation of Dreams' is devoted to the topic of distortion. Many pictorial representations are judged to be distorted. What correlation, if any, is there between these two kinds of distortion? Every judgement that a picture is distorted implies that some unstated norm has been violated. In everyday experience, there is often a discrepancy between our knowledge of how things are, and how they appear to the senses; thus conflicts between cognition and perception can arise. Confidence in the normality of the world is maintained by disregarding optical information which shows alterations of shape, colour, size, and so on. The functioning of censorship operating in regard to optical information, is similar to that operating in regard to dream-work; namely, the prevention of 'anxiety or other forms of distressing effects'.[11] In dreams, if the images become too distressing, then our censoring devices will wake us up, just as in the cinema our reaction is to turn away from scenes that cause us anxiety.

However, because pictorial representation stand in a secondary relation to the world, they often display the discrepancies between cognition and perception, and thereby produce distress, anxiety or laughter in the viewer. Artists have a choice: they can either take steps to harmonise their representations with the norms operative within their culture (Naturalism), or they can deliberately exploit the anxiety-generating discrepancies for expressive or rhetorical purposes (Surrealism, photomontage, caricatures, Expressionism). Distortion becomes part of the language of visual imagery; in particular, part of the language of film: 'The essential structural situation of film-makers has little to do with their ability to capture moments on film; they are makers of experience more than recorders of them.'

Freud believed that a dream is a fulfilment of a wish. But, often the psychical mechanism of censorship prevents the wish from expressing itself in a distorted form. Distortion by means of condensation, dis-

-placement, interruptions and obscurities, is therefore a 'mask' for the wish. In his text of jokes, Freud contrasts them with dreams, and argues that a dream is an asocial mental product which sets little store by intelligibility, whereas 'a joke is the most social of all mental functions', hence 'the condition of intelligibility is.. ... binding on it; it may only make use of possible distortion in the unconscious....up to the point at which it can be set straight by the third person's understanding.'[12] Pictures are in this respect more akin to jokes than to dreams. However, some dreams manage to evade the agencies of censorship, and nakedly assert their wishes, which may well be sexual and aggressive desires forbidden by society. Elements of fantasy or wish can be read into most art-work and film-work. Are films read in terms of symptoms from which to deduce the film-maker's own particular neurosis or obsession? Do obscure images function as a method of expressing repressed wishes, in an attempt to facilitate or resist a 'wish'?

A whole section of 'The Interpretation of Dreams' is concerned with secondary revision.[13] This mental operation occurs during dream-work, but also during waking hours, when a night-dream is being remembered. As the term revision suggests, this operation has a kind of editorial function: it censors, unifies, rationalises, and seeks to make intelligible the content of dreams. Freud argues that the secondary revision is a faculty of waking thought. One may liken it to the final stages in which disparate parts are synthesised or tied up, or to revisions undertaken months or years later.

A concrete example of the kind of intervention that secondary revision makes in a dream is the critical or reflective remark 'This is only a dream'. A parallel in art immediately suggests itself: all those devices in works of art in which the artificial , constructed or conventional nature of the work are foregrounded (telling the viewer that

it is merely a film, or a play) can be equated with secondary revision.

Considering Freud's theories on the nature of dream-work, and Walker's appropriation of Freud's ideas in relation to the production of art-work, it seems possible then to suggest a relation between states of dream and states of film. In discussing how film does emulate processes of thought, it might be possible now to understand how fantasy might be implicated in processes of film-work.

SECTION 1

CHAPTER 1

FOOTNOTES:

1. John A. Walker, 'Dream-work and Art-work' Leonardo, Vol 16, No.2. 1983 pp. 109-114.
2. Sigmund Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams' Standard Ed. Vols. 4 & 5. Chapter 6; pp. 277- 508.
3. ibid., 2. pp. 277- 278.
4. ibid., 2. p. 279.
5. ibid., 2. p. 320.
6. ibid., 2. p. 293.
7. ibid., 2. p. 105.
8. ibid., 2. p.316.
9. ibid., 2. p. 314.
10. ibid., 2. p. 352.
11. ibid., 2. p. 267.
12. Sigmund Freud, 'Jokes and their relationship to the unconscious'. p. 179.
13. ibid., 2. pp. 488- 508.

SECTION 1

CHAPTER 2

FANTASY

There is a fundamental objection in common sense to considering fantasy in the context of the social and political. Fantasy is flanked by 'poetry' on one side, and 'fallacy' on the other. On one hand, the term poetry invokes a more or less intentional art of imagination; on the other hand, 'visual fallacy' signals the unintentional, the hallucinatory. Whatever the case, in popular understanding, fantasy is always opposed to reality. Here, reality is conceived as that which is external to our inner lives. In this commonsense view, we simultaneously inhabit two distinct histories: one, mental and private: the other, physical and public. Political and social considerations are seen as belonging to the latter arena of common, empirical realities. But there is a fundamental defeat of the commonsense view: the transactions between the episodes of the private history (fantasy), and the public history (reality), remain mysterious, since by definition they can only belong to either series. Psychoanalysis allows us access to this mysterious area of transaction through the unconscious, which poses precisely the idea of another locality, another space; 'the between perception and consciousness'[1], where fantasy stages its 'mise-en-scene' of desire. It may be of value to look at how fantasy might function in the process of our mental activity, both in relation to the individual and to group interaction.

Psychoanalysis intends not to uncover objective causes in reality, so much as seek to change our attitudes to that reality. It achieves this by effectively deconstructing the belief in which 'fantasy' is simply opposed to 'reality'. Psychoanalysis dismantles such a logic

of the supplement to reveal the supposedly marginal operation of fantasy at the centre of all our perceptions, beliefs and actions. The object of psychoanalysis is not the 'reality' of common sense: it is what Freud termed 'psychical reality'. Psychoanalysis recognises no state of totally unambiguous and self-possessed lucidity, in which an external world may be seen, and known, as simply what it is. Unconscious wishes and the fantasies they engender are as immutable a force in our lives as any material circumstances.

Fantasy, Freud recognises as being committed to what he describes as 'The Pleasure Principle'. He believes that animal man becomes a human only through a fundamental transformation of his nature, affecting not only the instinctual aims, but also the instinctual values; that is, the principles that govern the attainment of the aims. He described the change in the governing value system as follows:

Immediate satisfaction	------	delayed satisfaction
Pleasure	------	restraint of pleasure
Joy (play)	------	toil (work)
Receptiveness	------	productiveness
Absence of expression	------	security

Freud described this change as the transformation of the pleasure principle into the reality principle.[2] It corresponds largely to the distinction between unconscious and conscious processes. The individual exists in two different dimensions, characterised by different mental processes and principles. The difference between these two dimensions is genetic and historical as well as structural: the unconscious, ruled by the pleasure principle, comprises the older, primary processes, the residues of a phase of development in which the individual strives for nothing but 'gaining pleasure', and draws back from operations requiring mental activity, or likely to cause unpleasantness or pain. But this unrestrained pleasure principle comes into conflict with the natural

and human environment. The individual comes to the traumatic realisation that full and painless gratification of his desires is impossible. And after this experience of disappointment, a new principle of mental functioning gains ascendancy. The 'reality principle' supersedes the pleasure principle; man learns to give up momentary, uncertain and destructive pleasure for delayed, restrained but 'assured' pleasure. According to Freud, reunification and restraint bring lasting gain and therefore the reality principle 'safeguards' rather than 'destroys','modifies' rather than 'denies' the pleasure principle.[3]

With the establishment of the reality principle, the human being who, under the pleasure principle, has been hardly more than a bundle of animal drives, has become an organised ego. He now strives for what is 'useful' and what can be obtained without damage to himself and his vital environment. Under the reality principle, the human being develops the function of reason: he learns to 'test' the reality and distinguish between good and bad, true and false, useful and harmful. Man acquires the faculties of attention, memory and judgement. He becomes a conscious, thinking subject with a rationality which is imposed upon him from outside. There is only one mode of thought activity which is 'split off' from the new organisation of the mental apparatus, and remains free from the rule of the reality principle: fantasy. This is protected from the alterations and stays committed to the pleasure principle.

Fantasy plays a most decisive role in the total mental structure; it links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness (art); the dream with reality; and preserves the perpetual but repressed ideas of the collective and individual memory, the taboo images of freedom. Freud establishes a two-fold connection 'between the sexual instincts and fantasy' on the one side, and 'between the ego instincts and the activities of consciousness' on the other.

The ability to represent the missing activity, or pleasure, is the process through which subjectivity (social and psychic identity) is formed. Psychoanalytic theory of fantasy not only takes pleasure seriously, but places the ability to think about pleasure at the centre of what constitutes us as human subjects.

Fantasy as a separate mental process is born, and at the same time left behind, when the pleasure ego is organised into the reality ego. Reason prevails: it becomes unpleasant, but useful and correct; fantasy remains pleasant, but becomes useless, untrue; a mere play, day-dreaming. As such, it continues to speak the language of the pleasure principle, of freedom from repression, of uninhibited desire and gratification; but reality takes precedence, according to the laws of reason, no longer committed to the dream language.

Freud restores imagination to its own right. As a fundamental, independent mental process, fantasy has a truth value of its own, which corresponds to an experience of its own; namely, ' the surmounting of antagonistic human reality'.[4] Imagination envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realisation, of happiness with reason. While this harmony has been removed into Utopia by the established reality principle, fantasy insists that it must, and can, become real, that behind the illusion lies knowledge. The truths of imagination are first realised when fantasy itself takes form, when it creates a universe of perception and comprehension: a subjective, and at the same time objective, universe. This occurs in art.

Art is perhaps the most visible 'return of the repressed', on the social, as well as the individual, level. The artistic imagination shapes the unconscious memory.

When considering how the notion of fantasy is integrated with the notion of reality in our society, it is interesting to look at such

divisions as those that are made between 'high' and 'low' culture. Embedded in this distinction is the assumption that the meaning of ' high art ' is derived from the artists themselves, from their intentions, experience and genius; mass culture's meaning lies in its function of making money and reproducing the social order. It is, however, arguable that high culture is now a mass cultural myth, a category created by specific state and market forces. But can such distinctions be clearly drawn?

Post-modernism is a term that has been developed in a variety of different contexts, but it has been suggested that a sense of break-down between cultural categories is common to them all. We are supposedly living in a time when all cultural forms draw on the same resources, raid and make fun of each others histories, and are implicated in multi-media tie-ups (the book of the film of the book). Mass consumption can be connsidered to have a significant role in the formation of collective identity. In what way do we become involved in consuming and being consumed in the high/mass culture of the media society? What is the nature of the role of fantasy in this consumption?

SECTION 1

CHAPTER 2

FOOTNOTES:

1. V. Burgin, Formations of Fantasy.
2. H. Marcuse, Eros and Civilisation.
3. ibid.
4. ibid.

SECTION 1

CHAPTER 3

CINEMA SPECTATING

Cinema might be considered a crossover area between so-called 'high' and 'mass' culture. Because of the physical advantages it has over other arts for involving the audience emotionally and sensorily, cinema is said to cater to private fantasy in a way that other art forms seldom approach. The accessibility to a mass audience creates a two-way traffic in myths and sensibilities, resulting in the catering for, and developing of, certain areas of fantasy- in particular, sexual fantasy.

Before moving on to discuss specific areas of fantasy, I feel it would be of interest to look at the experience of cinema-going itself. Recent studies, particularly those of Christian Metz in France, have sought to understand cinema-going as a particular kind of human activity. In order to differentiate film from television, theorists, particularly Metz, have talked of film-going as an 'event'. In cinema, the relationship between the audience and what is on the screen is very different from the experience of television viewing. The television viewers watch the screen with less concentration than they would a film in a darkened cinema theatre they have paid to enter. A television film is also seen as part of a continuous flow of programming, which means that whatever pleasurable experience you have of a programme is going to be erased by the next one. Television is so passive. If you have actually left home, paid your money and put your bum on a seat, there is more of a sense of occasion, and therefore a different relation -ship to the images. The film-maker has got an audience basically there.

It can be argued too, of course, that theatre also has this sense of occasion and caters for the area of fantasy. It is true that we willingly suspend disbelief at the theatre, and it is far from rare to become emotionally and sensorily immersed in a drama. We are aware that we are an audience watching actors portray characters, and act out scenarios, but we do suspend our disbelief in this reality and become involved in the fantasy of the theatre. In my opinion, this power to manipulate the audience is similar, but stronger, in the case of the cinema.

In the cinema, the advantage of the representation of moving images on the larger than life scale of the flickering screen with stereo sound, immediately submerges the spectator in an aquarium situation where the senses and emotions are constantly being manipulated by the film-maker, in order to create the desired effect. Television does not have this power of control; e.g., Nicholas Roeg's 'Eureka', a story of murderous desperation, overwhelming passion, and enormous evil, is beyond the scope of television. And with theatre, although events actually occur before our eyes, we cannot be exposed as effectively to numerous senses as at the cinema.

Cinema, like dreaming, is regressive in that it calls up the unconscious processes of the mind and favours the pleasure principle (fantasy) over the reality principle. This regression implies a slip back into the childish immature version of the self where our wants and desires (the forces behind the pleasure principle) dominate our personalities at the expense of contextual, ethical and social considerations (the reality principle). Cinema-going has been described by Metz as an activity of watching and listening that differs profoundly from the looking and listening of everyday life.[2] Cinema may produce an illusion of reality, but for psychoanalysis it is the illusion

itself that is of interest; what is its nature, and why does it come about?

Looking at the dream-state in relation to the filmic state, it emerges that there is a complex mixture of similarities and differences. Cinema-spectating is similar to everyday perception and day-dreaming, as well as dreaming, but it is not the same as any one of these states. The spectator sits in the dark and is relatively still. This intensifies the perceptions of sight and sound, so that although these perceptions still come from the outside world, they are received with a different intensity to everyday stimuli. But the fact that the perceptions do come from outside marks cinema as a different phenomenon to dreaming. In dream, it is the repressed ideas and associations of the individual's unconscious that come to the surface: the normal censoring activity of the ego is suspended, and the ego 'sleeps'. These repressed ideas stimulate the illusion of perceptions in the brain, while the eye and ear receive hardly any outside stimuli. The brain is stimulated into producing illusionary perceptions. The images and sounds of a dream come from inside; those of a film, from outside.

Despite this major difference, there are certain similarities between dreaming and cinema-spectating. In the cinema, the judging and censorious ego is also suspended, but to a lesser extent. The spectator is almost, though not completely, 'asleep'. This partial suspension of judgement means that things which appear to be normal in films may appear extraordinary in everyday life. It is in the cinema we see mermaids and flying saucers; anyone claiming to have witnessed such a phenomenon in real life would be dismissed as mad. But though the ego is suspended to a degree, it is not absolutely so. A dreamer is not aware of dreaming; dreams seem real 'until you wake up'. At every point the cinema spectator is aware of being in the cinema. But aware as we may be, we also

willingly suspend our disbelief (as with theatre) and consciously or subconsciously, we are manipulated by the images and sounds presented to us by the film. We know the characters are not real, yet still they have the power to move us.

The dream analogy can be a useful one, although it is limited, for one thing, by the fact that films are not only images- they are also sound. Further, the process of decoding film languages is as much conscious and social, as it is unconscious and presocial. However, these are issues raised by Metz, in particular, which have been followed up.

Metz argues that when one is in the cinema as a member of the audience, one 'watches and helps'.[3] The cinema audience watches because the image itself is seductive, larger than life, an object of desire. The audience thus concentrates on looking. But the structure of film narrative is such that its meaning has to be actively constructed by the viewer as they watch. The term 'suture' for instance, explains how each shot in a film is continually involved in constructing the relationship which will help the film make sense: relationships between one shot and the next, one sequence and another, and so on. Because the meaning of one shot is deferred until we see how it is fixed by its relation to the following shot, cinema is able to hide its method of constructing itself. This deferral of meaning, the closing of gaps by the viewers, means that they drive the narrative forward in order to understand what they have seen. Viewers are diverted from examining the means of construction by concentrating on the meaning.

In narrative cinema, film viewers do not know all they need to know until the film ends. This explains the pressure towards completion, towards mastery of the narrative ('helping'). But there is a deep contradiction that again reminds one of dreaming:

spectators are drawn between their desire for the image on the one hand, and desire for mastery of the narrative on the other. Therefore, we both want the film to end, to gain knowledge of it, and wish for it to continue to offer its objects of desire.

Even in films like 'The Mirror' by Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky, which is an autobiographical film of childhood experiences presented in the fragmented and distorted form the world actually assumes in the memory, a logical narrative structure seems to be absent. There seems to be no 'story' as such, but in each sequence of shots, the objects, colours, words and characters rely on each other for interpretation, even though this interpretation does not fit into the tradition of a logical narrative plot structure. In other words, although the film can be described as 'anti-narrative' by cinematic traditions, I feel that each shot relies on the next for an overall interpretation, and thus we do drive the film forward in order to master it. But in anti-narrative cinema, it can also be argued that this desire for domination over the narrative is overwrought by the desire for the objects on the screen. For me, it is a mixture of the two.

The audience desires to 'enter' the film, to disrupt even the minimal boundaries which divide the imaginary and real in the cinema. This occurs at an unconscious level, and underlines just how essential it is to have some understanding of the unconscious process of watching a film.

Cinema can be more readily likened to day-dreaming. Day-dreams are little fantasies that are contemplated when awake: they represent the fulfilment of wishes that, for various reasons, cannot be realised in life. Day-dreaming alleviates the otherwise over-whelming frustration, and films can be said to perform a similar function. They too represent stories about superhuman strength. But again, a day-dream is private and personal, a film is public and

social. But film and daydream are similar in that both release unconscious wishes and fantasies.

So, this is cinema-spectating: a state of lowered wakefulness in which the ego is suspended and the spectator intensifies the experiences of looking and listening; a state that uses little stories to provide public daydreams. On this basis, it is possible to examine why particular kinds of fantasy tend to predominate in today's cinema.

Cinema-spectating reactivates the traces of memory which developed from childhood. One such trace is that left by the various fantasies the infant has about his or her parents, which Freud terms 'family romances': the ways in which the child becomes aware that his or her parents are not the perfect beings it first thought.

Another fantasy that Freud identifies is that of the 'primal scene' . The child constructs, from its theories about sexuality, an idea that it has witnessed its parents in the act of making love. Such ideas constantly recur in analysis, and it has been persuasively argued that the trace of this fantasy contributes a large part of the emotional involvement of audiences in erotic scenes and 'pornography'.

Further subconscious traces re-activated by cinema are those of sadistic and masochistic tendencies, a phase through which the child passes at a very early age. Much of cinema's appeal comes from such scenes; the pleasure of seeing objects fragmented, the pleasure of continually changing shots and viewpoints in any film. More directly, the reactivation of these traces provide the attraction, yet repulsion, of a film such as 'The Texas Chain-Saw Massacre'(1974) in which physical dismemberment is exploited.[4]

The fact that cinema is capable of reactivating such traces does not mean that it is somehow a morbid or reprehensible

activity. Rather, it provides an explanation for the peculiarly compelling nature of various kinds of film. Yet, cinema as a whole depends on particular psychic structures, those of looking and listening. Psychoanalysis provides an account of these senses, concentrating especially on looking.

SECTION I

CHAPTER 3

FOOTNOTES:

1. C. Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier'
2. ibid.
3. ibid.
4. A. Young, 'Sitting in the dark and seeing the light'

SECTION 1

CHAPTER 4

THE FILM SPECTATOR AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

The nature of film's fascination- its collapsing of the boundaries of the real- is a further invitation to psychoanalysis. If Freud held that the gap between the real and the imaginary (what we see, and what we might imagine for ourselves) was the location of desire, then film does occupy that gap. What most of the responses to these issues has produced is a series of theories about the processes through which the audience identify with what they see on the screen. These processes are seen to be analogous to the ways in which the audience members construct their own identities within society.[1]

Psychoanalytic theory has emphasised the importance of the look, the gaze of the audience. This is reflected in its references to the audience as 'the spectator'. The power of the individual's look is important within Freudian and post-Freudian theory, since it is part of the individual's self-definition and relationship to his or her environment. So, audiences 'look' and they also 'spectate'. Audiences are separated from the film because it represents actions which are going on for their benefit, but as if they were not there. However, as agents for understanding the film, and as observers who can see but not be seen, they are in a position of considerable power. Freudian theory describes such a position as that of the 'voyeur'. The psychoanalytic account of voyeurism states that it is one of the basic components of looking, but it involves a sense of security for the 'looker' who then has power over the person or

thing seen. It is vital for the viewer that he or she not be seen looking, and that the person being watched should be unaware also, or at least pretend to be. This happens in the cinema; the audience watches characters who, in the majority of films, give no indication that they know they are being watched. Everything is constructed so that the cinema spectator has a sense of security, no sense that he or she is being watched. THe voyeuristic look is one of the pleasures an audience finds in the cinema. However, a few directors deliberately set out to upset this secure voyeuristic position. Stephen Dwoskin's 'Trixi' (1971), consists entirely of a woman approaching the camera, making wordless appeals and increasigly erotic advances. The effect of this concentrated gaze into the camera, and therefore directly at the spectator, is discomforting, challenging the audience's voyeurism.

This may not be entirely accurate, because the voyeur knows that while actors may not be present, they do know that they are to be watched. So, they exhibit themselves to the spectator, rather than unwittingly reveal themselves. This aspect is exploited by Fellini, whose characters often turn around and challenge the audience, asking them questions and confronting them directly.

We have always been told that we 'identify with' or see ourselves in characters on the screen. Screen heroes and heroines are widely held to offer some kind of wish fulfilment, and our admiration for one or other of them is assumed to be the expression of a wish we might, even unconsciously, want fulfilled. However, we also know that we do not only enjoy movies that invite this kind of identification, in fact, the film experience in either case is not markedly different.

Psychoanalysis has revealed two main categories of audience identification; and neither of them has much to do with conventional identification with the hero or heroine.

Firstly, Metz and others have argued that the nature of cinema-going is such that the very apparatus of the cinema invites us to identify with it.[2] The invention of the camera was encourged by an ideology of individualism, and its invention incorporates the view that the individual's perception is the organising principle of reality. When the camera is received as the viewing perspective on a series of projected images, it becomes a proxy for our eyes. Although there are such things as point-of-view shots, where the camera is clearly presenting a series of images from the point of view of the narrating authority- the organising principle of the film- which we identify as that of the audience.

Metz argues that if we want to make sense of the film, to achieve mastery over it (which I have already pointed out) it is this point of view with which we must identify ourselves. The camera (and by extension, the projector) becomes our eyes, and when we wish not to see what it shows us, e.g. gore in a horror movie, we shut our eyes and turn our heads. Our processes of perception are dramatised, made material, in the beam of light from the projector streaming down from behind our heads in the darkened theatre. As we see the film as our perceptions, rather than someone else's representation, we collapse the distinction between our eyes and the projection aparatus. This may not ring entirely true, since many films, and even some genres, depend on a degree of separation between the audience and the image. However, Metz argues persuasively that we identify with the mechanism of the cinema because they become, as it were, extensions of ourselves.

The second category of spectator identification with film is more difficult to simplify. This is the spectator's identification with more or less everything that he or she sees on the screen. Not only do we identify with our heroes and

heroines, but with all the characters at various points in the narrative. This is a consequence of seeing the screen as if it were in some respects a mirror of ourselves and our world. But with anti-narrative cinema, the characters often take up various postions and thus the spectators take up shifting positions of identification.

The post-Freudian theorist Jacques Lacan developed a most influential description of an aspect of childhood development, which he called the 'mirror stage'.[3] This is the point when a young child first recognises itself in the mirror, and realises it has an identity separate from that of the mother. In recognising an image of itself, and in forming a fascination for that image, the child begins to construct an identity. However, what children see, what they can only ever see, is an image or representation of themselves. Here begins the process of human misunderstanding and self-delusion; our egotistic identification with the image of ourselves is always in some sense illusory.

Nevertheless, the image of oneself is fascinating, irresistible to the child and to the narcissistic aspects of adult personalities. As Dudley Andrew put it (1984):

> 'Our fascination with films is now thought to be not a fascination with particular characters and intrigues so much as a fascination with the image itself, based on a primal 'mirror stage' in our psychic growth. Just as we were, when infants, confronted with the gloriously complete view of ourselves in the mirror, so now we identify with the gloriously complete presentation of a spectacle on the screen.'[4]

Despite its highly technologised character, the pleasure of film is, then, almost primal. (I demonstrate this point later in the chapter on David Lynch's 'Blue Velvet'). There seem to be

aspects of the process of identifying with film which emanate from or most basic drives. The various categories into which Freud divides the 'look' in his discussion of the components of human sexuality have their parallel in the pleasures we obtain from film: the narcissistic (seeing oneself reflected on the screen), the voyeuristic (enjoying the power of another's image on the screen), and the fetishistic (a way of exaggerating the power of material things or people in order to deal with one's fear of them). All are expressions of human sexuality, or displacements of desire; all can be argued to offer the means of identification between the film and the audience.

Of course, the analogy of the 'mirror stage' does have its limits; it could be argued that in the cinema one sees everything but oneself. Certain films are made purely as escapism. But even within these films, there will inevitably be aspects with which we will identify- perhaps elements we do not possess, but which we desire. But the common association of escapism with fantasy is misleading.

Perhaps the real benefit of this analogy is its highlighting of the confusion between perception and reality that is common to the construction of the self and to our understanding of film. In the commonality we can see as ancient psychic root beneath this most modern of narrative systems.

Psychoanalysis also reveals other pre-cinematic patterns which determine the audience/image relationship. Definitions of human sexuality are clearly of interest here, since this is an area where the notion of voyeurism, for one, requires little demonstration. The deployment of the female form and the adoption of the point of view of the unseen male spectator have marked much Hollywood film; they are central to films as otherwise different as 'The Seven Year Itch'

and '10'. Feminist work on the representation of the female in film has focussed, predictably enough, on the female body as commodity; the exploitation of the female body as a cinema spectacle, and the denial by contemporary cinema of any significant change in these patterns of representation and exploitation.

Laura Mulvey's work (1975) has been particularly influential.[5] She, like Metz, argues that the fascination of film is 'reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that moulded him'. She appropriates Freud's definition of the look, and claims that cinema is essentially involved with gratifying the desire to look. But this is not a simple matter. As I have already pointed out, cinema constructs the audience as voyeur, offering the pleasure of using another as an object of stimulation through sight, and it also constructs the audience as narcissistic, in identifying with the object seen. The first construction explains, for instance, the development of the spectacle of the female body in films for the voyeuristic male audience. The second, however, would appear to contradict the first. Presumably the male does not identify narcissistically with the female object of his voyeuristic look. Similarly, a female spectator is unlikely to identify with the object of the voyeuristic look. Mulvey argues that in Hollywood narrative cinema, the narrative solves this contradiction by representing the female as the object of desire on one hand, and as the passive object of the film's action on the other. The audience identifies with the male hero's desire for the female, voyeuristically, and with his active resolution of the narrative, narcissistically. Consequently, women are rarely essential to film plots (as they are to film spectacle), or represented as able to resolve narrative dilemmas unaided. There is no place

for the female character actively to drive the movie's narrative and thus compete for the audience's narcissistic identification. Although I believe this to be the case with much Hollywood narrative cinema, I find this point arguable in relation to certain recent films I have seen, For instance in Peter Greenaway's recent 'Drowning by Numbers', the three central characters are female and although, yes, they are subjected to the voyeuristic gaze, so too are the male characters. And I would also argue that the female characters are central to driving the film's narrative forward. Therefore, I feel that Mulvey's argument does stand to reason in relation to Hollywood narrative cinema, but this aspect is being challenged by recent films.

Also, in anti-narrative cinema, the directors often deliberately alter the pre-conceived positions of identification and therefore perhaps offer a way out of the problems Mulvey points out in Hollywood films.

But the theories I have put forward in the preceding pages are arguable. The aural aspects of film, as I have pointed out, disturb the dream analogy and shatter the comprehensiveness of Lacan's mirror analogy. Any sense of the differences between films tends to disappear before psychoanalytic theory. The dream analogy also tends to make film simply the bearer of fantasies; just as critics in other artforms have found this position hard to accept, film theorists have produced arguments countering it. The use of the analogy of the dream or the mirror as an explanatory device, as if it were a method of analysis, has been exposed to criticism since it is at the very least reductive to approach the film audience solely through the filter of the unconscious since a single system of signification is thus set aside from the many others which also contribute to the audience's experience of film.

Where psychoanalysis has been most suggestive is in its attempt to describe the audience's desire for the film text. Dudley Andrew, himself a stern critic of psychoanalytic theory, presents a thoroughly psychoanalytic description of the desire for the image.

> 'Desiring to possess the film, we are confined to merely viewing it. Consequently, the successful film can never ultimately satisfy us: rather, it rewards our passion to see by offering us still more to see, until we are thrown beyond the bounds of its narrative space and out into the queue waiting for the next film to light up on the screen, to light up the cavern of our psyches.'[6]

As his closing clauses emphasise, the action which draws us into the cinema is on the screen as well as in our psyches. He emphasises later that 'the psychic dimension of cinematic meaning is paramount, but only as regulated and shaped in cinematic discourse'. The importance of the particular text is not to be overlooked. The specifities of the text add up to what Metz calls a formula 'for granting a wish that was never formulated in the first place', an admission of the power of the text to call the audience into its unconscious, as it were.[7]

There are different experiences that we might describe as pleasurable, even in the movies. One frequently forgotten aspect is the pleasure we find in the familiar, in seeing a convention faithfully played out; there is the pleasure in confirming, through one's mastery of the film, one's membership in the culture; the pleasure in watching fashions and images for their own sake, or as a kind of shopping trip in order to compose one's own representation of oneself; and a further pleasure in watching a film or series of films as parts of the continuing development of the star as a sign.

There are various other gratifications, desires and needs which

spur us into cinema-going. THere is the desire to experience empathy, that is, sharing in the joys and sorrows of others and deriving psychological pleasure from this. Also, there is the pleasure gained from experiencing extreme emotions, such as love and hate, in a guilt-free and controlled situation. This differs slightly from experiencing empathy, which involves identifying with characters; it is our desire to experience powerful emotions without being carried away by them, or feeling guilt about them. Film enables us to have powerful experiences without paying for them, so to speak, and to take risks without having to worry about being devastated. The public arts often provide a catharsis or purgation of our emotions through art.

We also have a desire to satisfy our curiosity, and be informed. We all have a natural inquisitiveness about the world, and the cinema is an excellent way of gaining information. As I pointed out earlier we also have a need to find distraction and diversion from our lives, and cinema is sometimes, but not always, used as a means of escape. Along with this there is of course the desire to be entertained and amused.

All of these pleasures are implicated in the audience's decision to see a film, and in what they do with it when they see it. They are all social, cultural pleasures, appropriated by individuals for their own use but in no sense originating with each individual. They are pleasures offered by other social practices, and reveal how the social practice of film is enclosed within other practices and other systems of meaning.

SECTION 1

CHAPTER 4

FOOTNOTES:

1. Tunel, 'Film as Social Practice'
2. C. Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier'
3. ibid.
4. Tunel, op.cit.
5. ibid.
6. ibid.
7. C. Metz, op.cit.

SECTION II

CHAPTER 1

'BLUE VELVET' - DAVID LYNCH

SEXUAL FANTASY AND THE SPECTATOR

> 'The accessibility of cinema to a mass audience creates a twoway traffic in myths and sensibilities which has resulted in the catering for, and developing of, certain areas of fantasy, in particular sexual fantasy.'[1]

David Lynch's recent film 'Blue Velvet', deals, like 'Eraserhead', with this specific area of fantasy. It is also a good case in which to discuss the position of the spectator in relation to fantasy in cinema.

'Blue Velvet'has been described by Geoff Andrew in Time Out as 'the most honest film about male sexuality by a man since Lynch's earlier 'Eraserhead'. And it is hardly a flattering portrait, showing this sexuality as brutalising and degrading, infantile and violent, rooted in the need for power and control.

For Andrew, 'Blue Velvet' lays its cards on the table, and its terms of reference are not only male sexuality and its extremes, mixed with crime and corruption, but also cinema itself. It's not only the inderside of smalltown Lumberton, of sex and sex roles, of adolescent fantasies, that's exposed here; it's also the underside of film fantasy. The cinema classically likes to flirt with dangerous characters, indulging and secretly admiring them. Frank (Dennis Hopper) is an extreme of this type, that we, like the

young hero Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan), are forced to watch close up- and its not a pretty sight. But this, and even the character of Dorothy (Isabella Rossellini), emotionally damaged by Frank and living in a nightmare world of his controlling, are infinitely preferable to the dishonest fantasy of a film such as 'Betty Blue' (Jean-Luc Beineix).

> 'If the sexual threat that pervades 'Blue Velvet' (chiefly through Frank) was directed only at women, the film would be unbearable'.

But its not; Frank's polymorphous perverse sexuality ("I'll fuck anything that moves"- and we almost believe him) is just as threatening, and even more violent, towards Jeffrey than towards Dorothy. A 'love-letter' from Frank is a bullet in the head- and it's only men that get them. ' 'Blue Velvet' is a disturbing, brilliant, darkly subversive and surprisingly comic fairytale that defies simplistic response'.[3]

Any account of David Lynch's films might as well begin with Lynch's own person, which hovers in a peculiar relationship to the films. Interviews with Lynch almost invariably begin with a physical description of their subject, a portrait which is also an enigma, since Lynch doesn't look like the creator of 'Eraserhead' or 'Blue Velvet': 'Lynch is a friendly, rather boyish man in his mid-thirties who appears to have stepped out of the 'Happy Days' 50's of drive-ins, sock-hops and cruising the strip on a Saturday night. There is nothing in his appearance to suggest the bleak intensity of his films'.[4] The idea that the creator of such disease and disorder could himself be 'innocent' seems an amusing riddle.

David Lynch was 30 at the time his first film, 'Eraserhead' was shown at the Filmex, Los Angeles in 1976. He had only made two previous short films,'The Alphabet' (4 mins.) and 'The Grandmother'(34 mins.), both combining live action and animation. His interest in film had been slight.

Unlike the generation of directors epitomised by Lucas and Spielberg, Lynch had not been enthralled by the Saturday matinees of his childhood and filled with an ambition to recreate those thrills. His first love was painting, and his film work began as an exploration of painting techniques. He has never really abandoned his animation career; his films treat characters as though 'they were pixillated versions of people, creatures neither human nor inhuman, whose life-force follows its own skewed logic,' as Simon Jenkins has said.

During high school Lynch shared a studio with Jack Fisk, who worked on Lynch's films in later years and went on to direct 'Raggedy Man'. After a short period in Europe, Lynch entered the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts in 1965. Born in Missoula, Montana in 1946, to an 'extremely happy' family, Lynch's memories are of blue skies, red flowers, white picket fences,green grass; birds chirping, a plane droning overhead.."And I think what happened, was that I went to a big city and it scared me," says Lynch,"it was real frightening"[5]. The idea of the city as an alien place runs through both 'Eraserhead' and 'Blue Velvet'. Lynch speaks of feeling and intuition a great deal; he seems to distrust words to some degree, claiming that he "can't talk about things so well". By refusing to verbalise, he can leave the images largely uninterpreted, so that they can retain their original power and their multiple associations.

Lynch's subsequent film 'The Elephant Man'(1980) assimilates these fears and concerns of his previous work into a historical setting. His third film, 'Dune' (1984) ran into 'creative problems' (as Lynch himself admits) and was successful neither commercially nor artistically.

Lynch's movie references are not touchstones of nostalgia, of a cinephile past, of formative experiences at the movies, but something like found objects, elements of design, part of the magpie tradition of bricolage; in short, more akin to the references and style of

animation (one of Lynch's formative experiences). Lynch's enthusiasms are those of the collector, rather than the movie buff; a collector fascinated by textures, which themselves can suggest a movie mood ("I'm real keen on the Mid-West, downtown L.A., Egyptian hieroglyphics, black-and-white German Expressionism, and Art Deco", Lynch says in Monthly Film Bulletin).

'Blue Velvet' is set in Lumberton, USA. Tom Beaumont collapses while watering his garden. Returning from the hospital, his son Jeffrey finds a severed human ear which he dutifully delivers to Detective Williams, who later tries to curb Jeffrey's curiosity about it. Williams' daghter Sandy, however, tells Jeffrey about a nightclub singer, Dorothy Vallens, who is connected in some way with the investigations. Intrigued, Jeffrey tricks his way into Dorothy's apartment and steals her keys. That night, after watching Dorothy perform 'Blue Velvet' at the Show Club (where she is known as 'The Blue Lady'), Jeffrey enters her apartment. Having failed to hear Sandy's warning signal, he hides in a closet on Dorothy's return and watches her undress. She finds him, and threatens him with a knife, forcing him to undress and then making erotic advances. Jeffrey hides in the closet again, when the acutely disturbed Frank Booth arrives to sexually humiliate and violently abuse Dorothy. Jeffrey suspects Booth of holding hostage Dorothy's child, and her husband (whose ear he has cut off). Frank leaves; Jeffrey consoles Dorothy, but refuses when she asks him to hit her. After discussing these events with Sandy, Jeffrey visits Dorothy again. He also follows Frank from the Show Club to a deserted industrial area, and sees two of Frank's associates (including a man in a yellow jacket) near the scene of a drug-related murder. When Sandy rejects his advances, Jeffrey returns to Dorothy and indulges her masochistic desires. Frank arrives, and takes Jeffrey and Dorothy on a violent joyride to the place where her son is apparently being

held, before beating Jeffrey up. On Sandy's advice, Jeffrey reports his discoveries to Williams, although he realises that the man in the yellow jacket is in fact Williams' partner. Jeffrey and Sandy declare their love for each other at a party, and Jeffrey is subsequently threatened by Mike, Sandy's boyfriend. Dorothy then appears naked in the street, having been beaten up by Frank. After delivering Dorothy to safety, and gaining Sandy's forgiveness, Jeffrey goes to Dorothy's apartment, where he finds the bodies of her husband and the man in the yellow jacket. Frank returns to kill Jeffrey, but the latter, once more hidden in the closet, shoots him dead...Jeffrey awakens in his garden, as Sandy calls him in to lunch; his father, now recovered, chats to Detective Williams; Dorothy embraces her son.

'Blue Velvet' is Lynch's first film set either in the present day or in a recognisable version of America. The film's familiarity and intimacy serve to show just how strange his version of reality is. Normal life proceeds along a thin thread, while all around is darkness and violence. Lynch's previous work had shown cruelty and perversion in the safely surreal confines of a man's mind. But when Jeffrey responds to Dorothy's masochistic invitation to beat her, and is then beaten up in turn as a form of poetic justice, the observation is too close to provide any comfort to its civilised audience.

The final twist in this film is to show us not just the strangeness which surrounds normal life, but the strangeness of normal life itself.

> 'David Lynch has adapted Shelley's injunction to make the familiar unfamiliar into a vision that makes the familiar weird. Lynch has wittily heeded the advice of his sternest critics, to deal with 'real life', and shown that it is as surreal as the menage of Henry Spencer in 'Eraserhead'[6].

'Blue Velvet' openly flaunts its Freudian themes, and narrative. Its protagonist, Jeffrey Beaumont, is an Oedipal hero. His real father is struck down (by a heart attack); he sets out on a journey and encounters woman as enigma and symbolic mother figure, and makes love to her; finally, he kills the murderous father-substitute, thereby restoring some form of normality, and setting himself free to take a young woman of his own. The narrative is liberally dotted with Freudian signposts, often humorously treated; a severed ear, the symbolic use of keys (to unlock the unconscious), the Oedipal drama which Jeffrey witnesses from a wardrobe, repressed homosexual desire when Frank kisses Jeffrey, the multiplication of father figures, the separation of a mother from her male child, woman as masochist, and so on. The surface knowingness and playfulness, the ironic tone and insistent parody of family values, mark 'Blue Velvet' as a post-modern text.

The concept of fantasy has recently been taken up by film theorists, particularly feminist ones, because it seems to offer a way out of related problems: too narrow an account of the film-spectator relationship, (which I have already gone into); and the denial of a position for the female spectator. The turn to fantasy has enabled them to counter the tendency to ascribe a fixed, masochistic place for both female characters in the diegesis,and the female spectator in the cinema. Instead, they have emphasised the sliding subject positions of the female protagonist and the multiple positions for the female and male viewer.

The important aspect of fantasy for Freud was not its relationship to reality, but its degree of psychical reality in the life of the individual. According to Laplanche and Pontalis' article, 'Fantasy and the origins of sexuality', psychical reality is 'alone truly real', in contrast with the majority of psychological

phenomena; it is just as real as the material world.[7] Freud did not divide fantasy into conscious and unconscious fantasies; he insisted that the same nucleus is present in the deepest unconscious fantasy, in daydreams, and in the secondary revision or conscious interpretation of dreams when we are awake. But he did distinguish between original structural or primal fantasies and secondary imaginary fantasies.

The primal fantasies deal with the major enigmas of a child's early life, enigmas which concernthe origin of the individual, the origin of sexuality, and the origin of sexual difference. Fantasies of the primal scene picture the origin of the human being, the creation of the child in the parents' love-making. Fantasies of seduction in which the child desires to seduce, or be seduced by, the parent represent the origin of sexual desire. And fantasies of castration dramatise the origin of the difference between the sexes. Although these three scenes are sometimes treated as if they were staged quite independently of each other, Freud's discussions in a number of case-studies stress the way they inter-relate and overlap. Also, Freud does not invoke copulation, castration and seduction as general concepts; the figure of the powerful father largely (but not totally) dominates all three primal fantasies.

Behind these fantasies lies the drama of the Oedipal crisis. The primal fantasies are bound up from the start with the organisation of sexual difference. In her article '<u>Fantasia</u>', Elizabeth Cowie stresses Laplanche and Pontalis' definition of fantasy as the 'mise-en-scene' of desire.[8] This approach begins by relating fantasy to auto-eroticism (sexual excitement without another's stimulus). This is a very important step, because it shows that desire is not just a welling up of the drives; it begins to exist as sexual only as it is articulated in fantasy.

Fantasy is not the object of desire, but its setting. Fantasy does not depend on particular objects, but rather on the setting out of images in which the subject is caught up. Hence, fantasy as the 'mise-en-scene' of desire, which is to be found, as we have seen, not only in the unconscious fantasies, day-dreams, and secondary revision, but also, as Elizabeth Cowie argues, 'in such public forms of fantasy as films and novels'. With these fantasy scenarios, the subject is free to take up a number of subject positions. In fantasy, the subject does not pursue the object or its sign.[9]

At least three different forms of fantasy can be distinguished in 'Blue Velvet'. Like any other film, it is a 'public fantasy'. Secondly, the structure of the film suggests that the hero may have dreamt the whole thing: the image of the ear is used to frame the events-as-dream. In the opening sequence, the camera zooms down and into the interior of a severed ear which Jeffrey finds in a country lane; in the final sequence, the camera pulls out from the inside of an ear- in this case, Jeffrey's. He awakens on the lawn of his parents' garden, where the film's action also began. If 'Blue Velvet's narrative of death and desire is a dream, this is not spelt out for the spectator; it is impossible to separate out the 'Dream' events from those which precede and follow them. Thirdly, Freud's three original fantasies of the primal scene, castration and seduction are specifically depicted within the narrative (Jeffrey's dream?) In short, 'Blue Velvet' is a public fantasy about a private dream which involves a representation of the primal fantasies.

The parody of a suburban idyll, set in Lumberton, is gradually undercut by a sequence of disturbing images. A woman watches a television drama in which a gun is seen in close-up, pointing to the left of the screen. The film cuts to a man outside watering his lawn; suddenly he writhes in agony as he falls to the ground with a

heart-attack, his hose between his legs so that he appears to be urinating, the water spurting forth in an absurdly comic manner. A dog jumps up and down, attempting to catch the spray. Thus, the film's first suggestion of violence is linked to the female gaze; a woman looks out at a fictional gun pointing in the direction of the real outside world, where her husband is suddenly struck down. This drama is watched by a small child whose narrative significance only becomes clear in the film's final sequence. The symbolic family configuration, mediated in this sequence by the image of the gun and the unexpected violence, forms a metonymic pattern which becomes central to the narrative. Its evil undertone is reinforced in an equally unexpected series of images in which the camera seems to burrow down into the ground beneath the clipped lawn, to reveal a magnified jungle where insects are devouring a grub with cannibalistic frenzy. An eerie collection of sounds invades the soundtrack; these are repeated later in the narrative at moments of intense fear and horror.

It is important to point out that the first intimation of violence is linked with the act of looking, because from then on, the film's tendency to offer tableau-like scenes or displays (Dorothy's nightclub performance; Dean Stockwell's mimed rendition of '<u>In Dreams</u>'; the grotesque arrangement of corpses Jeffrey discovers in Dorothy's apartment) are always matched by an emphasis on seeing. From Frank's interdiction to Dorothy ("Don't you fucking look at me") through Jeffrey's plea on being discovered in her closet ("I didn't mean to do anything except see you") to Jeffrey's realisation that he is 'seeing something that was always hidden', the questions of power, fear and knowledge which drive the film are always linked to the idea of looking.

The heart attack triggers off the film's drama. When the man's son, Jeffrey, is returning from the hospital, he finds a severed human

ear. He takes it to Detective Williams, who discourages Jeffrey's curiosity about his bizarre discovery. After leaving Williams' house, Jeffrey meets the detective's daughter Sandy (Laura Dern), who emerges from the night shadows in parody of the 'noir' style. It is woman's body which links the film's two worlds: the outer world of idealised family life and the inner world of violent, perhaps fatal symbolic relationships. Later, another woman, Dorothy Vallens, also emerges from the suburban darkness. This time, woman's body is naked and battered, a brutal reminder that the two worlds are two sides of the same coin. This theme is repeated in the film's final sequence.

Fascinated by hearing of nightclub singer Dorothy Vallens, Jeffrey hides in Dorothy's apartment, in the hope of 'seeing something'. The events that follow lead him into an underworld of crime, kidnapping, drugdealing, murder, and sexual abuse. However, this crime narrative functions as a disguise; the film is primarily concerned with the drama of human relationships, and the role of sexual fantasies in them. The film's final sequence repeats images from the opening, revealing that 'normality' has returned to suburban family life. The camera pulls out from the interior of Jeffrey's ear as he wakes in the garden to the sound of Sandy's voice calling him to lunch. This shot rhymes with the earlier shot in which the camera enters the recesses of an ear, signifying the possibility that the drama has been a dream. Jeffrey's father chats to Detective Williams, Aunt Barbara expresses disgust at the cannibalistic behaviour of robins, and Dorothy Vallens embraces her son. The symbolic family configuration has been reworked many times throughout the narrative, in its parody of Freudian themes.

It is in the hesitation between parody and a more disturbing representation of the primal fantasies that 'Blue Velvet' raises interesting questions about fantasy and spectatorship. The critical apartment scene for example, seems at one level to endorse the argument

that in those texts which stage the primal fantasies, the places of the characters are not fixed and, as Elizabeth Cowie puts it, 'the staging of desire has multiple entries for the spectator'. Nevertheless, this multiplicity is neither infinite nor vague.[10] The spectator is not completely free to identify with any character position at will. Entry is coded in specific ways; certain spectator positions are encouraged over and above others.

In this scene, Jeffrey has stolen into the room of Dorothy Vallens, a woman he does not know but whom he believes to be connected with the underworld, and he has hidden in a cupboard. The voyeurism of Jeffrey's 'peeping' is heavily marked in a close-up of him through the cupboard door slats, looking at Dorothy undress. When Dorothy discovers him, however, this voyeuristic look is turned against him, and he becomes the object of woman's aggressive desire. She threatens him with a knife, while angrily questioning him: "Do you sneak into girls' apartments to watch them undress?" She orders him to undress: "I want to see you...Don't move. Don't look at me." she shouts. As she begins to make erotic advances, she orders Jeffrey to remain still: "Don't touch me or I'll kill you. Do you like talk like that?" "No," Jeffrey replies, adamantly. Dorothy's threat as she makes love to him orally, while holding a knife, is painfully clear. At this point, woman controls the gaze, the knife, and the key to man's pleasure. Jeffrey is rendered totally vulnerable, his voyeuristic gaze deflected, his concern directed towards the threat and pleasure offered by the woman.

Female viewers find this one of the most interesting and disturbing scenes in 'Blue Velvet'. Woman is in control of the situation, her desires, and the look. She investigates his body. Even if Jeffrey's youth and inexperience undermine her power to

some extent, Dorothy is still depicted as a figure in control. In this staging of the primal fantasy of seduction, the spectator is presumably free to identify with either male or female, or with both characters, Initially, Jeffrey subjected the woman to his voyeuristic gaze as he secretly watched her undress. Dorothy reverses this balance of power: she subjects him to her gaze and, while wielding a knife, forbids him to look at her. Thus, a series of positions are presented, the terms of which are taken up successively by Jeffrey and Dorothy. The spectator, however, is not completely free to identify with either man or woman, or the symbolic positions they occupy- son/lover and mother/lover. The representation of the seduction fantasy is over-determined by the theme of castration: Jeffrey voyeuristically views Dorothy as woman, signifier of castration; Dorothy strips Jeffrey naked and threatens him with a knife. Because castration means such different things for women and men, the freedom of the female or male spectator to enter into the scenario via the processes of identification cannot be unbiassed.

In her article on visual pleasure and spectatorship, Laura Mulvey linked the look of the male protagonist, the bearer of the gaze, to notions of power and a desire to control and possess the heroine, the object of his look. Much of the spectator's pleasure derives from this power and control.

Although the representation of the seduction fantasy in '<u>Blue Velvet</u>' may not necessarily be locked into any particular form of looking, in this instance it has been overwhelmingly determined by the voyeuristic structures of teh look which are invariably linked to a scenario of castration within filmic mise-en-scene. If fantasy then is the mise-en-scene of desire,

then desire, and the look of desire, must also be aligned with the specific features of the mise-en-scene- particularly the gendering of space- and thus marked in a particular way.

The seduction sequence is brought to an abrupt close by the appearance of the violent, psychopathic Frank Booth. His perverse and unpredictable behaviour makes the rest of the scene shocking and difficult to watch. The audience soon understands that events will not follow any familiar or comforting narrative lines.

Dorothy's fear of Frank forces her to abandon her aggressive rape/seduction, and she hides Jeffrey. The scenario which unfolds before his eyes takes on dimensions of the bizarre and the grotesque. It is clearly a re-enactment of the primal scene, represented from various perspectives: the primal scene as parental coupling, and the primal scene as birth. To add to this complexity, the primal scene merges into a scenario marked by Oedipal desire and castration. During this entire sequence, the camera cuts again and again to isolate Jeffrey in extreme close-up, as he watches voyeuristically from the security of the cupboard.

In this bizarre scene, Frank moves between the sadistic position of the punishing father and the masochistic position of the child in relation to the mother. The central desire of the masochistic fantasy is the child's desire for the all-powerful mother. But this is possible only in the imagination. As a consequence, 'death becomes the fantasy solution to masochistic desire'.

Next, Frank assumes the role of the father. After violently 'making love' to Dorothy, Frank stands up, hits her, and screams at her not to look at him. He then rolls her over, saying "You stay alive baby. Do it for Van Gogh!"- a reference to her husband, Don. Frank then leaves. Cautiously, Jeffrey comes out of his hiding-place to comfort Dorothy (later, they begin to make love, but Jeffrey leaves when Dorothy tries to make him hit her). At this point, the camera

breaks its identification with Jeffrey's gaze. Throughout the entire sequence of sixty-seven shots, nineteen are from Jeffrey's point of view. The camera, Jeffrey, and the viewer share the same voyeuristic position as the scene unfolds. The repeated screening of the bright close-up of Jeffrey's profile as he watches Frank and Dorothy, interspersed with shots of the scenario itself, help to maintain the distance which Christian Metz argues is essential to the voyeuristic gaze.[13]

The sense here of sexual aggression inherent in looking is at its most acute, and gives a particular edge to the implicating of both Jeffrey and the spectator in the ritual being enacted. The absolute inextricable link between the film's moral concerns and its investment in the guilty pleasures of looking is crucial, and seems carefully calculated to force male spectators into moralising comfusion. In the Time Out review (4-11 March 1987) Lynch is praised for his genius and imagination, but the spectator is warned of the dangers of cinephilia, and told of the need for 'a little honesty' and 'a little moral awareness'. The greatness of 'Blue Velvet' is exactly that it demonstrates the impossibility of neatly dividing those areas.

Laplanche argues that the position of the spectator in relation to primal fantasy is aligned with masochism. The infant's passive position, claims Laplanche, 'is not simply a passivity in relation to adult activity, but passivity in relation to adult fantasy intruding within him'. Thus, Jeffrey's voyeurism is counterbalanced by this passivity and helplessness. Not only is his looking completely unauthorised, he is in danger of extreme punishment from Frank, the father substitute, if caught. This also helps explain why Jeffrey does not interfere, as he does later when Frank attempts to humiliate Dorothy. I would argue that the audience is also placed

in a position of masochism. Not only is the scene difficult to watch, as I mentioned earlier, but the spectator is also punished for watching, in that the events which unfold before the eyes of the innocent viewer/child are both shocking and violent.

Although Metz argues that all voyeurism is sadistic to a degree, in this scene Jeffrey's voyeuristic look seems to be predominantly grounded in structures of masochism. Frank as the infant who desires re-incorporation into the mother's body is also located in a passive position in which his ultimate desire is a desire for death. Unlike the voyeur, Frank fails to maintain a distance between himself and Dorothy's body. His desire to re-attach himself to the mother by way of a symbolic cord signifies the extent of his desire to suppress the gap between object and subject.

The representation of Dorothy/woman in this sequence is extremely complex. On one hand, she can be seen as a masochistic, degraded figure, physically, sexually and verbally abused by Frank. Her smile after Frank hits her indicates that she derives pleasure from pain and humiliation. On the other hand, the close-up of her head falling back with a look of intense pleaaure on her face suggests an auto-erotic desire and its fulfilment. Frank screams at her: "Don't the fuck look at me!" Although she does not look, her power is assured through the pleasure of erotic self-sufficiency. She experiences a pleasure from which the man is excluded. Her 'look' is directed to a place within herself. This scene is particularly disturbing because it represents woman as masochist, and gives voice to a cultural prohibition: the possibility that one can derive pleasure from pain.

'Blue Velvet' suggests not only that women can find pleasure in pain, but that this can be a male desire too. In the dramatisation of the seduction fantasy, the male is clearly represented in a masochistic position; Dorothy cuts Jeffrey's cheek witha knife and

forces him to submit while she takes pleasure in his body. Although it appears as if the narrative's acts of sexual violence are primarily directed against Dorothy, Jeffrey in fact takes the heaviest blows- not only is he punched savagely by the brothel-keeper, Ben, he is later beaten by Frank in a scene of sadistic/sexual violence. Sandy also hits him. Jeffrey leaves Dorothy's apartment when she asks him to hit her; he later returns, even though she brutalised him in their first encounter. Frank also takes up the position of masochist in his relationship with Dorothy, who plays the all-powerful mother to his 'child'. In this sequence, Frank appears completely to regress to a pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic position. 'The Oedipal moment parades as the moment of primal loss, but actually it screens that loss from us' (Freud). Frank pushes back to that moment of primal loss, his pleasure/pain expressed through his grunting and the sounds of breathing as he re-enacts the moment of birth.

The metaphor of travelling into an interior, secret place is alluded to in the opening sequence of the film, when the camera discovers a hidden world of violence and cannibalism, death and decay beneath the neat suburban lawn- a place where insects and other forms of life are locked in a deadly, chaotic battle. The distortion and magnification involved in these two shots underline their surreal quality. They also suggest the emotional trajectory of '<u>Blue Velvet</u>': a burrowing into secret, subterranean places; the earth, the interior of the body, the unconscious, the womb. Jeffrey's journey into Dorothy's world (her apartment is dark, secret, womb-like) is essentially a descent into the interior of woman, into her hidden places, ultimately into the womb of which the film presents two opposing images.

Through a process of displacement, woman's womb is seen by the terrified male as dark, mysterious and deadly on one hand, and as

erotic and sensuous on the other; a secret interior of blue velvet. Even the velvet assumes both aspects; sometimes its surface looks soft, at others it appears rough like the bark of a tree.

Dorothy is partly presented as the phallic mother because of her place in the desires of the male protagonists. These desires are spoken through a staging of the three primal fantasies, and they shape the structure of the narrative. But desire for the son is also Dorothy's desire. In this sense, she holds the key to male pleasure and happiness, and she knows it. This is why Frank screams at her not to look at him. He cannot bear to see that she ultimately holds the power.

Not only are the three primal fantasies at work in 'Blue Velvet': the narrative presents them in such a way that subject positions, specifically those of mother-child-father, become interchangeable. The movement between these symbolic places is so varied and complex that the film could be read as a dramatisation of the interchangeability of subject positions in relation to the staging of fantasy (Elizabeth Cowie suggests that this film seems to be about the shifts of positioning). Although the various positions take on meaning only in relation to each other, this sliding stops in relation to the figure of the woman. Only she can signify 'blue velvet', the womb, the source of life.

It seems that in 'Blue Velvet' the fantasy of castration is overwhelmingly linked to a masochistic look. The fantasy of seduction seems to involve an exchange of looks in which both forms, sadistic and masochistic, are represented. What is most interesting, however, is that in the representation of desire, the look was not deterministically linked to gender. Thinking in terms of fantasy makes it possible to theorise spectatorship in a new context. It suggests that many possible roles can be taken

up by the subject in the narrative, which in turn allows multiple identifications for the spectator. Another way of freeing critical discussion from the tendency to posit only a 'male' gaze, is to look more closely at the way in which 'mise-en-scene' produces a 'masculinisation' and a 'feminisation' of space. If filmic space is represented differently, then this allows for a greater mobility of gender positions- male characters being able to take up a 'feminine' place and vice versa.

Although it is only one of the three primal fantasies, castration does seem to play a significant part in structuring the representation of the other fantasies in 'Blue Velvet'. If this is true of other films, it may help to explain the centrality of the castrating, male gaze in the cinema; it also indicates why Mulvey's 'sadistic model' of looking speaks with such authority. A second determinant is the coding of space as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. And thirdly, in 'Blue Velvet' for instance, modes of looking are closely linked with the point of view of the male character. This must make a difference for the female subject who identifies with that character and his fantasy, in comparison with the male subject who also identifies but with a figure represented 'in his own image'. Narratives presented from this point of view, that of a female protagonist, as in womens' film, must also invite a different point of view; as indeed they must necessitate a different form of identification for the male viewer. Even if the difference is minimal, unexpected, contradictory, or impossible to theorise, the fact of that difference must be acknowledged.

Theresa de Lauretis writes that she sees emerging from current feminist debates a female subject 'that is at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of a two-fold pull, of a division, of a doubled vision.'[14]

Perhaps the viewing subject, whether male or female, is also aware of a 'two-fold pull' when identifying, whether as observer or actor, with a fictional character of the other sex. A woman is both 'inside' and 'outside' fantasy when the fantasy represents male desire.

'Blue Velvet' has been described as 'the most honest film about male sexuality by a man since Lynch's earlier film 'Eraserhead'[15]. Clearly, thinking in terms of fantasy makes it possible to look at spectatorship in a new context. Because 'Blue Velvet' does not present its characters in the typical Hollywood, male-centred format, a number of shifting positions emerge for both male and female spectator in relation to the film. At the very least, Lynch is pushing the way forward in this respect, and opening up otherwise closed doors for the shifting positions of spectator identification.

SECTION II

CHAPTER 1

FOOTNOTES:

1. V. Burgin, J. Donald and C. Kaplan (eds.), 'Formations of Fantasy', Methuen (London) 1986.
2. Geoff Andrew, 'Time Out', 1986.
3. ibid.
4. Cinefantastique, September 1984.
5. K. George Godwin, 'David Lynch Retrospect'
6. Sean French, Sight and Sound, Spring 1987.
7. Laplanche and Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality' in 'Formations of Fantasy'.
8. Elizabeth Cowie, 'Fantasia' (1984).
9. ibid.
10. ibid.
11. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in Screen 16, 3 (1975).
12. Barbara Creed, 'A journey through Blue Velvet' in 'Formations', Winter 1988.
13. C. Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', London Macmillan 1982.
14. Teresa de Lauretis, 'Technologies of Gender: essays on theory, film and fiction.'
15. Geoff Andrew, op.cit.

Plate 1 The sunny surface of Lumberton....

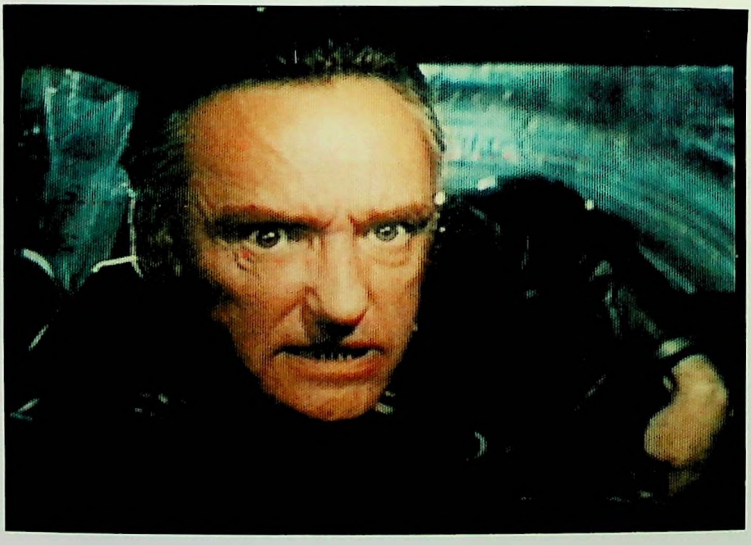

Plate 2 ...and its underworld (Frank Booth)

Plate 3 " It's a strange world, Sandy" Jeffrey remarks

Plate 4 Jeffrey approaches Dorothy Vallens at her apartment

PLate 5 'The Blue Lady' (Dorothy Vallens)

Plate 6 ... and Sandy- the two extremes of woman

Plate 7 The 'innocent' Jeffrey

Plate 8 Jeffrey as voyeur, as he watches Dorothy from her cupboard.

Plate 9 Woman holding the power (Dorothy threatens Jeffrey with a knife, after finding him in her cupboard)

Plate 10 ...power reversal (Frank Booth)

Plate 11 Woman as masochist (Dorothy smiles, while Frank controls the situation)

Plate 12 Woman as victim (Dorothy arrives, battered and naked in Jeffrey's garden)

Plate 13 Dean Stockwell sings 'In Dreams'

Plate 14 Dorothy is reunited with her son Donny

Plate 15 Robins arrive in Lumberton

Plate 16 We end looking at the surface of Lumberton, but aren't convinced for a minute that all is well.

SECTION II

CHAPTER 2

THE DREAM IN DAVID LYNCH'S 'ERASERHEAD'

'The screen is a dangerous and wonderful instrument if a free spirit uses it. It is the superior way of expressing the world of dreams, emotions and instinct. The cinema seems to have been invented for the expression of the subconscious, so profoundly is it rooted in poetry. Nevertheless, it almost never pursues these ends...'[1] (Luis Bunuel)

Luckily, certain film-makers have consciously explored this aspect of cinema, and Bunuel was one of the first to do so. He described his films as an expression of the unconscious feelings of man, and therefore, he felt, of universal value.

Fantasy moves the attention of audiences away from immediate realities to see the deeper roots of the problems they are confronted by. British director Peter Greenaway realises this power, and the necessity of fantasy in films. In his recent film 'Drowning By Numbers' he does not attempt to give the viewer an assurance of the reality of the subject matter. The very form draws attention to itself, and invites the audience to apply its intelligence to the work. Instead of stirring emotions through a naturalistic depiction of characters and situations, his films give audiences an opportunity to stand back and look at malevolence, evil and danger in the world around them. The effect is to increase, not diminish, the audience's emotional response.

The same can be said of American film-maker David Lynch, whose film 'Eraserhead' (1976) has caused much debate. It first appeared at the Filmex, Los Angeles, in 1976. Dark and brooding, its moody black-and-white images slipping seamlessly from mundane reality to nightmarish fantasy and back again, it wielded a powerful effect on its audience, leaving many stunned and disturbed.

I intend taking Lynch's film 'Eraserhead' and looking at the thought processes involved in its creation, in an attempt to draw together the theories put forward in the first chapter, where processes of dream-work were compared to processes of art or film work.

Lynch, who was very much influenced by Bunuel, has managed to capture not only the matter of a dream, but, more importantly, the manner as well. His film 'Eraserhead' is not simply a fantasy related to us and labelled 'dream', something which we stand apart from as passive observers. It is the dream experience itself.

'Eraserhead' is perverse, ugly and obsessive to a degree which puts off many who do not see at first glance what Lynch is trying to do. Its ugliness forces some people (including myself sometimes) to look away before having a real chance to look at it.

But what is interesting here is the frequent 'absoluteness' of teh reaction- both in those who dislike it, and those who keep going back to it. A simple assertion of 'Eraserhead's strangeness cannot explain this; something more is at work. And it is not just the underlying meanings; rather, it is the forms in which those meanings are embodied.

Lynch has managed to tap into the processes of dream-consciousness with a frightening directness. As a result, the film has an uncanny ability to take control of the viewer's mind

as he or she watches. The experience of 'Eraserhead' is very immediate; the dream becomes the viewer's own.

Much of the critical confusion caused by 'Eraserhead' is due to the traditional concept of narrative. Where is the story? Most viewers, from habit, look for an externally meaningful coherence, a recognisable narrative thread. And they immediately run into trouble, as what they see appears to be a succession of meaningless images and inconclusive scenes. The only 'story' 'Eraserhead' offers consists of the utterly banal situation which it takes as its starting point.

But what the film does present is a complex internal coherence: the coherence of dream images, which may represent any number of things simultaneously, with no single meaning negating any of the others.

But whose dream is 'Eraserhead'? Firstly, of course, it is that of David Lynch. But within Lynch's dream/film there is an added complexity: no-one stands outside the events of the dream. Although Henry is at the centre, he cannot be called the dreamer. Rather, he is the dreamer's dream-identity. The absence of a dreamer eliminates the usual distance which turns filmed dreams into straightforward fantasy. 'Eraserhead'is more immediate. The absence of a dreamer, in a sense, makes the viewer the dreamer; and perhaps this accounts in part for the strong reactions to the film.

It is within these tensions, within the puzzle of whether Henry has been dreamed up, or is the dreamer of the film,that 'Eraserhead' exists; in fact, they make it possible, and give it its impact. One aspect of this is the way the film works simultaneously in objective and subjective registers; 'To Lynch amateur anatomist and biologist and collector of what he calls

'textures', the world of 'Eraserhead' has its own observable reality'.[2]

At the same time, 'Eraserhead' is a social comedy of particularly acute maladjustment, a cruel comedy of a self-perceived outsider who imagines his grotesqueness through the eyes of others.

But 'Eraserhead' is not about alienation, a tale of fear and loathing in the big city, from which Henry would like, but doesn't know how to, escape. This scenario has often been proposed,[3] both to explain the film's atmosphere of dread, and to account for it in terms of some theme or narrative momentum. In fact, there is no evidence that the film or its hero has any interest in going anywhere; which, if we take 'Eraserhead' as the rendering of someone's dream-state, is hardly surprising. It is a comparison that Lynch himself advances,with caution, that 'Eraserhead' is 'one of the best renderings on film of the method of Kafka's dream-narratives: a direct literal representation of something that is essentially a metaphor.'[4] Henry's dread, his fear of possessing, generates this fantasia of creation gone wrong of life biologically and industrially on the skids.

It is essential that Henry remain unchangeable, frozen in his unmade state, his 'innocence', because it is the immutability which produces the fearful transformation of the dream-within-a-dream. When Henry loses his head, and it is put through a process that capitalises literally on the film's title. What accounts for all Lynch's cinema, perhaps, is a similar irreducible innocence in its creator, that clean-cut,'gee-whizz' image projected out of its time, and an ability (like Henry) to imagine every horror in order to remain untouched by it. Is this, perhaps, the reason some people are drawn to see such films?

In analysing this dream/film, it may be of interest to look at the way in which the world of films views itself. No matter

how bizarre it may appear to us, the people who inhabit this world accept its events as the normal state of affairs. For the viewer, the sense of dislocation between what one sees and a character's response to it, can at times be very disturbing. For instance, the first scene with the 'baby'; the situation is so familiar that it borders on the banal. Mary is attempting to spoonfeed the baby. It spits the food out. Tired of its whining, she gives up, angrily slamming down the spoon. She sits unhappily on a chair by the window: a lonely, all-too-familiar figure, the woman trapped by an unwanted child. Then, hearing Henry at the door, she quickly and dutifully returns to her task. Henry enters this scene of utter domesticity, looks at mother and child, and gives a coy paternal smile. It is all so ordinary- yet the viewer witnesses it with a kind of shock. The disturbing element is the 'child': a strange, reptilian thing, armless, legless, with a thin neck attaching its head to a shapeless body, wrapped tightly in bandages. This thing looks frighteningly alive, and almost human. This sense of dislocation and distortion brings us back to similar situations found in the dream.

Filmgoers are used to being presented with cues as to how they should respond to what they see on the screen, the most common being the responses of at least one of the characters present in a scene. But here, disturbed and disgusted, we have to watch as these people treat this thing as a perfectly normal child, assuming that we too should see it as such.

In 'Eraserhead', we find ourselves in a kind of psychological quicksand, unable to find the correct footing, emotional or intellectual, from which to view what is occuring. Our own experience is constantly proven inappropriate for this world, and no guide is provided within the film itself. The resulting sense of uncertainty creates a base-line of tension, which Lynch plays on throughout the film. We can

never be sure what is going to happen; indeed, we cannot even make a reasonably good guess.

The rules here are not those of our familiar material world, nor indeed of any cinematic tradition, but rather those of a dream, where it is not action or event which leads to a further action, but image which leads to image. And since almost every image is a shifting multiple entity, occuring within a context of several simultaneous images which at any moment can point in a number of different directions, we have no solid basis on which to make predictions. Again and again, Lynch leads us on, seeming to build towards some climax of revelation, only to lead us back to where we were- or so it seems. This device is used continually throughout the film.

In 'Eraserhead', Lynch constantly distracts our attention and alters the situation while we are looking elsewhere. But the distraction often seems bizarrely disproportionate to the trick performed. And of course, neither trick nor distraction is sufficiently noted by the characters. It is as much their acceptance of this shifting situation as the situation itself which causes the spectator such uneasiness.

This circularity reaches its peak in the elaborate sequence which seems to promise a way out of the film's unstable world. The neighbour, having locked herself out, invites herself to stay the night at Henry's apartment. The bed transforms into a pool of milky fluid, into which the embracing couple submerge.

Henry at last finds himself on the stage behind the radiator where the deformed blonde of his visions sings of Heaven. But his head is abruptly ripped off as the 'baby' emerges from his neck. The head disappears in a pool of blood- and drops past the camera to a street, where a boy quickly grabs it and runs.

After the lengthy retreat into the enclosed darkness of the claustrophobic apartment, we have emerged violently into light and open air. We seem to have stepped out of the film world, or the dream world. Admittedly, this is still our world, but the sudden change may offer some fixed point of reference to make sense of it all.

The head is taken to a store where it is tested and, as the title suggests, used to make erasers.

The boy takes the head to a dingy little office- the world is quickly closing in again. The manager leads him to a dimly lit back room, where a piece of the head is removed and inserted into a machine, which fixes erasers onto pencils. The quality of the rubber is judged acceptable. The boy is paid. The machine operator brushes eraser dust from the table; the swirling fragments dance in darkness to the sound of a rushing wind...

...and all of a sudden, we are back with Henry- lying in his bed, arms gripped around his head, the child crying... and the neighbour gone. Was she ever there ? Was it just a fantasy ? Was the whole thing a dream ? Such questions are meaningless, because in the world of the film, everything is real, or, nothing is. It is quite fruitless to try and separate the film's events according to degrees of reality, because there is no ultimate rational baseline. As in a dream, no distinction can be made between what happens, and what someone thinks is happening, because thought instantaneously manifests itself as an event.

'Eraserhead' is full of false leads, clues taking us off on tangents, which somehow bring us back to where we started- but not quite. The viewer is always on guard, preparing for some event which never occurs. In retrospect, it seems to be a film in which very little actually happens, although always on the verge of

something momentous; tension builds, but no true release is provided.

Although the film has appeared in certain instances as a comedy, there is an underlying feeling of corruption- corruption of the natural world. And at the root of this corruption is man; the part of us which causes us to perceive our species as apart from the rest of nature; a separateness which causes us to believe that we are free to interfere with, and alter nature in any way we desire, with complete impunity.

In the film, the consequences of this meddling well up in vivid, nightmarish terms. The world of 'Eraserhead' is a dead world, bleak and sterile. In fact, man's interference has made it actively hostile to life. And this process has rebounded on man, in the form of the perversion of one of life's most basic drives: sex. Set in a dead world, the symbolic progress of the film reveals an ever-deepening fear of sex, in fact a disgust with sex, which can only be remedied by an ultimate escape from it into death.

The physical world depicted in 'Eraserhead' offers virtually no images of life. From the very start, we see a bleak landscape, a grimy urban wasteland. Concrete expanses, tenements in a narrow street give way to waste ground. The open areas we see are either mere expanses of mud, or are enclosed by wire fences, containing a litter of technological debris.

When asked about the main influences on 'Eraserhead', Lynch is inclined to turn the question in another direction entirely:

> " Philadelphia. I was married, and we had a child. Not having any money, and needing lots of space, I was forced to live in a very poor area. We bought a house for $3,500; it had twelve rooms. I tell people that all that protected us from the outside world were those bricks. But the bricks might as well have been

paper. The feeling was so close to extreme danger, and the fear was so intense.... There was violence and hate and filth. A little girl pleading with her father to come home, and he's sitting on the kerb. Guys ripping another guy out of a car while its moving. All kinds of scenes..'Eraserhead' came out of that."[5]

The film's central symbol for unbalanced, faulty technology - and for the active part of the human mind that is responsible for the disruption and perversion of the natural world- is the 'Man in the planet'. This figure, a grotesque mutant, is a barely moving, twitching creature who sits in a ruined, decaying room with control levers in front of him. He is the repulsive inhabitant of man's own mind. By manipulating his levers, he initiates the action of the film; he is in charge of this world, whose motion is mechanical rather than living. This, we can see, is a direct reference to the imbalance of the reality principle over the pleasure principle.

In the film's final moments, it becomes clear that the Planet is not even spherical, but distorted, elongated; in fact, shaped something like a head- a dark inorganic head. This repulsive embodiment of the force responsible for corrupting the natural world is, from the dreamer's point of view, the devil. But, of course, it is also a vital part of man, and thus of the dreamer himself. The horror of this nightmare is the horror of man facing the monster in himself, a confrontation which finally leads to an act of self-destruction to end the horror.

The image which dominates the film, becoming its centre, as well as the centre of Henry's life, is the 'baby'. This inhuman, yet, at the same time, oddly human, creature, lies unmoving on the table from its first appearance, but somehow seems to be in control. It wears Mary down with its incessant, demanding cry, finally driving

her away. Yet Henry accepts its presence passively. What is this bizarre reptilian mutant? From its shape, and its position in the film's structure of symbols, it can only be one thing: the penis. It is the penis grown out of all proportion; it has become a separate entity, all appetite.

Why, then, does Henry, with scissors in hand, cut open the baby's bandages? Is this interest clinical? Is he trying to punish the baby for trapping him? Or is it a deliberate act of self-release? Certainly, the outcome is release of a kind- the kind, in fact, which Henry longs for. The act itself is self-castration, an attempt to destroy the appetite by destroying the organ. All the poisons flood out of the dying thing, and it causes chaos. Because in destroying the penis, Henry also destroys the tool of continuity, the means by which the world (the particular inner world of the dream) is sustained. Without the support of this organ, the world flies apart. The result is death, for the nothingness of the sterile womb, Henry's 'Heaven', is death itself.

The kind of control involved in man's heavy-handed manipulation of the physical world is unable to harness the forces of life. The horror of sex- from Henry's nervousness of women to the grotesquely distorted sexual imagery- arises from the perception that this particular force is beyond the control of man's rational consciousness (the twisted 'man in the planet').

Instead of trying to come to terms with it in a way which acknowledges its rightful place, consciousness fears sex, tries to suppress it; and down in the subconscious, the place of dreams (the realm of the film), it becomes distorted, even more fearsome. Because it is beyond control, sex is perceived as a monster. And the only way to escape it is to eliminate it entirely.

But self-castration does not merely obliterate sex- by

cutting off the links of life's vital force, it also kills the castrating consciousness. And so, while Henry sinks blissfully unconscious into the arms of his sterile angel, the 'Man in the Planet' pulls desperately at the controls of his machine and crumbles, with his world, into a million fragments. At this point, the dream, and the film, end abruptly.

'Eraserhead' is, then, a depiction of the self-castrating tensions which result from man's inability to reconcile his intellect with other, equally potent aspects of his nature. What makes Lynch's achievement so impressive is that he states this entirely through suggestion. He manipulates these symbols with remarkable dexterity in a surreal vehicle which is organic and unified, and frightenigly alive, without ever reducing the message to the level of a tract.

Lynch's experience of coming from a sunny childhood to the hardened and dangerous streets of Philadelphia created a collision of opposites in his own life, which carries on into his films. In 'Eraserhead' he took two sides of the same coin and presented them on the one plane, disguising the boundaries between the two through fantasy; the banal social set-up surrounding suburban family life, alongside the nightmarish visceral experiences.

Henry, like Lynch, is innocent, the victim of the dream and of the reality of the social narrative within the dream. We too are in the position of innocence as dreamer/viewer; exposed to the fears of the director knitted into a 'social reality', occupying the same time and space.

By facing these fears in the dream, in the cinema, perhaps we will then remain untouched by them? Perhaps this is our wish: to face or disguard the dream/film and its implications? As with

any other form of fantasy, this is a definite possibility, but is relative to the spectator. Having said this, I feel that cinema is an extremely strong medium through which to articulate and explore these fears and anxieties, and taking the strong reactions (both positive and negative) to 'Eraserhead', Lynch has perhaps taken the dream, in manner and in method, sexual fantasy and the medium of film, and struck a chord within the cinema.

SECTION II

CHAPTER 2

FOOTNOTES:

1. Luis Bunuel, 'A Statement'.
2. 'Rolling Stone', 13 November 1980.
3. 'Cinefantastique', September 1984.
4. Richard Combs, 'Crude Thoughts and Fierce Forces', pp. 99-104 of 'Monthly Film Bulletin'.
5. 'Rolling Stone', op. cit.

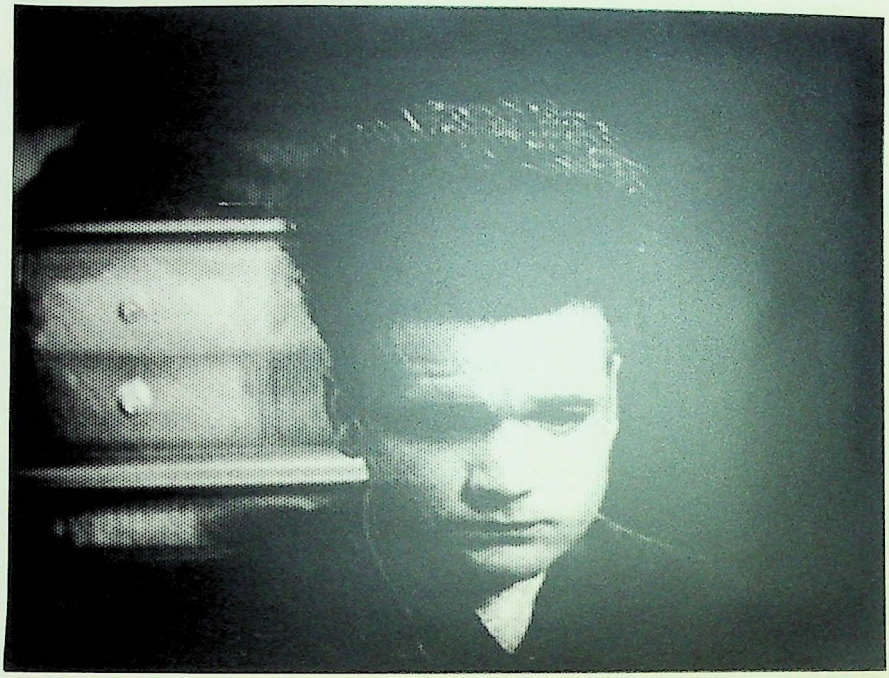

Plate 17 The 'innocent' Henry

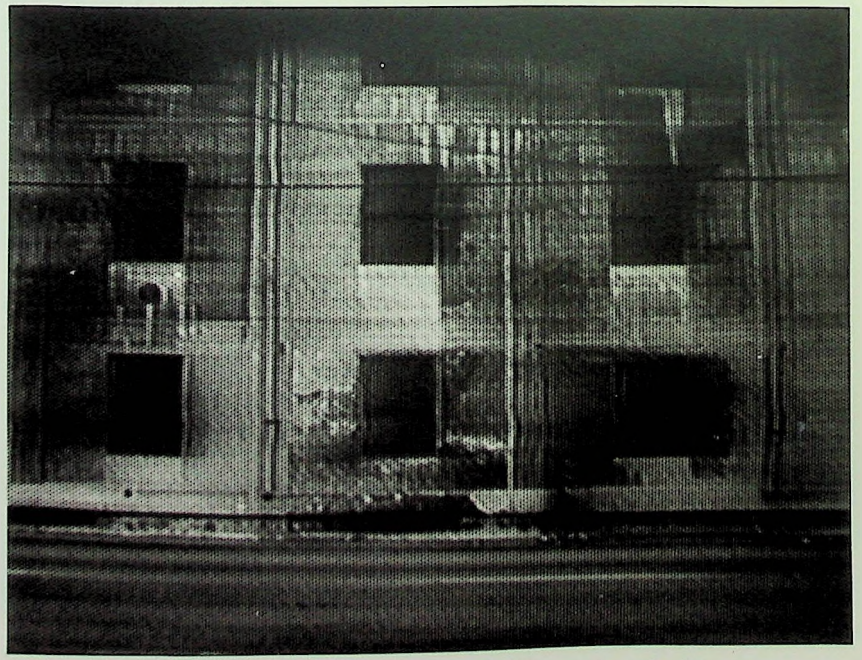

Plate 18 The bleak landscape of 'Eraserhead' (Philadelphia)

Plate 19 Henry at dinner with Mary and her family

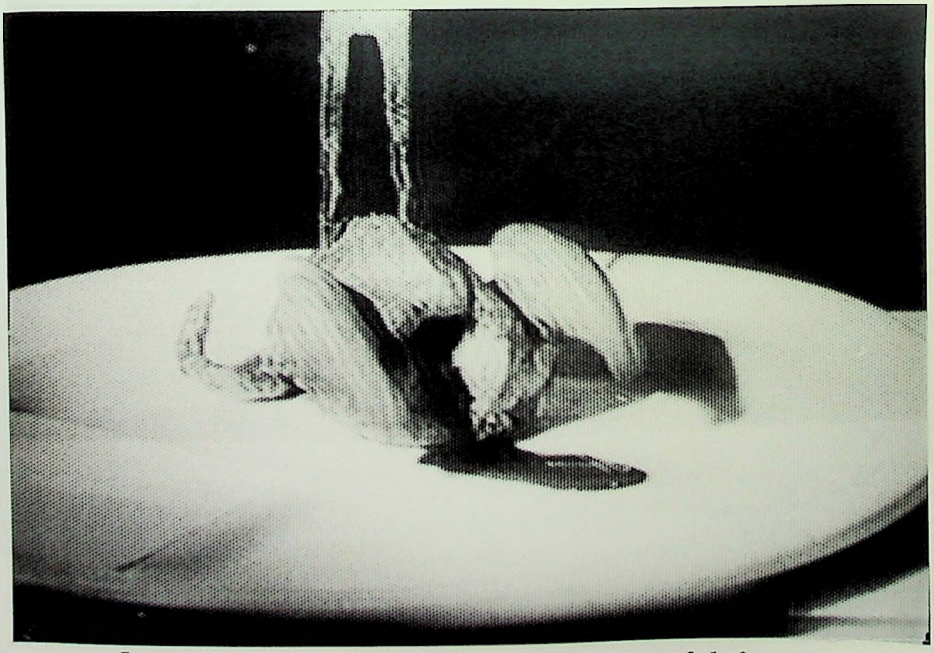

Plate 20 The dinner begins to show signs of life once touched..

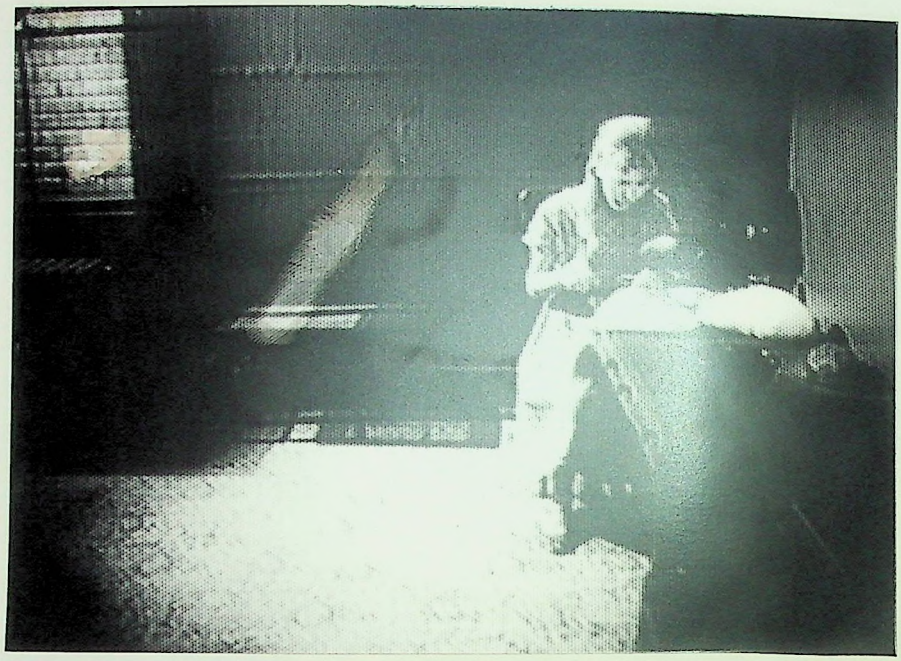

Plate 21 Mary with the 'baby'

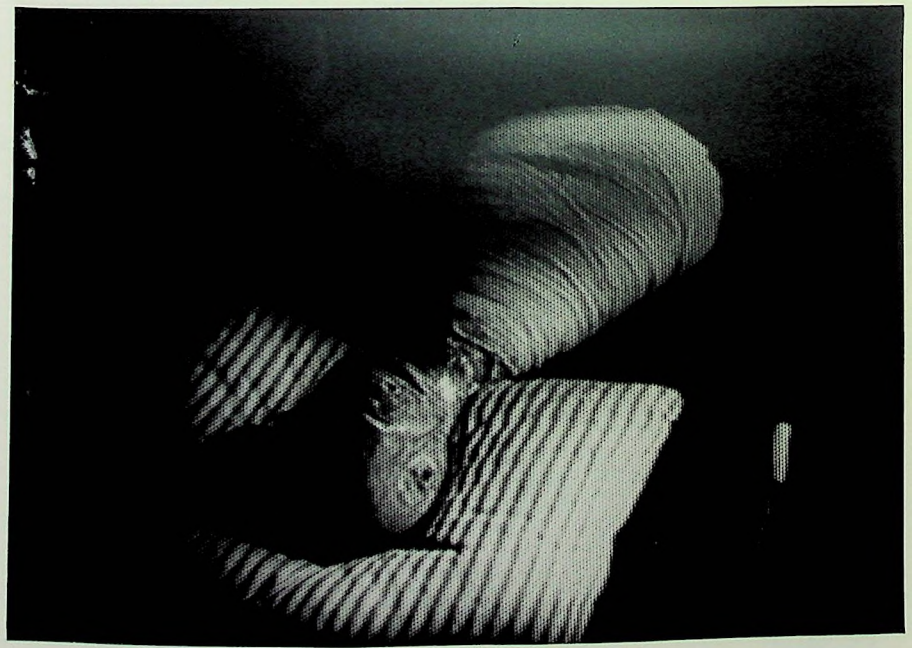

Plate 22 The 'baby'

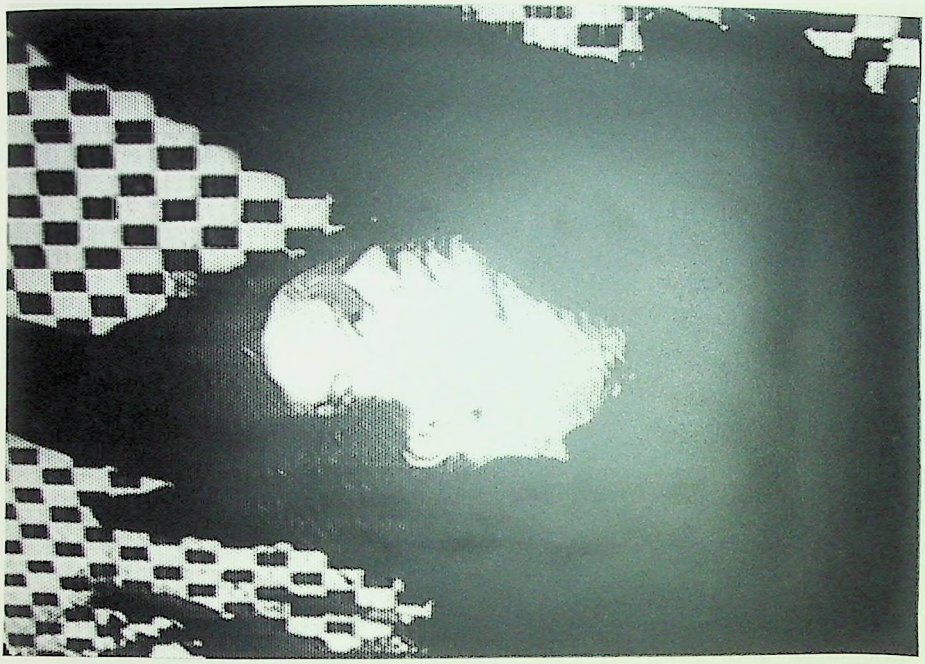

PLate 23 Henry's fate

PLate 24 Henry's 'dream' in the radiator.

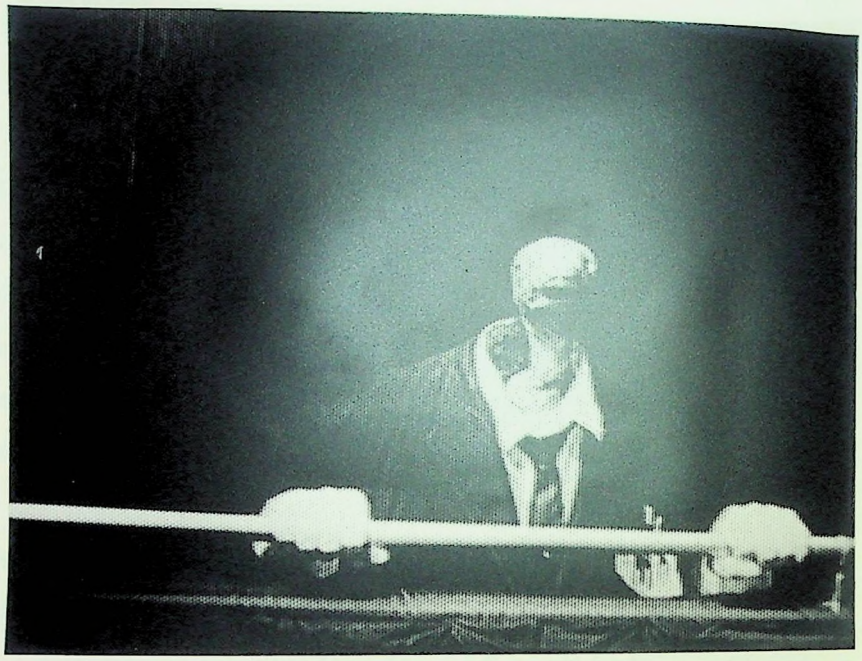

Plate 25 Henry imagines himself as being taken over by the 'baby'

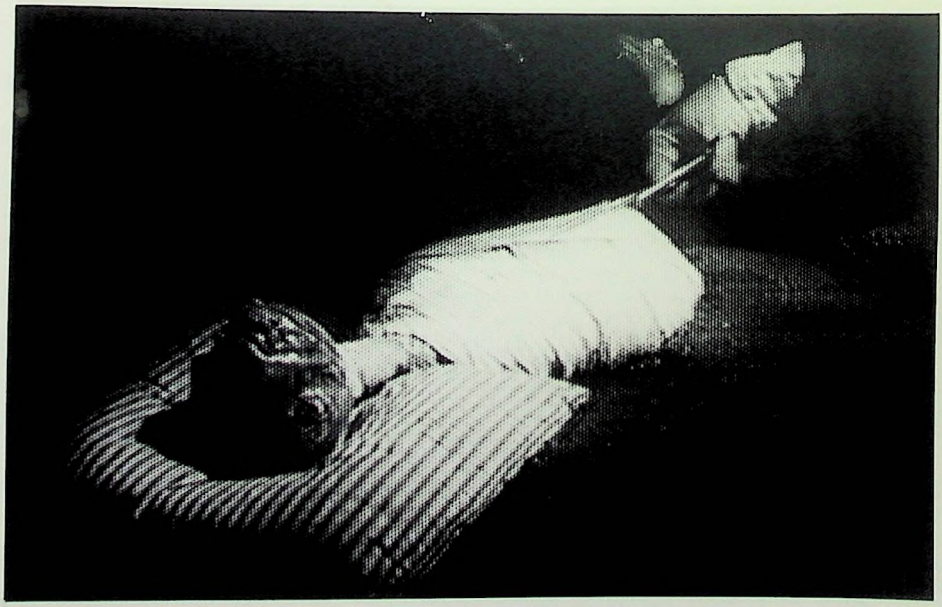

Plate 26 The 'castration scene': Henry destroys the 'baby'

CONCLUSION

And so we arrive back at the question with which I began: 'Why is it, in such an advanced society, that there is so much unhappiness?' It would be evident from any honest self-assessment that we are repressing our wishes and desires and are governed to a large extent by reason and logic. Fantasy, being the only mode of thought cut off from this repression, thus becomes an important force in our lives. 'In its refusal to accept as final the limitations imposed upon freedom and happiness by the reality principle, in its refusal to accept as final what can be- lies the critical function of fantasy.'

Fantasy is as immovable and powerful a force in our lives as our material circumstances.

Art can perhaps be described as the most visual return of the repressed. Cinema might be considered a crossover between high and mass culture. Because of its physical advantages over the other arts for involving the audience emotionally and sensorily, cinema is said to cater to private fantasy in a way that other art forms seldom approach. And this accessibility of a mass audience creates a two-way traffic in myths and sensibilities, which has resulted in the catering for/developing of certain areas of fantasy, in particular sexual fantasy.

As I have demonstrated, David Lynch is exploring the area of sexual fantasy in his films. By showing us it is possible to tap into the unconscious and the dream-thoughts, and then articulating this through the medium of film, he has presented us with a private fantasy made public. Presenting this on the screen in a manner which moves between the real and the illusory has the power to

unsettle the spectator, making him or her question their position in relation to what they see. Since it is suggested, and as I hope have demonstrated, one of the reasons why we go to the cinema is to identify with what we see on the screen, and this being analogous to the ways in which we construct our identities within society, we are put in the situation, with 'Blue Velvet' for instance, where we are not presented with fixed positions for characters and thus, for spectators; and so, we are forced to make moral judgements in order to identify with what we see.

But Lynch is only exploring one specific area of fantasy, from his own viewpoint. I am therefore only touching on the vast area of dream and fantasy. But I feel that clearly there is a necessity for fantasy, and film seems to be presenting itself as a suitable medium . It seems, the concerns of the 1960s generation with self-discovery and political radicalism have come together in an attempt to rediscover the cinema's power to move the attention of the audience away from immediate realities, to see the deeper roots of the problems that they confront in the contemporary world, and to dream of new possibilities.

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