

Benjamin Carter

## «Mulholland Drive» by David Lynch

There is a thickness in the atmosphere: something vaporous, almost glutinous. *Mulholland Drive* is a kind of cosmological and biological schema at the same time. On the one hand there is something resembling the orbiting and also the birth and death of stars; on the other hand something similar to the joining and splitting of cells. Perhaps it's the push and pull between these scales that touches on human experience, but also on something that David Lynch usually describes as the mystery, or in this case perhaps as the silence, a kind of droning silence.

In the beginning, there is a convulsion. After the Jitterbug sequence, which is a convulsive dance, there is an explosion. But before the explosion there is a drift: a dark Cadillac is roving through darkness. In the Cadillac, the passenger's head nods to the rhythm of the road - she is clearly under the spell of this drifting movement, which seems like sleep. Then there is some apprehension of the imminent explosion: the Cadillac stops and the man in the front seat next to the driver turns and points a gun at the passenger's head. However, the explosion is not the explosion of the gun (this happens later as a stuttered echo of this scene), teenage joy riders speed around a bend in the road and impact with the Cadillac. From the carnage, the woman passenger is the only one to emerge, practically unscathed, only without memory, as if born from the flames. However, this convulsion, which perhaps has awakened her - though her first movements are angular like those of an automaton -, has perhaps awakened her on the wrong side: her face looks almost vampiric and her gaze hypnotized. She is like a dark star set on a new orbit towards the glistening lights of L.A.

And if *Mulholland Drive* is a cosmology, which it surely is in part, it is one that contains a number of zones with a degree of slippage between these zones, and a number of warps. There are the two stars - the two lead actresses of the film: one with blond hair, the bright star who will fade and perhaps burst again, and the one with brown hair, the dark star whose gravity draws the other star in. The latter, an amnesiac since the accident, puzzled by the money and the blue key that she finds in

her bag and in search of an earlier identity; the former in search of an identity for the latter - the loved object, and in search of her own self realization. This search brings them eventually to a nightclub and the discovery of the blue box that corresponds to the blue key.

The nightclub is perhaps close to the (at least symbolic) centre of this cosmos and the magician who introduces the acts seems to have some knowledge of its workings. He is aware that certain effects, which are pre-recorded, even though they may seem to emanate from the object, come from elsewhere; and more traumatically, the voice, though it seems to emanate from within the body, also comes from elsewhere. Something is speaking through these bodies, and a certain kind of miracle occurs when the voice abandons the body but nevertheless continues to speak. A singer whose eyelids are painted like a sunset, whose eyes are dark and drawn in, like black suns, with a tear painted underneath, looks like the shadowy side of Betty Boop. She sings a beautiful song of supplication and mourning. As she sings, her head fills the entire screen. The voice wells up from a space outside the screen and pours through her mouth. For Lynch this space outside the frame, outside the zone is a mysterious space - people and objects disappear into it or emerge from it. The Magician knows this when he throws his wand out of the frame and it disappears. However, the Magician's powers are such that he can also disappear within the frame, as if pulling back through it, having knowledge of the vapours. There is clearly a fascination here with what is just beyond the angle of vision or behind our backs or beyond the screen, like Orpheus looking over his shoulder. Gently the singer collapses and falls back. She is carried off the stage as a body, but her voice continues to sing. This splitting of body and voice, and simultaneously the two women in the audience joined by their convulsive sobs is both a moment of trauma and of revelation. Lynch's ideas always go in at least two directions at once.

Though the blue box, when it is eventually opened, appears to be empty, it is actually a vortex, which sucks everything that has happened up to this point in the

film through to the other side – like Alice falling down the rabbit hole or through the looking glass. Still on this side, as a viewer one feels left alone, but another zone starts to emerge. Something less fluid and more fragmented begins to appear which resemble a traumatized consciousness facing aspects of the real as if the screen has been turned around, but certain elements from the other side are starting to bleed back through.

Overall, the figures occupy this space with different degrees of success, but rarely with mastery. Perhaps the few exceptions are the magician who can disappear in space, and the dwarf in the sealed room who has achieved an almost total stillness and commands others by drawing out the appropriate question which already contains its own answer; or the cowboy who functions as an authoritative messenger because he allows the words to flow through him without any psychological resistance. But those who understand less are still adrift, while certain convulsions coming from without or within might set them on a new course.

Identity here is something absent – lost or not yet found. If the two main figures are agents, and if there is a certain enquiry, it is carried out in an almost trancelike state, there is a force luring them on, which is to some extent the other in the pair, but also something beyond. There is one moment when this drifting coagulates into an act – the ecstatic «I'm in love with you!» Whatever zone this takes place in, this moment, through its extreme vividness, certainly forms the emotional centre of the film.

But in this cosmos, there is a general drifting and crumbling. Any coagulation can only be momentary. Then there seems to be a terrible disorientation. The bright star begins to fade and in searching again for the loved object only encounters herself. There is a late scene where the blond actress while making coffee, looks up and sees the dark haired actress, she is happy.

### Abstract

This text is an analysis of the film's structure, and of the film as a medium of the analysis of life.

In a reverse shot, we see her happy face turn to terrible disgust. Here, there seems to be something welling from within, but this is more convulsion than expression. As in a Francis Bacon painting, it is more appropriate to speak of a grimace than a countenance. The next reverse shot now shows, where the dark-haired actress had been, only herself.

«*This girl isn't in my film.*» – «*It's not your film anymore.*»

*Mulholland Drive* is a film set in Hollywood using motifs culled from classical Hollywood films – film noir, the western, the circus film etc. It is partly a deconstruction, partly a re-hallucination. There is a scene where the film director is losing control of the film. The question arises: who is in control of the film I am watching? Lynch as a director, like many of his figures, and like his implied audience, resembles a traumatized agent investigating and simultaneously implicated in a conspiracy that obsessively throws up variations on a few archetypal clues, or merely symbols of clues. The agent typically will not know if he is aiding or abating the crime. And if the film is a crime, it has something fumbling and catastrophic about it, like the thief in another scene who, after murdering a friend to steal a book of phone numbers, accidentally shoots a fat lady through the wall, and, when he is dragging the lady into the first room to lay her with the other corpse and he is observed by a man with a hover, feels obliged to shoot him as well. If Lynch's work has more elegance than the thief's does, it still leaves a similar trail of criss-crossing clues, and false starts. Lynch is clearly enthralled, like we are, by the spectacle of Hollywood. His films acknowledge that our subjectivity has been drastically altered by Hollywood to the extent that it is almost the grammar that we use to understand not only films but also life. Lynch seems to want to re-hallucinate these motifs and this grammar in an almost traumatic way in order to meet them once again as his double.

### Autor

Benjamin Carter (born 1971, Cambridge, England) is an artist living and working in Berlin.

### Titel

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