

DavidLynch.com: Auteurship in the Age of the Internet and Digital Cinema

Zoran Samardzija, Columbia College Chicago, USA

"Your Eyes Are Moving"

In a *New York Times* profile published prior to the theatrical release of *Inland Empire* (2006), David Lynch declares, "Film is like a dinosaur in a tar pit. People might be sick to hear that because they love film, just like they loved magnetic tape. And I love film. I love it!" (Lim, 2007). While Lynch is not the first established director to state his preference for digital video over film, how exactly he has chosen to work with the Internet and digital video makes him stand apart and has rich implications for critics who wish to understand wide-ranging and intersecting issues within film and media studies. To be more specific, much insight can be gained about the changing nature of auteurship and spectatorship, not to mention the convergence between film and other media, by examining Lynch's embrace of the Internet and digital. Yet before presenting these issues, it is important to remember why Lynch wanted to work with film in the first place.

Lynch often mentions in interviews that he started making films so he could see and hear his paintings move. A characteristic telling of this story is quoted in the second edition of Michel Chion's book *David Lynch* (2005): "As I looked at what I'd done, I heard a noise. Like a gust of wind. And it came all at once. I imagined a world in which painting would be in perpetual motion" (cited in Chion, 2005: 9). Lynch's idea of a "painting in perpetual motion" assumes some eclectic notions about authorship and spectatorship that distinguish him from other painters turned directors. Informed by several personal meetings and interviews, Martha P. Nochimson's *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart* (1997) remains the best book-length explanation of how Lynch's ideas about authorship and spectatorship apply to his own work. Recounting a discussion she had with Lynch about the Jackson Pollack painting *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952*, she writes:

'I don't understand this,' I said. 'Yes you do,' Lynch said. 'Your eyes are moving.' They must have been, but I had not paid any attention. I had automatically experienced a lack of meaning because I could not stand at the prescribed, controlling viewing distance and read the painting as a rationally controlled system of shapes. Lynch had spontaneously identified the painting as a meaningful representation for me because it had released my moving eye from conventional viewer expectations. *I* saw that I could not contain the painting in some theoretical framework; *he* saw me performing with the painting. He saw as crucial that part of me that my education had taught is inconsequential to my grasp of meaning. (Nochimson, 1997: 5)

This encounter exemplifies how Lynch thinks spectators should interact with his work: by abandoning the idea that the meaningfulness of an image arises only when one has achieved rational, critical distance. The process of moving one's eye across an image, and the

subconscious interaction with the formal properties and textures of an image, in other words, are as purposeful for Lynch as interpretation from a distance. As Nochimson further explains, Lynch "was talking about the *balance* between reason and direct subconscious engagement with the materiality of the paint, not an *abandonment* of reason" (Ibid.: 5). This balance between subconscious engagement and rational distance also applies to how Lynch conceives of his own authorial intent. As explained in *The Passion of David Lynch* and in numerous interviews, Lynch sees that his role as an author is to unleash his subconscious through the textures of his images with which the spectator can then interact. As Nochimson states, "this ideal accounts for his assertions that ninety percent of the time he doesn't know the reason for his directorial decisions, his way of saying that he frees himself to receive ideas, images, and impulses that his active will *could not* tap into during the directing process" (Ibid.: 17). It is no wonder, then, that Lynch notoriously refuses to interpret his own work in interviews or on DVD commentaries: in addition to wanting to leave interpretations to spectators, he cannot or does not wish to rationalize his own creative process, since he sees it as originating in the subconscious.

Lynch's desire to see his paintings move and to achieve greater interaction with the textures of his images both for himself and spectators has also led him to abandon film and embrace digital video and the Internet. Since *Mulholland Drive* (2001), he has devoted much of his time to his website, www.davidlynch.com, where members can pay to watch his experiments with flash animation and digital video, get weather reports for Los Angeles from Lynch himself, and even submit questions for him to answer. Members and non-members alike can purchase self-distributed DVDs of his early short films, compilations of his Internet experiments, his first feature film, *Eraserhead* (1977), and even order his signature coffee brand. If that is not enough, they can also purchase coffee mugs, mouse pads, t-shirts and hats.

In this essay, I argue that Lynch's shift toward the Internet and digital challenges how film and media scholars commonly understand auteurism, spectatorship, and media convergence. To be more precise, an examination of Lynch's authorial persona and recent work illustrates how classical forms of film analysis such as auteurist criticism can adapt to, and illuminate, an era of post-cinematic media convergence. "A onetime celluloid fetishist," as critic Dennis Lim describes him, Lynch has become a meta-auteur, an auteur who constantly reflects on how developments in media alter the nature of authorship and spectatorship (Lim, 2007). Moreover, *Inland Empire*—his three-hour feature shot on commercial-grade video that began as experiments for his website—can be read as a grand experiment that challenges how spectators process the codes and conventions of narrative cinema.

The Auteur in the Age of the Internet and Media Convergence

Andrew Sarris's and Peter Wollen's writings provide two classic film studies variations of auteur theory. In Sarris's famous essay, "Notes on the Auteur Theory," he states that one "premise of the *auteur* theory is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value" (Sarris, 2004: 562). According to this definition, an auteur is someone who imposes on the spectator "recurrent characteristics of style" that reflect his or her worldview. Peter Wollen offers a structuralist definition of the auteur, stating that the auteur is "a structure which underlies the film and shapes it, gives it a certain pattern of energy cathexis. It is this structure which auteur analysis disengages from the film" (Wollen, 2004: 577). Instead of a distinct personality that creates a unified style, in this construct an auteur is merely a signifier that points to stylistic affinities between films.

Criticism of David Lynch has largely adhered to these classic definitions of auteurism. The last few years have seen the publication of several book-length studies, notably Eric G. Wilson's *The Strange World of David Lynch: Transcendental Irony From Eraserhead to Mulholland Dr.* (2007), Todd McGowan's *The Impossible David Lynch* (2007), and Jeff Johnson's *Pervert in the Pulpit: Morality in the Works of David Lynch* (2004). All three studies treat Lynch as an auteur who, through his "distinguishable personality" or structural signification, disrupts spectators' conventional expectations about cinema. To varying extents, they each reveal the datedness and limitations of auteurist criticism when it fails to consider how media convergence affects authorship and spectatorship. None of these books discuss in detail how Lynch's shifting choices of media alter how spectators interact with his work. *The Impossible David Lynch*, for example, begins with an analysis of David Lynch and his cinema that emphasizes, in the vein of much classical structuralist film theory, the inherent distance between spectator and screen. Todd McGowan writes:

From his first feature *Eraserhead* (1977) through each of his subsequent films, the films of David Lynch present a challenge to this viewing situation. The great achievement of his films lies in their ability to break down the distance between spectator and screen. Rather than permitting the imaginary proximity that dominates in mainstream cinema, Lynch's films implicate the spectator in their very structure. The structure of a Lynch film alters the cinematic viewing situation itself and deprives the spectator of the underlying sense of remaining at a safe distance from what takes place on the screen. (McGowan, 2007: 2)

Avoiding the issue of what exactly constitutes "mainstream cinema" and Lynch's relationship to it, one must question how the "viewing situation" for David Lynch's work has remained unchanged in the thirty years since *Eraserhead*. Since then a diligent spectator could have encountered Lynch's work in such diverse contexts as in midnight screenings in the 1970s, on their television screens in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to downloading short film experiments onto their computer in the last decade. Even if a spectator limits herself just to Lynch's feature-length films, it still cannot be said that there is a singular "cinematic viewing situation" in which she would have watched them all. McGowan's argument, in other words, that Lynch challenges the conventions of spectatorship for "mainstream cinema" presupposes an unchanging model of spectatorship that does not account for the vast technological developments that have altered how spectators experience or encounter cinema. As an example of auteurist criticism applied to David Lynch, who has always embraced working in multiple media, it reduces the complexity and variety of his career.

To remain viable in the present, auteurist criticism must abandon static conceptions of authorship and spectatorship and ground itself in a theory of media convergence. Henry Jenkins's *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) offers one such model that can be used to rethink auteurist criticism. In the book, Jenkins argues that technology does not drive media convergence: it is the work that spectators do, how they use and make connections between media, that determines the process. He writes:

I will argue here against the idea that convergence should be understood primarily as a technological process bringing together multiple media functions with the same devices. Instead, convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content. This book is about the work -- and play -- spectators perform in the new media system. (Jenkins, 2006: 3)

In a convergence culture, a spectator must use other media if she wishes to fully understand the film she is watching. Invariably, this also means an auteur no longer functions as the origin or focal point of meaning for the film she is watching. The auteur becomes a virtual nexus for the various media within which a spectator interacts. Consider, for instance, directors such as the Wachowski brothers or Richard Kelly who have become apt at creating films that turn into transmedia franchises, their narrative worlds spanning across different media. In his chapter on *The Matrix* franchise (1999-2003) and the Wachowski brothers, "Searching for the Origami Unicorn: The Matrix and Transmedia Storytelling," Jenkins argues that the diegetic world of the film trilogy is not fully understandable to spectators who are not totally immersed in the many other media manifestations of *The Matrix* such as the video games or the animated short films in *The Animatrix*. Even then, understanding may prove difficult, as Jenkins notes:

The sheer abundance of allusions makes it nearly impossible for any given consumer to master the franchise totally. In this context, the Wachowski brothers have positioned themselves as oracles—hidden from view most of the time, surfacing only to offer cryptic comments, refusing direct answers, and speaking with a single voice. (Ibid.: 99)

It is not only the abundance of references across different media that makes it difficult for spectators to fully understand *The Matrix*. They must also confront the oracle persona of the Wachowski brothers themselves, who, as Jenkins notes, seek to confound spectators further by saying that there are even more hidden messages in *The Matrix* than anyone will ever know (Ibid.: 99). This oracle persona differs from the classical film studies notion of the auteur and invites a more interactive model of spectatorship. The Wachowskis are not, in other words, like Alfred Hitchcock or John Ford: there is no, to use Andrew Sarris's term, "distinguishable personality" for spectators to uncover that shapes and unifies the meaning of the world of *The Matrix*. Any such structure or unity exists only within the minds of the spectators of the transmedia franchise.

Richard Kelly is another director willing to exploit the potential of transmedia narratives. Unlike the Wachowski Brothers, he does not assume an oracle persona and is willing to interpret his own work, freely discussing meanings in interviews and even reworking his films to remove any ambiguities. Viewers and fans of Kelly's first film *Donnie Darko* (2001), for example, can visit www.donniedarkofilm.com, where they can advance through different levels depending on how many details they recall from the movie. Each level reveals more character back-stories and fates, and further explains the mythology about time travel and tangent universes that are central to the film's narrative. In addition to inviting spectators to unravel the more perplexing elements of the film through an interactive website, Fox released *Donnie Darko: The Director's Cut* in 2004 which added twenty minutes of material and changed many of the special effects. It also had the effect of removing any ambiguity about whether events in the film should be taken literally or filtered through the disturbed psyche of Donnie. Kelly's next film, *Southland Tales* (2006), explored the potential of transmedia storytelling to an even greater extent; the film is technically a sequel to three graphic novels that Richard Kelly created with Brett Weldele. As with *Donnie Darko*, there is a cryptic and interactive website, www.southlandtales.com, relating to the film.

David Lynch's embrace of the Internet has created a more complicated auteur persona than either the Wachowski brothers or Richard Kelly. Unlike the Wachowskis, Lynch frequently gives interviews but absolutely refuses to interpret his own work. He is also no stranger to

creating transmedia narratives: *Twin Peaks* began as a television show, spawned a feature film prequel, and fostered devoted online communities in the early 1990s in the days of Usenet (see Jenkins, 1995: 51-69). Rather than using his website to create more elaborate transmedia narratives, he experiments with digital video and theorizes how new media alter his working methods and affects how spectators process the codes and conventions of narrative cinema. With his website, then, he has created a meta-auteur persona, consistently reflecting on the changing nature of authorship and spectatorship and adapting the presentation of his work accordingly.

As an indirect but important example of this reflection and adaptation, consider the fact that some recent David Lynch DVDs do not have chapter breaks. A handwritten note by Lynch in the booklet of *The Straight Story* explains the reasoning as, "I know most DVDs have chapter stops. It is my opinion that a film is not like a book—it should not be broken up. It is a continuum and should be seen as such. Thank you for your understanding." With the DVD of *Inland Empire* David Lynch has slightly relented: it has chapters but no menu to access them. Comparing a DVD to a book is not as outlandish as it may first seem. David Bordwell makes the same association providing more detail, in an entry from his blog titled "New Media and Old Story Telling." He writes:

This sounds odd, because we think of digital media as replacing print. Yet consider the similarities. You can read a book any way you please, skimming or skipping, forward or backward. You can read the chapters, or even the sentences in any order you choose. You can dwell on a particular page, paragraph, or phrase for as long as you like. You can go back and reread passages you've read before, and you can jump ahead to the ending. You can put the book down at a particular point and return to it an hour or a year later; the bookmark is the ultimate pause command. (Bordwell, 2007)

After considering Bordwell's comments, Lynch's disapproval of DVD chapters should not be read as an attempt to exert more authorial control over spectators. In fact, the opposite is true. Recall that he thinks spectators should abandon the idea that the meaningfulness of an image arises only when they have achieved rational, critical distance. Subconscious engagement proves just as important and is only made possible by experiencing the textures and images as a continuum, which is something DVD chapters disrupt. To reiterate a statement from Martha Nochimson, Lynch's ideas about authorship and spectatorship require "a balance between reason and direct subconscious engagement" (Nochimson, 1997: 5). Achieving this balance underlies many of the ideas Lynch provides on his website about working with the Internet and digital video. *The DVD Dynamic: 01 The Best of David Lynch.com* collects some of these, as well as a few of his experimental films done for the site. In the member message from Lynch on the *Dynamic* DVD, he states rather vaguely at first, "One thing leads to another. It's the weirdest thing. One thing leads to another." Speaking more concretely about the benefits of digital cameras, he adds, "it's so user-friendly to set up something and then ideas start flowing and so the Internet is a home for those, and digital technology is a way to go and marries so greatly to the Internet, it starts things going that can lead to other things" (Lynch, 2007). While this statement suggests artistic convenience as the primary reason for working with the Internet and digital, it also indicates how Lynch's quest to balance reason and the subconscious directly follows from it. In an interview for the on-line magazine *Wired*, he offers more detail about why he shot his Internet experiments and *Inland Empire* with a commercial-grade digital camera. He explains:

The quality is pretty terrible, but I like that. It reminds me of the early days of 35mm, when there wasn't so much information in the frame or emulsion. But the human being is a beautiful creature, you act and react, and the medium starts talking to you. So I love working in digital video. High-def is a little bit too much information. (cited in Thill, 2007)

Lynch's explanation here challenges the common narrative that digital supplants celluloid and is a form of technologically derived aesthetic progress. His justification for not using a high-definition camera is that it contains too much visual information and so he instead prefers commercial-grade digital video because it reminds him of early 35mm film stocks. This does not mean that he is trying to replicate the look of early film stock with video, as spectators of either the series *Rabbits* or *Inland Empire* would immediately recognize. Both works absolutely look like they are shot on video. Rather, his preference for using a technology that produces "terrible" visual quality is linked to his desire for creating textures and images that allow for greater subconscious engagement, as a closer examination of *Inland Empire* will show. As Lynch states on the *Dynamic* DVD in answer to a question about how he incorporates reality and abstraction into his films, "I like stories that hold so called reality with abstractions and those are the stories that get me going." Adding further, "abstractions come from the ideas and they say just as much or more than the real, the so-called reality scenes but you have to use you intuition to decipher that. And that's the beautiful thing about the abstractions, it kicks in your intuition" (Lynch, 2007). Thus, the aesthetic choice of using commercial-grade digital video is understandable given Lynch's interests in abstraction and intuition: the "terrible" quality conceals more information than it reveals for spectators who must embrace their subconscious in demanding ways if they are to decode the complexities of *Inland Empire*.

The Spectator in Trouble: On the "Newness" of *Inland Empire*

David Lynch rarely discusses the genesis of his ideas. However, in interviews he has acknowledged that *Inland Empire* did not begin as a feature film idea but evolved into one after a couple of years of shooting projects and scenes which he often intended for his website. Understanding how *Inland Empire* eventually became a feature is important for grasping its subversions of spectators' expectations of the codes and conventions of narrative cinema. Portions of his Internet series *Rabbits* (2002) were, for example, directly incorporated into *Inland Empire*. The series has since been removed from his website but has been re-edited and included in the David Lynch *The Lime Green Set* DVD box set released in 2008. In its Internet version, *Rabbits* consisted of eight episodes that carried the tagline, "in a nameless city deluged by continuous rain... three rabbits live with a fearful mystery." Each episode was mainly composed of a single static shot showing humans in rabbit suits—two female ones, voiced by Laura Harring and Naomi Watts, and a male rabbit voiced by Scott Coffey—in an apartment repeating domestic chores and speaking in cryptic dialogue that is inexplicably accompanied by a laugh track. A notable exception occurs in the episode where one female rabbit—this time voiced by Rebekah Del Rio who memorably lip-synched a Spanish version of Roy Orbison's "Crying" in *Mulholland Drive*—sings a monologue. Throughout the eight episodes, the series generates virtually no narrative momentum. Spectators are no closer to understanding the "fearful mystery" that the rabbits live with, or the meaning of most of their dialogue. The series could be composed of eight or eight thousand episodes.

Unlike the case with the transmedia narratives of *The Matrix* or Richard Kelly's work, it is difficult to make a conclusive argument about whether spectators familiar with *Rabbits* in its original form have any advantage in understanding the narrative structure of *Inland Empire*. A close examination of the film's opening does not reveal any clear-cut diegetic continuity between the two works. *Inland Empire* begins in darkness accompanied by a variant of Lynch's signature ominous sound design. A light source, looking as if it originates from a movie projector, emerges and reveals the film's title. The film cuts to a close-up of the needle of an old gramophone spinning across a record, followed by a series of blurred shots of a man and woman speaking Polish in a mansion who are about to have sex. The rabbits then make their appearance as Lynch cuts to a woman crying in a room watching *Rabbits* on television. Viewers paying close attention will also notice a quick shot on the television of Grace Zabriskie's character, identified only as "Visitor #1," walking to the mansion of Laura Dern's character who we will be introduced to in a moment. Lynch follows this shot with a short excerpt from the first episode of *Rabbits*. One difference is that when the male rabbit exits the door of the set of *Rabbits* we see him leaving the room of the mansion that spectators saw earlier. Inexplicably, in the narrative of *Inland Empire* the rabbits seem to exist as both characters on television and as entities that freely traverse the film's various spatially dislocated settings. They function both as diegetic and non-diegetic elements.

How Lynch incorporates the *Rabbits* series into *Inland Empire* gives some indication of why the film resists easy attempts to summarize its plot or plots. It bends identities and distorts space and time in an even more convoluted manner than previous Lynch films, *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001). In his typical non-responsiveness, whenever asked to summarize the film, Lynch merely repeats the film's one sentence tag line, "A woman in trouble." Nonetheless, the film seems to tell two stories that spatially and temporally twist and overlap with each other in thoroughly complicated and befuddling ways. A Polish woman—the crying woman watching *Rabbits* on television and who the credits identify as "Lost Girl"—appears trapped in some form of limbo, due either to some curse, or to an inability to accept her own death. The second story follows Laura Dern's character named Nikki. She accepts a comeback role in a melodrama called *On High In Blue Tomorrows* that is actually a remake of a cursed Polish film that was never completed because the leads were murdered. As Nikki, evidentially, has a psychotic break with reality, she begins to merge with the character she is playing. Eventually she confronts the Polish woman lost in limbo, frees her, and overcomes her own psychotic break with reality.

One difficulty in interpreting *Inland Empire* emerges from how Lynch traverses the various spaces his characters inhabit. Set in Poland and Hollywood, the film maps the two disparate locations together, and characters shift between them without any discernible attempts at psychological or logical coherence. There are not many cinematic forbears that help explain how Lynch connects the various settings of *Inland Empire*. In a blog post, Steven Shaviro goes so far as to argue that the film in fact resembles a "newer media form." He writes:

Lynch's film is shot on digital video, and constructed in such a way that it is no longer a movie any longer [sic], but some newer media form. It is intimate and interior in a way that traditional movies (because they are public and collective and operate on a grand scale) are incapable of, and that therefore can only be attained by fracturing and fragmenting cinematic codes, and by rejecting 35mm film for digital video. But the deep logic of *Inland Empire* is still a cinematic one, precisely because it refers back to the cinematic codes that it deconstructs. *Inland Empire* is based on the enigma of images, all the

more so in that Lynch's digital camera flattens out and makes more glaring the images whose subtleties he used to capture on film. Lynch's sound design provides an exquisite support for these deconstructed images, but the images still come first. (Shaviro, 2007)

It is worth emphasizing that, in declaring *Inland Empire* some "newer media form", Shaviro is not saying it arrived on screens *ex nihilo* or that no other film shares its peculiar narrative construction. If one wishes, one can certainly compare it to other films that uniquely warp narrative space and time such as Luis Buñuel's *The Milky Way* (1969) or Raoul Ruiz's films from the early 1980s -- such as *On Top of a Whale* (1982), *Three Crowns of a Sailor* (1983), or *City of Pirates* (1984) -- which contain similar irrational spatializations of geography and characters who occupy multiple bodies and spaces at once. Such comparisons, however, would not clarify the difficulties spectators have in understanding the narrative construction of *Inland Empire*. Shaviro's argument that "the deep logic of *Inland Empire* is still a cinematic one, precisely because it refers back to the cinematic codes that it deconstructs" presupposes a dialectical idea of *the new* that is defined as the destruction and synthesis of elements of *the old*. Thus, instead of comparing it to similarly perplexing works, one should critically embrace how *Inland Empire* formally and thematically enacts the deconstruction of cinema in order to arrive at a new type of narrative construction.

How, then, do spectators process the deconstructions of cinematic narrative codes in *Inland Empire*? Dennis Lim suggests one possible answer in his review of its DVD release when he writes, "not only does *Inland Empire* often look like it belongs on the Internet, it also progresses with the darting, associative logic of hyperlinks" (Lim, 2007). The hyperlink may be the most apt metaphor for describing how spectators experience the structure of the film: numerous scenes echo and link to each other without linear causality, words and images consistently refer to each other with establishing any coherent sense of temporal order, and characters repeat phrases about animals, holes, and time that thematically join disassociated scenes together. Consider, for example, the scene early in the film where Nikki encounters her mystical neighbor, Visitor #1, which playfully introduces this hyperlink temporal structure. The neighbor interrogates her at length about the role in the film *On High In Blue Tomorrows* that she wants. Confusing Nikki thoroughly, she adds:

I can't seem to remember if it's today, two days from now, or yesterday. I suppose if it was 9:45, I'd think it was after midnight! For instance, if today was tomorrow, you wouldn't even remember that you owed on an unpaid bill. Actions do have consequences. And yet, there is the magic. If it was tomorrow, you would be sitting over there. (Lynch, 2006)

After the mystical neighbor points to where Nikki would be sitting, the scene shifts to "tomorrow" and spectators see her receiving news that she has been offered the role. Yet after Nikki overcomes her break with reality and frees the Lost Girl, we see her seated, looking happy, in the same spot which suggests she has either not accepted the role or that she has mysteriously cancelled that version of reality. This means the structure of *Inland Empire* differs from prior Lynch films, *Lost Highway* or *Mulholland Drive*. It is neither a Möbius strip that endlessly circles around itself, nor is it divisible into sections of fantasy and reality. Its structure is more akin to a web where individual moments hyperlink to each other and other Lynch films -- hence the musical number that closes the film which contains obvious allusions to everything from *Blue Velvet* to *Twin Peaks*.

While the hyperlink metaphor provides one useful way of describing the "newness" of *Inland Empire*'s structure, it is also important to stress that the film still reflects on the institutions of cinema. Much like *Mulholland Drive*, it is deeply concerned with Hollywood and the type of images it produces. The two films, though, differ in their conclusions. In *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch devotes much time to showing how the mechanisms of Hollywood grind down innocent characters and that it no longer operates as a dream factory. *Inland Empire* intensifies this outlook by suggesting the only way Nikki achieves happiness and grace is by canceling her performance in *On High In Blue Tomorrows*. In *Inland Empire*, then, Hollywood no longer merely destroys dreams: the very creation of cinema itself becomes suspect. As J. Hoberman notes in his review, "there's a sense here that film itself is evil" (Hoberman, 2006). In that regard, it presents a variation on the classic Lynch trope: characters who attempt to disavow creation. Recall that *Eraserhead* begins with its main character, Henry, literally falling into a world and by extension the film's narrative. He only escapes into "Heaven" with the Lady in the Radiator after murdering his own deformed offspring/ creation. In *The Elephant Man*, John Merrick can only escape his body and social normalization through suicide. In *Mulholland Drive*, it is no longer simply organic life that is deformed, Hollywood and film images themselves that are called into question. With *Inland Empire*, Lynch uses commercial-grade digital video to create an even more dialectical work that resembles a "newer media form" while exploring the potential evils of movie making and the ontological status of Hollywood images.

Postscript: "Film is Like a Dinosaur in a Tar Pit"

"Film is like a dinosaur in a tar pit," says Lynch in the statement that begins this essay (Lim, 2007). Although he was discussing the benefits of shooting with digital video instead of celluloid film, the dinosaur in the tar pit metaphor can also extend to how film scholars apply the auteur theory to his work. As I have argued, Lynch's recent embrace of the Internet and digital video significantly complicates how auteurism and spectatorship function in an era of media convergence. Book-length studies of David Lynch, however, remain bound to classical definitions of auteurism and presuppose an unchanging model that does not account for how technology alters the ways a spectator can interact with his work. Yet once it is updated to reflect developments in screens and other technologies, the auteur theory can remain a valid concept in a post-cinematic era and add nuance to discussions about the blurring line between movies and other media. Too often, such discussions are limited to material evidence about how technology creates greater interactivity for spectators, thereby replacing the "cinematic experience" with other media. Case studies of established auteurs who embrace working with digital instead of celluloid are rarely considered. Regarding the intersections between technology and spectatorship, Anne Friedberg offers the astute description of our post-cinematic age in the conclusion of her book, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*. She writes:

The "cinema" has been displaced by systems of circulation and transmission that abolish the projection screen and link the screens of the computer and television with the dialogic interactivity of the phone. In the "cinematic century" -- seen now in the 20/20 of retrospective "vision" -- the viewer remained immobile in front of the frame. As we begin this new century, the "postcinematic" "post-televisual" viewer has new forms of ever-virtual mobility. (Friedberg, 2006: 242)

While this is a precise and accurate analysis of how spectators interact with the multiple and overlapping screens that frame their lives, it also indicates why critical attention should be devoted to auteurs who adapt to this "ever-virtual mobility" and try to create films that resemble "newer media forms." Studying how Lynch, for example, uses digital video and the Internet adds subtlety to the totalizing formulations about the fate of cinema and spectatorship. Narrativized images, which require some lack of mobility for the spectator, still captivate artists and hold sway over audiences. Thus, before we fully embrace the teleology of the purely mobile spectator, we can also -- to use some Lynchian terms -- "slow down" and add "texture" by updating the auteur theory and use it to understand the uniqueness of a work such as *Inland Empire*, which is not the only "film" from an auteur constructed to resemble "some newer media form" but is arguably the most aesthetically sophisticated. It may also tell us the most about how future narrativized images will look.

References

Bordwell, David (2007) New media and old story telling, in *David Bordwell's website on cinema*. Available at: <<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/?p=827>> [accessed 26 June 2009]

Chion, Michel (2005) *David Lynch. Second Edition*. London: BFI Publishing.

Friedberg, Anne (2006) *The Virtual Window: From Alberti To Microsoft*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Hoberman, J. (2006) *Wild at Heart*, in *Village Voice*. Available at: <<http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0649,hoberman,75219,20.html>> [accessed 26 June 2009]

Jenkins, Henry (1995) 'Do You Enjoy Making the Rest of Us Feel Stupid?': alt.tv.twinpeaks, the Trickster Author, and Viewer Mastery, in David Lavery (ed.), *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 51-69.

--- (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Johnson, Jeff (2004) *Pervert in the Pulpit: Morality in the Works of David Lynch*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Kelly, Richard (2003) *The Donnie Darko Book*. New York: Faber and Faber.

Lim, Dennis (2007) David Lynch Goes Digital, in *Slate*. Available at: <<http://www.slate.com/id/2172678>> [accessed 26 June 2009]

Lynch, David (2006) *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*. New York: Tarcher.

McGowan, Todd (2007) *The Impossible David Lynch*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nochimson, Martha (1997) *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Sarris, Andrew (2004) Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962, in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism. Sixth Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 561-564.

Shaviro, Steven (2007) *Southland Tales*, in *The Pinocchio Theory*. Available at: <<http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=611>> [accessed 26 June 2009]

Thill, Scott (2007) David Lynch Interviews – Uncut, in *Wired*. Available at: <<http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2007/01/72391>> [accessed 26 June 2009]

Wilson, Eric G (2007) *The Strange World of David Lynch: Transcendental Irony From Eraserhead to Mulholland Dr.* New York: Continuum.

Wollen, Peter (2004) The Auteur Theory, in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism. Sixth Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 565-580.

Filmography

The Animatrix. 2003. Dir. Peter Chung (et al). DVD. Warner Home Video.

David Lynch: The Lime Green Set. 2008. Dir. David Lynch. DVD. Absurda.

Donnie Darko: The Director's Cut. 2004. Dir. Richard Kelly. DVD. 20th Century Fox.

Dynamic:01 - The Best Of DavidLynch.com. 2007. Dir. David Lynch. DVD. Subversive Cinema.

The Elephant Man. 1980. Dir. David Lynch. Paramount Pictures.

Eraserhead. 1977. Dir. David Lynch. Libra Films.

Inland Empire. 2006. Dir. David Lynch. StudioCanal.

The Matrix. 1999. Dir. Larry Wachowski. Warner Bros.

Mulholland Drive. 2001. Dir. David Lynch. Universal Pictures.

Southland Tales. Dir. Richard Kelly. 2006. Sony Pictures.

The Straight Story. 1999. Dir. David Lynch. Walt Disney Pictures.

Websites

DAVIDLYNCH.COM. Available at: <<http://www.davidlynch.com>> [accessed 27 June 2009]

Donnie Darko. Available at: <<http://www.donniedarkofilm.com>> [accessed 26 June 2009]

Southland Tales. Available at: <<http://www.southlandtales.com>> [accessed 26 June 2009]