



***The First CTP Faculty/Graduate Forum on Culture and the Arts***

*"Stop Making Sense!" (David Byrne)*

*Themes from the Writings of Franz Kafka and the Films of David Lynch*

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When my daughter, Simone, was two, a babysitter she really liked gave her a small rubber Bugs Bunny that McDonalds was handing out with "happy meals". It was an excellent little maquette of Bugs, and Simone adored it. She loved having Bugs scoop soap into his tiny raised white-gloved hand to wash her feet during bath time. And he never failed to get a laugh when he would struggle up the side of the tub to only to once again lose his balance and fall back into the soapy water. But Bugs would really bring the house down when he would lean over Simone's bowl to make inquiries about the meal and end up tumbling face-first into her mashed potatoes or chocolate pudding. He was a very funny guy! Simone watched very little T.V. at the time and had never seen the "real" Bugs Bunny, so I asked one day if she would like me to get a Bugsy video that we could watch together. She thought this was a good idea. She was quite excited when Bugs first appeared on the screen, but in less than a minute she was absolutely horrified. There was Elmer Fudd in his little hunting jacket chasing Bugs through the cartoon landscape with big knife. Simone jumped from her chair and ran crying to the T.V. She put her hands on the screen and cried "why he's doing that Dadda, make him stop, make him stop!" I turned the T.V. off immediately and told her that Bugs was OK, and that Elmer never really catches Bugs because Bugs is smart and Elmer is stupid. But it took quite a while for her to be consoled and I was told in no uncertain terms that I was not to ever show her such a thing again. She hated that 'stupid Elmer Fudd' and I was a 'bad Dadda' for showing her that.

So what happened? In a brief moment my two and a half year old causes me to see something I'd seen all my life in a whole new way! To borrow Carlos Castaneda's phrase, my daughter had temporarily 'stopped my world'. Her explosive reaction had caused me to see something that had always been funny, a cartoon character chasing another cartoon character with the purpose of butchering, cooking and eating him, as not so funny. From her perspective what kind of "sicko" would find that amusing? Her message could not have been more clear or direct. No polemic against media violence could have reached me in quite the same way. She caused me to change my theory.

It's this capacity to shift us off the theoretical ground we normally occupy that is so remarkable about the talents of Kafka and Lynch. And believe that their greatest strength as artists arises from their ability and willingness to speak to us from the same place as my two and a half year old did. This takes a lot of courage.

It took David Lynch five years to make *Eraserhead*, his first full-length film. It was shot mainly at night because that was the only time he might be sure that people making "real" movies wouldn't be walking through the set, a derelict barn on the back lot of a studio property. He ended actually



living for over a year in the room of Henry, the main character. To support himself he delivered newspapers when he wasn't shooting.

His marriage ended and the result was a film that no one wanted to look at, let alone distribute, for quite some time. How anyone could continue to have faith in such a strange and disturbing vision under these circumstances is in itself a mystery. I think it is an example of the creative use of obsession: that Lynch could not do otherwise once things had been set in motion.

The first time I saw *Eraserhead*, in 1980 I believe, its strangeness affected me for days; it wouldn't leave me alone, so I needed to see it again. I asked a friend at the time to join me - a man who had a certain male confidence that I admired. I knew right away that I had made a mistake; my friend began sighing impatiently, shifting in his seat and giving me disdainfully puzzled looks early on in the film. After it was over he was outright angry with me. Why had I wasted his time and money bringing him to such a ridiculous and senseless piece of garbage? He reckoned it was good that I was in therapy because if this was my idea of a good movie, I needed lots of therapy. At the time I felt my friend was probably right about my needing lots of therapy, but I knew he was wrong about the film's worth simply because it possessed me for several more weeks. What I believe now is that it was easier for that man to be angry at me than to feel how much the film disturbed him. How, like my daughter's reaction to the cartoon, it called into question a well established theory about the world and one's relation to it. Her reaction screamed, "what you think is funny is, at its core, not so funny!" *Eraserhead* whispers, "we all know how pleasurable and exciting sex is, but what about how much it terrifies us?" And like my daughter's reaction, *Eraserhead* does not provide the comfort of any theoretical distance: it does not discuss or present abstractions about sexual anxiety; it draws us directly into, and even induces, the anxiety. Most men would rather not be reminded that they are Henry.

The first time I saw *Lost Highway* there was a somewhat similar occurrence. I was standing alone in the lobby as the theatre was emptying thinking, "well that was pretty weird; Lynch has done it again, something really compelling but really disorienting'." Suddenly this man, a well dressed professional looking type in his early forties, comes out with his wife and another couple. The guy is talking in a really loud and disconnected way to anyone within earshot. "People, tell your friends, tell your families, tell anyone who will listen, David Lynch is having a laugh all the way to the bank at our expense! This movie is a joke, and we've just been had", he said with a fake mocking laugh. His wife and friends laughed in a kind of quiet embarrassed way along with him. The irony is that he had just watched a film that was about sexual anxiety and obsession giving rise to dissociation, and now he was reacting publicly to it in a completely dissociated way. But when I say that *Lost Highway* is about dissociation, what I really means is that it takes us into the



experience of dissociation in a way that it, as the man so graphically demonstrated, disorients us enough to actually *induce* dissociation.

It would seem that what this man experienced was a film whose structure and/or content did not fit his ideas or underlying theories about what a film should be, but their non-fitting was not a neutral or simply uninteresting event. He clearly felt compelled to 'make sense' of the film in a hurry and in way that would negate any of its potency as a piece of art. Because the film would not yield it's meaning in a way that conformed to his established schemata, it needed to be hurriedly deemed meaningless and in that way "*made sense of*".

But the gift that both Kafka and Lynch give us is that their art takes us to the heart of the human condition in a way that resists our insulating ourselves from their message by "making sense", taking it to a level of intellectual abstraction that keeps us at a safer remove from some disturbing human realities. Central to their brilliance is their work's resistance to being turned into knowledge. Knowledge is comforting and valuable, but it is also the opposite of mystery, the absence of magic. As Winnicott observed, we tend to most urgently need knowledge to overcome feelings of dependence and the fear of surrendering ourselves to another. Referring to Winnicott's ideas here, Adam Philips says, "Knowing is the opposite of the false cure for, dependence."

One of the most interesting things about being therapists is that we are engaged with a theoretical discourse that is perpetually expanding and evolving. We are constantly reminded that there is a lot to learn and that we are never in danger of knowing it all. This is good, and the knowledge is essential to our work. But what is equally important in our work is the frequent reminder that we are mysterious and paradoxical beings who will always remain only partially understood. As Philips puts it, "It is indeed dismaying how quickly psychoanalysis has become the science of sensible passions, as though the aim of psychoanalysis was to make people more intelligible to themselves rather than to realize how strange they are. When psychoanalysis makes too much sense, or makes sense of too much, it turns into exactly the symptom it is trying to cure: defensive knowingness". When we look over the history of the theories that inform our work, there is plenty of evidence to indicate how tightly even the brightest among us have grasped those theories and contributed to their orthodoxy. Why should we be any different? We do need to make sense of what our clients present, so why wouldn't we grab and hold onto anything that helps us? This tendency is simply human. That's why we need help to pull us in the opposite direction, to help us stop making sense and participate in mystery. Adam Philips is right to caution psychoanalysts about spending too much time with each other because it reinforces the tendency to start "believing in" psychoanalysis. We need constant reminders that our theories about human functioning, as helpful as they are, are also fortifications against those human



realities that frighten and disturb us. Our words are our primary tool for doing our work, but if they fall too much under the sway of theory they are deadening.

In a letter to his friend Max Brod, Kafka wrote, "Men hide behind them from time's whirligigs. For that reason words are evil's strongest buttress." David Lynch prefers not to talk about his work and simply refuses to answer questions about how or why he does certain things. He says, "I don't like talking about things too much because unless you're a poet, when you talk about it, a big thing becomes smaller". It's not the case that words and dialogue are unimportant to Lynch's films; they are essential, but they are used with a purpose similar to Kafka's, to throw us back onto the whirligig. To create just enough disorientation that we let something in us slip, become at least slightly unhinged. It's a bit like this joke:

A racehorse walks into a bar and sits down beside this other racehorse and orders a beer. "I can't believe what just happened!" he says. "I haven't finished in the money for months and I'm about two lengths behind the pack as I enter the clubhouse turn. Suddenly I get this jolt of electricity up my arse, like I've been hit by lightning, and bang! I pass the whole pack like they're standing still, finish a good two lengths in front of the second place and pay \$108. Unbelievable!!

"No shit", says the second horse, "I was just talking about that! The same thing happened to me last week, and I paid \$93."

Now, down at the end of the bar there's a greyhound listening to them and he pipes up. "Are you guys talking about that lightning bolt up the arse? I swear to God, the same thing happened to me just a couple of days ago".

The first horse turns to the other and says, "Hey, check it out! A talking dog!"

Theory is at its absolute worst, of course, when it becomes dogma. Then, like a fetish, it is a "terminal" object, an end in itself and not an object of potential transformation that opens us up to the infinite possibilities of the imagination. Nothing keeps us locked in an eternal unchanging loop quite as effectively as obsession and its accompanying compulsive use of objects, whether those objects are words and ideas, things or people. And as we all know, nothing is as impervious to the assault of reason as obsession and compulsion. It's hard to imagine someone being helped give up the compulsive behaviour of an addiction, like smoking, by someone explaining that smoking doesn't make sense.



Now, if anyone knows about obsession, it's Kafka and Lynch. I think it's fair to say that much of the work of both artists is a ride to the centre of obsessive thinking and behaviour. Let's take *Blue Velvet* as an example. Lynch describes this film as, "a story about a guy who lives in two worlds at the same time, one of which is pleasant and the other dark and terrifying."

Young Jeffrey, who returns home because his father has had a life-threatening heart attack, finds the severed ear that is a portal to a world parallel to the one he normally inhabits. Once he begins this journey he is compelled to continue because, as he tells Sandy, "I'm seeing things that were always hidden from me". His curiosity about this other world initiates the journey, but sex is the force that propels him further into it, despite obvious dangers. When he crosses over from the ordinary, he encounters Frank, his dark counterpart who dominates the twilight landscape.

Frank, a truly terrifying character, lives the completely prescribed life of the true obsessive. Despite the many unorthodox aspects of manner and life-style, and his absolute control over those around him, Frank Booth is a prisoner in the two-dimensional world of obsession. It is a world of endless repetition, intense stimulation and ritual that is devoid of transformative potential. He moves only among props of his own making which can have only the meaning he assigns them. Dorothy, Isabelle Rossalini's character, must be kept stripped of any transformative possibilities by making sure that she is never in the position of subject. She must speak only the words he puts in her mouth and is never to meet his gaze. She is, in Christopher Bollas' terms, a "terminal" object, a fetishistic object; essentially no different than the blue velvet she's required to wear. As such her purpose is the opposite of self-elaboration for Frank. As in their brief violent copulation, she is used to deaden something, not stir it to life. As a fetish, she is an end point, not a gateway into unknown and potentially expansive experience.

Bollas argues that the primary function of obsession is that it keeps us from dropping fully into our "idiom"; it walls off aspects of self experience that are not otherwise subject to our conscious control. The object as fetish is essentially different from the object that is used for self-elaboration. As Bollas puts it, "The object of pathological obsession is a purely projective container into which the individual evacuates his psychic life in order to terminate contact with it". ([Cracking Up](#), p87) Or, as Frank bellows into the night, "I'll fuck anything that moves!"

When Jeffery, compelled by his own desire, crosses from the pleasant world into Frank's, one of the things he sees that has been hidden from him is that in some respects he is Frank Booth. "You're just like me", Frank says to him. "In dreams you walk with me, in dreams you're mine, fucker!" Back in the innocent daylight world Jeffery can ask Sandy "Why are there men like Frank Booth?" But to his dismay, when he returns to the twilight realm, it takes very little prodding from



Dorothy to get Jeffery to strike her viciously in the face. In that moment, caught in the dark side of his desire, Jeffery's growing obsession with Dorothy temporarily negates the effective functioning of those sides of his personality that would preclude this act of violence against another.

Lynch seems to be reminding us that the distinction between a Jeffery and a Frank Booth is more quantitative than qualitative. More of Frank has been evacuated. He identifies more completely with his obsessive urges regardless of their malevolence. But we are given glimpses towards the possible origins of his need to be cruel. In the strange and disturbing ritual leading up to the violent copulation, as he oscillates between "Daddy's coming home" and "Baby wants to fuck", and again when Frank becomes so stirred during the singing of "Candy Coloured Clown" that he must abruptly end it, we see his desperate need to obliterate memory. Cruelty is his method for managing his object world. "Evil, considered as a structure," says Bollas, "points to a complex reorganization of trauma, in which the subject recollects the loss of love and the birth of hate by putting subsequent others through the unconscious terms of a malevolent extinction of the self."

A shocking and extreme character like Frank Booth certainly gets our attention, but most of us would not tend to identify with him. Most of us don't, in fact, act like Frank Booth, but as Lynch likes to remind us, it's not because we're completely incapable of it. The strange and disturbing places his films take us are always right next to the *ordinary*. Like in *Blue Velvet's* brilliant opening scene, the image of the friendly waving fireman gives way to the image of a man lying on the ground near death while his little dog drinks from the hose he is clutching. The camera then moves from the white picket fence with tulips, into the nest of beetles teeming beneath the grass. For Lynch, like Kafka, the mysterious, the uncanny, are always close at hand because they're *embedded* in the ordinary; we contact mystery through the everyday objects that surround us.

In an interview Lynch said, "Some people, just by their nature, think about the president of the United States and Africa and Asia. Their mind thinks over thousands of miles, big problems and big situations. That just completely leaves me cold. I can't get there. I like to think about a neighbourhood- like a fence, like a ditch, and somebody digging a hole, and then a girl in this house. and a tree and what's happening in that tree- a little local place that I can get into." (Chris Rodley, p. 10)

It's the same with Kafka. His brilliance is in his capacity to intimate wonder by using everyday language to slightly tilt the ordinary. What he often presents us with are narrative representations of those ordinary habits of mind that prevent the perception of mystery. In the short story *The Burrow*, for example, we are taken into the narrating creature's obsessive concerns about his physical safety and comfort. His mind-numbing ruminations about the construction, maintenance,



and security of the burrow are qualitatively no more bizarre than those of any obsessive's preoccupation. This could be a hypochondriac monitoring every minute bodily sensation, or an obsessed lover mentally tracking all imagined movements of the absent partner; the thought processes are essentially the same, only their content differs. As Beckett's Vladimir says to Estragon, "It passes the time, Gogo".

As the obsessive thoughts of a burrowing carnivore who likes to rove around in his store of ripening delicacies, they're at just enough remove from the ordinary in their content to bring the monotonous drone of the creature's mentation into greater relief. It's mind numbing because that's its unconscious purpose, to keep him from experiencing the terror of surrender. He takes comfort in the knowledge that his thoughts can always be given a familiar structure; it doesn't matter that their content is obsessive worry. Referring to his brief excursions outside the burrow he says,

I am not permanently doomed to this free life, for I know that my term is measured, that I do not have to hunt here forever, and that whenever I am weary of this life and wish to leave it, Someone, whose invitation I shall not be able to withstand will, so to speak, summon me to him. And so I can pass my time here quite without care and in complete enjoyment, or rather I could, and yet I cannot. My burrow takes up too much of my thoughts.

As we read this story most of us, no-doubt, create some kind of mental representation of the creature based on the few indicators that Kafka provides. But it's unlikely that many of us find ourselves imagining a relationship with him because there is nothing to suggest that he has either the room for, or the inclination towards, relationship. (On the other hand, for some of us, memories of attempts at relationship with particular people might have been brought to mind.) The point is that obsession, even if its object is another person, *precludes relationship*. By its nature it closes us off from the possibility of experiencing the other as a subject and thus, an opening to the unknown. It's fueled by the anxiety that prevents us from full participation in the human tragedy. It keeps us from living out of what Bollas calls the "simple self" and its capacity for wonder.

In dreams we are returned to this capacity because the mental processes through which we impose order and limitation are largely unavailable to us. We do not shape the dream, we are shaped by it. In On Being a Character, Bollas writes,





When I enter the world of dreams I am deconstructed, I am transformed from the one who holds the internal world in my mind to the one who is experientially inside the dramaturgy of the other. Gathered and processed by the dream space and dream events, I live in a place where I seem to have been held before: inside the magic and erotic embrace of a forming intelligence that bears me. (p. 14)

The aspect of dreams that is often the most troubling for us is our lack of control over their events. At the same time because we are so deeply within our simple experiencing selves we "endure deep experiences there". For similar reasons the work of Kafka and Lynch call cause us to "endure deep experiences". Encounters with their work leave us somewhat disarmed because they won't allow us to make sense of them in ways that we usually make sense of things. But this is not because they present us with narrative events that are highly convoluted or stylistically difficult to follow. It's because their use of language and visual imagery evokes *self-states* that can be experienced but never fully comprehended. Their *meaning* can't be "made sense of". It's similar to what the American poet Donald Hall says regarding the unique power of poetry, "In logic no two things can occupy the same point at the same time, and in poetry that happens all the time. This is almost what poetry is for, to be able to embody contrary feelings in the same motion."

In *The Metamorphosis* Kafka says quite matter-of-factly that Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams to find that he had been transformed into a giant insect. He then goes on in the same tone to describe in mundane detail Gregor's thoughts on how this transformation would negatively affect his life as a traveling salesman. He's worried that this turn of events has already made him late for work, and God knows how his already difficult boss is going to react to his new form. What do we, as readers, do with this odd juxtaposition of bizarre event and the prosaic reaction and tone of the protagonist? We might follow our tendency to search the text for symbolic references and so translate the events into their underlying meaning? Or we might be intrigued enough to learn more about the events and conditions of the artist's life and then superimpose a biographical index over the work to make sense of it that way. But if we allow ourselves to stay engaged with the imagery and events without putting them through a higher order of abstraction, we might simply experience a self-state that can be felt but not fully understood.

If someone were to ask me what I thought *Eraserhead* is about, I'd probably say sexual anxiety. But that sounds like think I *understand Eraserhead*. In truth, I'd be willing to bet my next month's pay that David Lynch doesn't *understand Eraserhead*. He only knew in minute detail what the film had to look and sound like, and what the actors had to say and do to tell the strange story that is



*Eraserhead*. If we immerse ourselves in Henry's world with its scab encrusted man at the control levers, and simply follow him in his encounters with his girlfriend Mary and her family, and the baby and the dark sultry woman across the hall, we might begin *to feel* like what it's like to *be* Henry. Or what the world feels like to Henry. I can read Michael Balint's very powerful and helpful ideas about the *basic fault* and how this shapes an individual's experience of himself and the world, but if I let it, this film takes me right into the subjective realm of the basic fault. The combination of relentless background sound, the shuffling movements and inane truncated dialogue, the shadowy lighting and strange objects and Images, takes us into a place that is foreign and familiar at the same time. This combination of influences works like a state-altering drug that can cause us to drop into the *simple* self and its unguarded experience of things. Opposites can co-exist. Henry can desire the woman across the hall and be terrified of her at the same time. Normal social interaction that we depend on to order and stabilize the world is rendered inoperative. It's somewhat like falling into the *vertiginous moment* that Sartre describes in *La Nausée*, or what we might choose to call *narcissistic decomposition*. It's a visit to the borderline!

Staying with Lynch's images and not protectively rising above them by deeming them too violent, too disgusting or simply nonsensical, requires a certain letting go. It's similar to what we do when we go with a client into the landscape of her dream. If she says of her dream, "Well, this thing that looks like a stone, but it's not, is small but I know it's actually very big, is being guarded by this man. But I know in my dream that he himself will steal the stone because that already happened before I see him", we try to stay open to the images and to unhinge something in ourselves in order to more clearly hear the dream's language and feel its atmosphere. Watching a film like *Lost Highway* kind of asks the same thing of us. Just as *The Metamorphosis* says Gregor Samsa woke to learn he'd been transformed into an insect, *Lost Highway* says, Pete Dayton woke up in a jail cell and had no idea how he got there. He was quite disoriented and had a nasty bump on his head, and had no recollection that he had, just the preceding week, been someone else who had been convicted of killing his wife. He also forgot that when he was Fred Madison, the convicted killer, he had seen things that were yet to happen. We saw earlier that Fred Madison had been experiencing difficulties with his sexual confidence, and seemed somewhat obsessed with doubts about his beautiful wife's fidelity. We watched him have a very disturbing encounter with a strangely menacing little man who demonstrated to Fred that the man was there at a party and in Fred's home across town at the same time. If these logical impossibilities were taking place within a fantasy, science fiction or horror narrative, we would automatically suspend our disbelief. We're accustomed to adjusting our metaphysical points of reference to accommodate fantasy, so we watch or listen with expectations that suit the genre, like how we listen to a joke about two horses talking in a bar. But in David Lynch's films the metaphysical ground is often



suddenly shifted beneath us and we're left with no clear reference point from which we can make sense of what we're experiencing. We watch a gathering of hip Hollywood types mingle and splash around the pool, then this little man from no place turns up, and we fall through him like a portal into another world we weren't prepared to encounter. It's perplexing and disorienting and one of the ways David Lynch helps us to stop making sense. Maybe, like the man I saw outside the theatre, we experience a degree of dissociation.

So why would David Lynch want to do this? Why would he want to, as it were, distract the complex "sense-making" mind, and get us into a somewhat altered state? When he's asked directly, this man who is known for being disarmingly guileless and earnest—he was once described by the producer Stuart Comfeld as "Jimmy Stewart from Mars"—he says things like, "All my movies are about strange worlds you can't go to unless you build them and film them. That's what's so important about film to me. I just like going to strange worlds". From what I've gathered about him, he abandoned an earlier career as a painter because he, more or less, accidentally discovered that film was more evocative of other worlds. When I think of him spending five years making the likes of *Eraserhead*, I am left with the distinct impression that he makes these films because he feels compelled to, and their purpose is not a consideration.

However, certain recurring underlying themes do give us clues regarding what kinds of things David Lynch seems compelled to explore. He might create scenarios and images that prompt us to stop making sense, but this does not arise out of a post-modern sensibility or belief that there is no essential human nature to make sense of. *Wild at Heart*, for example, is about the power of love and the possibility of finding love, even in hell. He pieces the love story of Sailor and Lula inside the story of The Wizard of Oz, because his trips into other worlds are always about the search for lost parts of the self. Often these parts are the ones we gladly discard, so the main characters, sometimes heroic, usually encounter their dark and destructive counterparts. In these encounters something is lost, so something else can be gained. In *Wild at Heart*, Sailor is tempted into relationship with the despicable Bobby Peru, and ends up doing a wrong thing for a right reason. It seems that until he has been knocked down yet one more time and eventually meets up with the *good* witch, he hadn't fully learned not to "turn his back on love". In the last few minutes of the film Sailor continues to meet violence with violence, until his vision of the good witch enables him to meet it with forgiveness.

If we can say that *Wild at Heart* is about the possibility of finding love in hell, it and Lynch's other films, are also about the *psychological* hell that connects love to obsession. This is especially true of *Blue Velvet*, *Lost Highway*, and *Fire Walk With Me*, the film based on the characters and



events from Lynch's television series, *Twin Peaks*. Sexual obsession, with its capacity to split the personality, is the engine that drives all three of these films.

In *Fire Walk* the central character is Laura Palmer, the girl whose murdered body is discovered at the beginning of *Twin Peaks*. Laura, a deeply troubled 17 year old drug and sex addict, has been repeatedly sexually violated in her own bedroom since she was 12 by "Bob" a scruffy long-haired intruder. In a recurring state of complete dissociation Laura sees and experiences Bob enter her bedroom in a sexual frenzy. We see Bob, and also see that Bob is actually Leland, Laura's father and eventual murderer. He is completely obsessed with his beautiful young daughter in a way that is reminiscent of Frank Booth's sexual enslavement of Dorothy Valens in *Blue Velvet*. When Leland is not the monster Bob, he's an upstanding citizen and family man. As Bob, his desire is not just for sex; it's for a complete vampire-like possession of his daughter's being. When Laura tells her friend about Bob, she says, "He says he wants to be inside me or he'll kill me". Later, during one of her dissociated states, we hear the disembodied voice of Bob whisper, "I want to taste through your mouth". Similarly in *Lost Highway*, Fred Madison's jealous preoccupation with his wife leads to a radical splitting of himself into another identity and the murder of his wife Rene and Mr. Eddy (or Dick Laurent). In his final moments as Pete, as he and Rene, or Alice, are having sex on the hood of the car in the desert, he says repeatedly, "I want you, I want you", and she looks at him coldly and says, "You'll never have me!" then gets up and walks away. At that point he becomes Fred Madison again who moments later slits Mr. Eddy's throat. Like Frank Booth's bizarre sexual ritual, these are expressions of an obsessive desire for a sexual and psychological union that attempt transcendence through obliteration of self-other boundaries.

Although I'm going to come dangerously close to making sense here, I can't avoid drawing a connection between these recurring representations of the "double", these autonomous embodiments of destructive and sexually obsessive impulses, and some ideas that Sander Ferenczi had about this phenomenon. In his theory of the teratoma, he connects the notion of the monstrous double such as Frankenstein's monster or Dr. Jekyll's Mr. Hyde, to somatoform disorders arising from the somatization of deeply repressed feelings and traumatic memories. One class of these disorders, which he calls *autoplastic*, manifest in disturbances in basic internal bodily functions having to do with things like digestion and elimination etc. Another class, which he calls *alloplastic*, manifests in disturbances in functions that are more connected to the ego and its negotiations in the external world. Here we see things like sexual impotence, hysterical paralysis and other conversion symptoms that impair our ability to interact effectively with the world around us. In its most extreme the internalized form becomes a malignant tumour, while the external manifestation is that of the dissociated malevolent character artistically represented in the evil twin.



Summarizing Ferenczi's use of the term, Martin Stanton writes

Ferenczi uses the term to intimate that all our attempts to regain *primal unity generate* a supplement of metaphoric space that gradually accretes into a twin being. The temporal and spatial definition of such "beings" can assume fulsome dimensions: psychosomatic prompting of cancerous growths for example, or psychotic "twin" personalities that commit violent crimes.

Significant to our consideration of the connection between this theory of the teratoma and some of the characters and events in Lynch's films, is the fact that according to Ferenczi the primary psychic origin of the teratoma is the unconscious demand for the denial of "parental copulation". So Frank Booth is not only an unforgettable teratoma, his behaviour even gives us some clues about how he came into being. Only this time baby *is Daddy and Baby* at the same time, and "Baby wants to fuck", and is running things now. And he can't be excluded because reality takes the shape *he* gives it. And anyone who attempts to thwart this process gets a "love letter" straight from Frank's gun to their brains.

Now the theory of the teratoma might tell us something about Frank Booth, but a character like Frank doesn't arise from a theory nor could he, in my opinion. He is born of the imaginations of David Lynch and Dennis Hopper. When we experience a character like Frank through a medium as evocative as film, we are reached in a place that theory can't really get to. Theory, by its very nature, helps us draw back from experience and to frame it in meaning. When we encounter a character like Frank, who has popped out of an imagination like David Lynch's, a vantage point outside the direct experience is not available to us. It's similar to being inside the events of a dream; we don't usually know we are dreaming until we've returned to the conscious world. Most times, once we're back in wakefulness, we can recall the dream but have some distance from it because we know it was a dream. Sometimes, however, the boundary between the two worlds is not so clear. Some nightmares hold us temporarily in the space where the two worlds overlap, so the psychological and emotional experience of the dream world continues though we are awake. We usually don't like this because it's a startling reminder of the arbitrary nature of the order that our minds impose upon experience. That overlapped area is where psychotic people live: some of us might be interested in them, but we certainly don't want to *be* one of them.

By and large, we have tended to invalidate their experience, probably because some of their insights into the human condition hold some truths that we find too disturbing. But when we remember our dreams, we are often remembering trips into a world where time and space don't



behave like they do when we're awake. This is why they can both frighten us, and also help us to become "unstuck ". Adam Philips refers to them as "paradigms for the ungraspable".

Some dreams are so ungraspable with our daytime minds that they are like those strange fish that live in the deepest valleys of the ocean floor; when we bring them to the surface to study them, they explode. Lynch and Kafka are at their most evocative when they hold us momentarily at that place where these two worlds overlap, when they present us with something that looks like it should be graspable, but it's not. When we read *Investigations of a Dog*, for example, we follow the narrator's obsessive musings about some strange events he's experienced; events that don't quite conform to the laws that govern "dogdom" as lie understands them. That group of canines that emitted enchanting music as they did the socially unthinkable, and walked down the street on their hind legs. And that other group, the "soaring dogs", which he has never seen first hand, but whose existence his inquiries have led him to no longer doubt. And that majestic hound, who described himself as a hunter, appears before the narrator when he was near death from fasting; the hound who said he could not continue to hunt while the narrator laid in his own blood; the hound whose singing causes the narrator's body to stand and then run off against his own will. When we read about these supernatural events and his ongoing metaphysical and scientific inquiries, our logical minds want to "translate" them, to somehow tie them to reference points that might help us order what we're experiencing. Or as a comedian once put it "Why is hail always the size of something else?" Are the soaring dogs references to mystics and their practices? Is the hunter who brings him back from the brink of death a Christ figure, or some kind of messiah? And as we do this, we can feel our mind slamming against the walls of its own limitations. On this level the story acts like a Zen koan; it frustrates our mental tendency to grasp something so as to force it to yield its meaning.

Kafka's great unfinished novel, The Castle, is, among other things, like an extended fictional account of the mind experiencing the structures of its own subjectivity. For just under five hundred pages, K, the land surveyor who has been commissioned by castle authorities to carry out undefined assignments, tries exhaustively to learn specifically what is expected of him and how he should go about his tasks etc. These answers are never yielded; the castle's logic is never fully grasped by K., nor by us. The story has been interpreted as a metaphor for the bureaucratization of 20th Century life, or Kafka's struggle with his abandonment of Judaism, but such interpretations are themselves the kind of reification that the novel attempts to depict. We do, of course, create and end up serving social structures and institutions that were intended to serve us, but those structures are themselves concretizations of the mental processes that both organize and limit our perception of reality.



The Castle is an extended metaphor for the "sense-making" mind run amuck, creating obsessive order and meaning. The abilities and value of this aspect of the mind are, of course, immense, but it does seem to lack the capacity to check itself once given free rein. It's like that arsenal of ideas and problem-solving strategies that many of our clients bring to us; *they* don't know that our real job is to help them learn to sneak up on themselves. The tricky part is to avoid giving them a new set of ideas. But we all know how difficult it is to stay close to the heart and not head for our own castle of certain truths when confronted with someone who puzzles, frightens, or otherwise intimidates us. If you're like me, you tend to get very busy. It seems almost automatic.

As e.e.cummings put it:

along the brittle, treacherous bright streets  
of memory comes my heart, singing like  
an idiot, whispering like a drunken man who  
(at a certain corner, suddenly) meets  
the tall policeman of my mind.

The paradox contained in the notion of "sneaking up on oneself" is not a problem in dreams, but it requires a mental state that is difficult for most of us to achieve and sustain in waking life. We need all the help we can get. Recalling our dreams and holding ourselves inside our experience of their images and mood can help move us closer to a state that tolerates this kind of contradiction. Psychoanalysis, at its heart, is itself an attempt to bridge certain fundamentally opposing human urges. Adam Philips writes, "Psychoanalysis is about the unacceptable and about love, two things we may prefer to keep apart, and that Freud found inextricable. ... [he] discovered that love was compatible, though often furtively, with all it was meant to exclude". Psychoanalysis asks us to accept and hold this contradiction, but because its ideas are presented primarily through theory, they are subject to the same kind of reification that Kafka is attempting to address. So we end up talking about *the unconscious* as if it were a thing, and we talk about it like we *understand* it. We end up talking about *love*, in all its variations, like we *understand* it. I think Philips gets closer to the truth of things when he says, "Most psychoanalytic theory and technique conceals the simple fact that analysts are often frightened of their patients". We need to be reminded of this, but also of the fact that this doesn't make us bad therapists. All of our efforts to gain a better understanding of human psychology need to be constantly offset by close encounters with the kinds of paradox and contradiction we experience in dreams. We need to be reminded of how weird and mysterious we really are, especially when it comes to love and its close connection to terror.



This is what David Lynch does best. The events, characters, sound and imagery of his films are blended to create moods that put us in states that are not foreign to contradictory feelings and urges. In *Wild at Heart* the two main characters are remarkable in their ordinairness. The love between them is filled with disarming tenderness, yet charged with intense sexual heat. Their conversations are like mutual free-associations, wandering from cigarette brands, to lunatic cousins, to sexual experiences and childhood traumas, with no intent but to share each other's thoughts. They're not burdened by purpose or plans. Yet they're moving through a world that is as menacing as they are innocent. Their love evokes murderous envy that shadows it throughout the film with psychopathic destructiveness that can't allow it to exist. *Wild at Heart's* theme is archetypal, the maiden rescued from the clutches of the witch by the hero's love and bravery. But it's Lynch's fresh *method* that gives it the evocative power of a fairy tale for an era that's hardened to fairy tales because it's dominated by parody and ironic distance. The villains, Marcello Santos and Bobby Peru, are not far from ordinary, but they're pure malevolence. The settings, mostly cheap motel rooms where we can almost smell the stale beer and cigarette smoke, are places we all know. The frequent references to ordinary things like cigarette brands and car makes, and close shots of the same kind of everyday details, like toenail polish and ice cubes, hold us in the ordinary world. The banal dialogue filled with its goofy retro phrases, and the childish business between the characters (like Marietta crawling up like a lioness to scare Johnnie Farrago, who hides his face in his hands), create a familiar surface atmosphere that's in constant tension with its shadow. The actors deliver performances that sustain this tension by being slightly parodic and a bit larger than life while remaining truthfully connected to the character's emotional centre. So Sailor's love for Lula is filled with honest tenderness and reflects comic-book sentiments at the same time. Bobby Peru is both terrifying and slightly ridiculous. Then periodically the ordinary world recedes and becomes backdrop for a surreal representation of a heightened emotional state. Like when Sailor sings *Treat Me Like a Fool*, Lynch and Nicholas Cage conjure the effect of Elvis before he became a parody of himself. Cage's rendering of the song is at once slightly off centre and also true to the sentiment of its lyrics, as well as to Elvis' original power as a performer and idol. The sudden slipping between levels of reality catch us off guard, and we feel a truth that undercuts layers of intellectual complexity and insulation. Despite what we might *think* of Elvis at this point in history, he became so immensely popular because he projected something that made millions of girls want to be *with* him and millions of boys want to *be* him.

At other points in the film the slipping from the ordinary to another reality that is always right next to it, induces emotional experiences that are far less pleasant. His use of sudden contrast without a logical or clear narrative tie to the story line causes something in us to slip. It's a bit like watching little Shirley Temple in the middle of a tap dance number, pull a straight razor from her frock and draw it across her partner's hand then continue with her dance like nothing had





happened. So Sailor and Lula's top-down drive through night air opens up to an encounter with the young accident victim who talks manically about her missing purse and how angry this will make her mother, as she gushes blood and dies in Sailor's hands. The contrast between the pleasant drive and the accident scene, and the contradiction between her ordinary preoccupations and what's actually taking place, are disorienting and disturbing. Such events are not necessary to the movie's plot, but are integral to the constantly shifting mood and contrasting images that embody its meaning. We can't make sense of them, and sometimes that's a good thing. What we do know is that we're feeling something we weren't a minute ago. With David Lynch's help, we've kind of snuck up on ourselves.

And sometimes, like with Kafka, we're presented with something darkly humorous that takes us across that line. We find ourselves laughing at things we shouldn't find funny, characters and situations that are often quite outside the usual and "normal" range of funny, especially if we are people who are *sensitive* and *normal* enough to be psychotherapists. Like in *Wild at Heart* when the feed mill clerk is crawling around looking for his severed hand, and we see the dog leaving the premises with it in his mouth. We're suddenly reminded that we are, after all, meat - so what the hell, you've got to laugh. Lynch's humour is dark and at times absurd, but it's also funny. Like his violence and simple romanticism, it tends to catch us off guard, and that's the point. Both he and Kafka cause us to drop into some place we're not quite prepared for, because where we end up can never be fully mapped. But it's important that we keep grasping at the ungraspable. We're thrown for the moment into areas in ourselves where we must trust the moral impulses of our own hearts. Both of these artists have taken the risk of doing just that, and both have created bodies of work with deep moral centres, but neither assumes that responsibility for us. But if we allow it, their work will take us to places where we're required to be brutally honest with ourselves, and also accepting of our humanness. The more capable we are of this, the less dangerous we are to others and to ourselves. Or, in the words of William S. Burroughs, "Never be such a shit that you don't know you are one."

To close, two reminders from the mouths of Lynch characters: Jeffrey from *Blue Velvet*, "It's a strange world, Sandy"; the good witch of the East in *Wild at Heart* "Don't turn your back on love, Sailor".



### **A response to a comment by Phil McKenna:**

A brief one of those, "what I should have said was..."

Philip expressed some distaste for Lynch's work on the level of what he experienced as the filmmaker's essential dualism, his being confined to a Manichean vision of the perpetual struggle between good and evil, with no possibility of redemption. I can see why Lynch's films and his preoccupation with the dark underside of the ordinary would leave one with this impression. He does indeed show us our evil. But I don't believe he excludes the possibility of redemption or goodness existing without evil in equal proportion. In *Elephant Man*, for example, Dr. Treves (played by Anthony Hopkins) is faced with the reality that his motives might not be purely humanitarian, and that he might simply be a civil and dressed-up version of the cruel Bytes, John Merrick's carnival "keeper" who claims ownership of him. Treves, in a moment of disturbed conscience asks his wife if he is a good man. We see him suffering something deeply and that his goodness is imperfect, but that it is also real goodness and not just disguised or well-behaved self-interest. We see, and feel, through this character the genuine human impulse of compassion towards his kind.

Lynch's 1999 film *The Straight Story*, is a story about redemption and forgiveness, (just as *Elephant Man* is a story about human dignity). It is also a film in which very little *happens*. A man drives a lawn tractor 400 miles to see his sick brother who has been estranged for over ten years. He undergoes this ordeal because something in him, his bitter stubbornness has undergone a transformation and his love for his brother has become unstuck. We get the sense that his *perception* of things, like what's important and what's not, has undergone a significant change. The evidence of this is a simple act - he goes to visit his brother, though this act is physically complicated by the fact that the only way he has of getting there is on his lawn tractor. What has happened inside this man is next to impossible to represent. This is why paintings and descriptions of hell are more abundant and way more interesting than those of paradise. Grace is a state of being, a state of mind, and can only be experienced from the inside looking out, and is very difficult to represent externally. Like it says in David Byrne's song, "Heaven is a place, a place where nothing ever happens".

Although David Lynch's films depict lots of evil, I don't feel this is because he believes we are essentially evil. It's more like we do evil things when we are frightened and conflicted but have trouble acknowledging this to be the case. I believe the intent of his work has more to do with



helping us get to the fear and confusion that underlies the evil deeds; to contribute to a cleansing of these windows of perception so we have less need for evil.