

## ***Blue Velvet Handout***

### **Filmographie**

*Blue Velvet* (USA 1996). von David Lynch.

120 Minuten. Drehbuch: David Lynch.

Cast:

Isabella Rossellini	Dorothy Vallens
Kyle MacLachlan	Jeffrey Beaumont
Dennis Hopper	Frank Booth
Laura Dern	Sandy Williams
Hope Lange	Mrs. Williams
Dean Stockwell	Ben
George Dickerson	Detective John Williams
Priscilla Pointer	Mrs. Beaumont
Frances Bay	Aunt Barbara
Jack Harvey	Tom Beaumont
Ken Stovitz	Mike
Brad Dourif	Raymond
Jack Nance	Paul
J. Michael Hunter	Hunter
Dick Green	Don Vallens
Fred Pickler	Yellow Man
Philip Markert	Dr. Gynde
Leonard Watkins	Double Ed
Moses Gibson	Double Ed
Selden Smith	Nurse Cindy
Peter Carew	Coroner
Jon Jon Snipes	Little Donny
Angelo Badalamenti	Piano Player (as Andy Badale)
Jean Pierre Viale	Master of Ceremonies
Donald Moore	Desk Sergeant

A. Michelle Depland	Party Girl
Michelle Sasser	Party Girl
Katie Reid	Party Girl
Sparky	The Dog

Fred C. Caruso	producer (as Fred Caruso)
Richard Roth	executive producer (as Richard A. Roth)
Dino De Laurentiis	executive producer (uncredited)
Music by	Angelo Badalamenti
Cinematography by	Frederick Elmes, director of photography
Film Editing by	Duwayne Dunham

### Synopsis

Weil sein Vater eine Wirbelkörperfraktur erlitten hat, lässt sich der junge Jeffrey Beaumont für einige Wochen vom College beurlauben und kehrt in seinen Heimatort zurück, die friedliche Kleinstadt Lumberton. Blumen blühen vor strahlend weißen Gartenzäunen, der Feuerwehrmann winkt fröhlich im Vorüberfahren.

Auf dem Rückweg vom Krankenhaus findet der Student auf einer Wiese ein abgeschnittenes menschliches Ohr. Er übergibt es bei der örtlichen Polizei an Detective John Williams. Dieser möchte ihm wegen der noch laufenden Ermittlungen nichts über den Stand der Erkenntnisse verraten und bittet ihn, über die Angelegenheit zu schweigen. Jeffrey beschließt daraufhin aus jugendlicher Neugier, dem Fall auf eigene Faust nachzugehen.

Sandy, die Tochter von John Williams, bringt ihn auf die Spur der Nachtclubsängerin Dorothy Vallens. Jeffrey verkleidet sich als Kammerjäger und verschafft sich auf diese Weise Zutritt zu deren Wohnung. Während Dorothy von einem Mann in einem gelben Sakko abgelenkt wird, stiehlt er ihren Wohnungsschlüssel. Er dringt mit dem Schlüssel in ihre Wohnung ein und versteckt sich im Wandschrank, als Dorothy unerwartet zurückkehrt. Sie entdeckt ihn und will mit ihm schlafen, treibt ihn jedoch wieder zurück in den Wandschrank, als es an der Tür klopft. Im Schrank wird er Zeuge, wie Frank Booth an Dorothy ein sexualisiertes Ritual vollzieht, und erfährt, dass Frank Dorothys Ehemann und Kind entführt hat und gefangen hält. Das Ohr, das Jeffrey gefunden hat, stammt von Dorothys Mann.

Jeffrey beschließt, mehr über die Entführer von Dorothys Familie herauszufinden. Er beschattet Frank und dessen Handlanger und macht

Fotos von ihnen. Auch der Mann mit dem gelben Sakko taucht wieder auf. In der Nähe geschieht ein Mord an einem Drogendealer, an dem Franks Komplizen schuld zu sein scheinen. Jeffrey geht zu Dorothy und schläft mit ihr. Es stellt sich heraus, dass sie masochistische Bedürfnisse hat. Als er zur Tür hinaustritt, trifft er auf Frank und seine Begleiter. Sie zwingen ihn und Dorothy, in ihr Auto zu steigen. Sie kommen an einem Etablissement vorbei, wo im Nebenraum Dorothy offenbar ihren entführten Sohn kurz besucht. Frank und seine ebenso unberechenbaren Kameraden schüchtern die beiden vollkommen ein. Am Ende der Fahrt schlägt Frank Jeffrey zusammen und lässt ihn irgendwo außerhalb von Lumberton liegen.

Als Jeffrey am folgenden Tag erwacht, geht er zu Sandys Vater, dem Polizisten, um ihm von seinen Erlebnissen zu berichten und ihm die Fotos von Frank und seinen Männern zu zeigen. Der Mann, der stets ein gelbes Jackett trägt, entpuppt sich als ein Kollege des Polizeiinspektors. Später geht Jeffrey mit Sandy zu einer Party, wo sie sich ihre Liebe gestehen. Nach der Party verfolgt Sandys ehemaliger Freund das Paar und hält sie bei Jeffreys Haus an. Als er Jeffrey zur Rede stellen will, sehen sie Dorothy nackt, verletzt und weinend im Garten vor dem Haus stehen. Jeffrey und Sandy fahren Dorothy zum Haus von Sandys Eltern und rufen dort den Krankenwagen.

Jeffrey begibt sich ein weiteres Mal in Dorothys Wohnung und findet dort den zu Tode gefolterten Ehemann von Dorothy und den schwer verletzten Polizisten im gelben Jackett vor. Als er gehen will, sieht er Frank kommen. Mit der Waffe des Polizisten versteckt er sich erneut im Wandschrank und erschießt Frank, als der ihn entdeckt.

Danach kehrt wieder Ruhe in Jeffreys Leben ein. Er hat eine Beziehung mit Sandy, und Dorothy ist wieder mit ihrem Kind vereint.

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue\\_Velvet\\_\(Film\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Velvet_(Film))

**Songtexte**

*Roy Orbison: In Dreams/ Candy-colored clown*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szWxPNVZ4UY>

"A candy-colored clown they call the sandman  
Tiptoes to my room every night  
Just to sprinkle stardust and to whisper  
Go to sleep, everything is all right.

I close my eyes, then I drift away  
Into the magic night. I softly say  
A silent prayer like dreamers do.  
Then I fall asleep to dream my dreams of you.

In dreams I walk with you, in dreams I talk to you.  
In dreams you're mine, all of the time we're together  
In dreams, in dreams.

But just before the dawn, I awake and find you gone.  
I can't help it, I can't help it, if I cry.  
I remember that you said goodbye.

*Bobby Vinton: Blue Velvet*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icfq\\_foa5Mo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icfq_foa5Mo)

She wore blue velvet  
Bluer than velvet was the night  
Softer than satin was the light  
From the stars  
She wore blue velvet  
Bluer than velvet were her eyes  
Warmer than May her tender sighs

Love was ours  
Ours a love I held tightly  
Feeling the rapture grow  
Like a flame burning brightly  
But when she left, gone was the glow of

Blue velvet  
But in my heart there'll always be  
Precious and warm, a memory

Through the years  
And I still can see blue velvet  
Through my tears

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Die oben aufgeführten Texte finden sich im anschliessenden Dossier.

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**David Lynch**

<http://www.thecityofabsurdity.com/bluevelvet/bvabout.html>

**"Blue Velvet is a love story."**

"I started with the idea of front yards at night and Bobby Vinton's song playing from a distance. Then I always had this fantasy of sneaking into a girl's room and hiding through the night. It was a strange angle to come at a murder mystery."

"And then, I'd always had a desire to sneak into a girl's apartment and watch her through the night. I had the idea that while I was doing this I'd see something which I'd later realize was the clue to a mystery. I think people are fascinated by that, by being able to see into a world they couldn't visit. That's the fantastic thing about cinema, everybody can be a voyeur. Voyeurism is a bit like watching television – go one step further and you want to start looking in on things that are really happening."

"A film that deals with things that are hidden within a small town called Lumberton and things that are hidden within people."

"Blue Velvet is a very American movie. The look of it was inspired by my childhood in Spokane, Washington. Lumberton is a real name; there are many Lumbertons in America. I picked it because we would get police insignias and stuff, because it was an actual town. But then it took off in my mind."

"There is an autobiographical level to the movie. Kyle is dressed like me. My father was a research scientist for the Department of Agriculture in Washington. We were in the wood all the time."

"When I was little, my brother and I were outdoors late one night, and we saw a naked woman come walking down the street toward us in a dazed state, crying. I have never forgotten that moment."

"To me a mystery is like a magnet. Whenever there is something that's unknown, it has a pull to it. For instance, if you were in a room and there was a doorway open and stairs going down and the light just fell away, you didn't even see the bottom, where the stairs ended; you'd be very much tempted to go down there."

"It had to be an ear because it's an opening. An ear is wide and you go down into it. It goes somewhere vast."

"[the ear is] a ticket to another world."

"The colors in the film are part of the mystery. One of Frank's accomplices, for example, always wears a yellow suit or raincoat. Blue is also my favourite color and I wanted it to be in contrast with the red lipstick worn by Dorothy."

"She [Dorothy Vallens] is a willing captive. I feel that people can fall into these things, like steps. In real life, it doesn't happen so fast. I'm not saying it couldn't. I feel like people get into it by degrees. The boy in the

film does what she asks him to do, and finds in himself the ability to do a lot of the things he never thought he could do."

"Frank is totally in love. He just doesn't know how to show it. He may have gotten into some strange things but he's still motivated by positive things."

"Frank, to me, is a guy Americans know very well. I'm sure most everybody growing up has met someone like Frank. They might not have shook his hand and gone out for a drink with him, but all you've got to do is exchange eye contact with someone like that and you know that you've met him."

"The only thing to say about all the controversy is, did I make all that up, or are there examples in real life? And there are countless examples like that in real life. So why do they get upset when you put something like this in a film? People get into all sorts of strange situations, and you can't believe they're enjoying it, but they are. There are lots of reasons for it. It gets you into psychiatry."

"Because people have an idea that Dorothy was Everywoman, instead of being just Dorothy. That's where the problem starts. If it's just Dorothy, and it's her story - which it is to me - then everything is fine ... When you start talking about "women" versus "a woman," then you're getting into this area of generalization. There's a billion of different stories and possibilities."

"Dennis Hopper called me up one day after reading the script. He said, 'David, you have to let me play Frank because I am Frank'. That scared the hell out of me!"

#### **Regarding the sentence "He put his disease in me" in Blue Velvet**

"Just the word disease used in that way – it's so beautiful just to leave it abstract. Once it becomes specific it's no longer true to a lot of people. Where if it's abstract there could be some truth to it for everybody." 🗡️

#### **Jack Nance (Paul)**

"...We were still editing Eraserhead, and I went over one afternoon...He [David Lynch] showed me this little drawing he'd done...He had this three-by-five drawing that he'd done of this rustic roadhouse or saloon, out in the countryside. It was just by the side of the road with this big neon sign on top of the place that said: "Blue Velvet." He showed it to me and said: "How do you like it, Jack?" I said: "It's beautiful." He said: "We're going to do that someday." I said: "Do what?" And he said: "We're going to do Blue Velvet someday. It's a movie." When we were shooting that scene years later in that Roadhouse - when Hopper is sitting there fondling the blue velvet and Isabella is singing the song – it was incredible. After that first take I went over to David and said: "I know how many years you've been waiting to



hear that song."

**Dennis Hopper (Frank Booth)**

"I know exactly the kind of guy Frank is, I've met that character lotsa times. His drug intake is a vital thing because he's warped out on a certain chemical . . . uh . . . imbalance. Uppers, a whole variety of pharmaceutical 'ups' and a lot of alcohol are what shapes Frank's whole point of view. I've been there and when I read the script actually I hadn't even seen a David Lynch film beforehand - but I read the script and it was . . . right - I have to have that part! So I knew David had started filming and, knowing this one phone call was crucial, I became Frank. I had to cut through the shit and let Lynch know he needed me. There was no other choice. And it worked."

"And at the end of the movie, in those last images, there's the shot of Dorothy - she's sitting in some park with her little son in her arms. David's intention -'cos he told me this - is to let the viewer know that it's not over, she's still thinking about Frank, still longing for him. Frank's dead but she'll always love him."

**Isabella Rossellini (Dorothy Vallens)**

"I tried to portray not just a character, but a character development."

"I see Dorothy very much as a victim and as someone who is suffering. Yes, she does get herself into this situation, and yes, she does enjoy being beaten, but she was probably totally twisted and totally crazy and sad. And she does begin to come out of it as the film ends."

"The film is basically a search into the unknown. In a search, you find something. You begin to understand something, whether it's good or bad, about yourself, and the world and that you have choices. It's a process of knowledge, and experience."

"A lot of people thought that Blue Velvet was sick, but for me, it was David's reasearch of the good and the bad. There is an incredible gentleness and a conflict between good and evil in him that is so moving. It's absolutely the core of his art, and it makes him a profoundly moral person. He's also great fun. I mean, humour beyond the beyond! I laughed a lot in the years that I worked with him. He doesn't make himself into a character. He's just from Montana."

"It is not true that David Lynch wanted to humiliate me. I never felt exploited or abused"

"When I came out of the bushes totally naked, I felt like a slab of beef hanging. There was nothing sexy about it. It would have felt like a sin if I was doing a nude scene to titillate the public."

"[David Lynch is] seraphic, blissed. Most people have strange thoughts, but they don't rationalize them. David doesn't translate his images logically, so they remain raw, emotional. Whenever I ask him where his ideas come from, he says it's like fishing. He never knows what he's going

to catch."

**Laura Dern (Sandy Williams)**

"David is as much a believer in the robins as in Frank Booth."

**Jack Fisk (friend who studied and worked with David Lynch)**

"I saw so much of David in the Kyle (Mac Lachlan, who plays Jeffrey Beaumont) character – his walk, his mannerisms."

## THE LANGUAGE OF FILM USING DAVID LYNCH'S BLUE VELVET

<http://declanogallagher.blogspot.com/2016/04/the-language-of-film-using-david-lynchs.html> 23.10.18

I'd like to start with the hypothesis that there are three protagonists in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*. 1. Frank Booth. 2 "The Well Dressed Man" and 3. Jeffrey Beaumont. These are the same person, three parts of David Lynch. They are the topology expressed in Lacanian terms as 1. The Real, 2. The Imaginary Order and 3. The Symbolic Order. In that order ..Boom boom!

The Real – Frank Booth is the “State of nature from which we have been forever severed by our entrance into language,<sup>3</sup>” “the domain of the inexpressible, the domain of death and inexpressible enjoyment [*jouissance*].<sup>4</sup>” According to Lacan it is the Real that “isn't a world of things, it isn't a world of being, it is a world of desire.<sup>5</sup>” In our dreams we encounter the traumatic Real, as it processes thought in a surreal and calculated manner. The Real is the period in life as neo-natal children where we have nothing but need. The Real has no language but still remains with us after we gain the ability of language. Lacan often said, “ The Real is impossible,<sup>6</sup> “ due to its infantile nature.

The Imaginary Order, Ideal-I or Ideal-ego -“the well dressed man” is the “fundamental narcissism by which the human subject creates fantasy images of both himself and his ideal object,<sup>3</sup>” says Felluga. The realm of the ego that accounts for an impression of ourselves as individuals and as separate identity to others. It is first encountered in early childhood when looking in a mirror, hence known as the “Mirror Stage.<sup>6</sup>” It acts as a suture for the Real to the Symbolic Order, giving access to the echelons presupposed to exist in the *nom de pere* [“name of the father.<sup>6</sup>”] That is the almighty “no” of the child's' elders. The inevitable discipline handed out to young growing child.

The Symbolic Order -Jeffery Beaumont is the world of linguistic intersubjective social relations. It is the rules of the game subjectivised. Also known as the big Other, due to the presupposition that it is part of radical alterity, otherness as opposed to the original Real. Once a child has this attribution, they can manage and thrive in a social world. Žižek calls the Symbolic Order “Societies unwritten constitution, the second nature of every speaking being.<sup>7</sup>” It is the logical negotiation initiated and accepting of the castration complex, buttressed to the Imaginary Order. It contains lack as opposed to the Real where, “there is no lack or absence.<sup>5</sup>”

These are the three disparate characters played out as Lynchian Blue Velvet fantasy, they are dangerously separated. Lacanian psychoanalysis tells us that these features of the Real, the Imaginary Order and the Symbolic Order are normalised when tied together with a Borromean knot. Unfortunately, there is no Borromean knot to guide the three protagonists through the complexities of Blue Velvet. They are but used as catalysts to visualise distinguishing features of other characters and situations in the Lumberton milieu.

The invention of film lends itself to a developing and contrasting analysis. As an adjunct to David Lynch's Blue Velvet and language of cinema itself, I take on the task

of explaining, form and meaning [sign and signified] within scenes of Blue Velvet using metalanguages. For example, the post-structuralist theories of Derrida's deconstruction and Lacanian tools of psychoanalysis.

René Descartes famously stated, "cogito ergo sum.<sup>1</sup>" I think, therefore I am. This was later built upon by a dictum of Foucault, observing reality to be split into "discursive formations,<sup>2</sup>" body and mind. The phenomenology of the Lynchian spirit is a building of the Hegelian thesis – antithesis towards freedom.

Hollywood distinctly and traditionally draws the gaze to a common aesthetic body image, which is only the partial story of the Descartes' binarism. Where as Lynch constitutes the other ontology of cinema, the mind, specifically the subconscious. The entity that is really in charge.

Cinema contains, a categorical grammar, a generative syntax and an impart of information – apropos a language of film. Syntagms of cinema are often considered analogous to the written word. The frame as the word, the establishing shot as the first sentence, the scene as paragraph and sequence as chapter. As we can see there are many ways to tell a story. Goddard suggests we can juggle with film- edit in many different ways, play with time and space. He says, "Movies should have a beginning, a middle and an end but not necessarily in that order.<sup>8</sup>"

So why just "a" language of film? Can we not suggest that there are many languages of film? Film language follows a presupposition of rules through conflated cultures, and although we can share the intersubjectivity of watching a film, we will interpret the film differently. In a Saussurean sense the significant remains the same while the signifier changes. This is the attribute of film that the sign and signified are often so similar but it still a language. The mimesis of narrative through cinema is rightly justified as language confirmed by Claude Levi Strauss "a myth is always recognised as being such by those to whom it is recited, even when it has been translated from one idiom into another, even when it's exact formulation has been somewhat modified<sup>9</sup>". Perhaps it is best to say there is one language of film but many dialects and as Deleuze puts it "cinema is the universal language."

A key element to cinematic wisdom is the use of conventional styles to effect. Accordingly the opening/establishing shot of Blue Velvet is a pivotal one. It is here that Lynch valorises a full frame of blue velvet material as iconic from which all-else leads. This starting point is a considered display of the discourse of psychology's "primary and recency<sup>10</sup>." This is the wisdom of the order of the montage, underpinned by the relevance of the first and last frames. The spectator not only posits a salience to these positions but also readily remembers them. To begin with a sheet of blue velvet is to set the scene as grand expose of the movie's thesis. The velvet commonly used as theatre curtain and positioned here metaphorically as about to open, suggests Lynch will be truthful, open, raw and that this is a fetish movie – caveat emptor.

Camera movements are sparse subtle and homogenous throughout the Blue Velvet timeline. David Lynch is not the auteur with distinctive shots drawing attention to himself. His auteur qualities are within the characters and script. The lack of camera movement does not expound the limits of Hollywood proper. Lynch is not willing to superficially "wow" an audience with cinema apparatus. The emotion developed within the film has an appearance to be spectator driven. The shots have unity. Quite often still frame after still frame. Lynch camera movements are slow, creeping through shots, more leaning than actually moving. The pan, the tracking, the short crane, all slow and emblematic of appearance being self contained. Lynch uses the

Extreme Close Up [ECU] to effect. It's a gateway to the insect world, synonymous with our three characters that plod their way without direction.

Freud's full and varied analysis of fetish always brought him to the same conclusion. "In every instance, the meaning and purpose of the fetish turned out in analysis to be the same<sup>11</sup>". Further he states, "The fetish is a substitute for the penis.<sup>9</sup>" This is not an everyday penis but one that has been lost in early childhood. A fetish is a substitute for this lost women's [the mother's] penis.

In *Blue Velvet* there is a role-play fantasy where baby Frank has seen his mother Dorothy with no penis and is perplexed by this concept. Frank believes [Mother] Dorothy has been transformed; Freud calls it a "verleugnung or disavowal,<sup>11</sup>" the castration complex. This méconnaissance or misunderstanding is due to what Lacan says is "a lack.<sup>6</sup>" In this state Freud postulates the female genitals as "stigma indelebile.<sup>11</sup>" Freud states further that the repression at this stage can provide an aversion to female genitalia in the analysand, Frank. Freud continues to discuss, he/she "Treats it [the fetish] in a way which is obviously equivalent to a representation of castration.<sup>11</sup>" Frank embellishes the velvet as a metaphorical umbilical cord, as it is placed in his mouth and in Dorothy's mouth. The umbilical cord is severed after birth, analogous to the mythical phallus. Frank uses this material as the symbol of the catastrophe. The blue velvet fetish is commandeered to mythologise the unfathomable castration, a distraction from that idea which is so hard to contemplate. The fetish begins to unravel, the more abstract and undemonstrative, the greater the possibility of distraction. Reductio ad absurdum, so no one can deduce this original sin.

Frank is confronting the original sin narrative, the castration complex. He sits in front of Dorothy and demands to see the genitals missing. "Wider" says Frank. Adam and Eve were both penalised for their inaugural crime. This too is played out in *Blue Velvet*, as Dorothy and Frank are both punished within the film. While *Blue Velvet* harnesses the mask and velvet for its fetish. Adam and Eve use a bitten apple to symbolise the mythical missing phallus. This is a smoke and mirror trick covering the mothers' loss. A memorial to the phallus, the Adam and Eve artifact.

Frank's terror has not left him, he returns to the point of contention, the ineffable female genitalia. He ritualises the loss. Freud believes that this is the time when either transcendence to homosexuality may occur or a fetish will appear or the loss is merely surmounted. It can be surmised that we must count ourselves lucky for our existence for according to Freud, Adam or Eve at this point could have not found the apple fetish and instead become gay.

*Blue Velvet* manages to engage an audience through distinctive reasoning beginning with the agency of the gaze. Lynch's overt attention to gaze for example, in the line, "Don't you fucking look at me," privileges this paradigm and explicitly recognises the spectator and the agenda of the hegemony of cinema within the spectator's gaze. This is the essential question for Lynch, what are you looking at?

Theorists have surmised that the all-important gazing at the cinema is a directed male gaze. The cinema can be considered as yet again a "Mirror Stage,<sup>6</sup>" not only a physical mirror but everywhere in the film where we bedeck an image with ourselves. The cinematic viewers invent themselves into the scene, a psychic *mis en scene*. Stereotypically, both male and females look with a male gaze to see "radical alterity.<sup>7</sup>" We take up with a side and instill ourselves within the image proper, embarking on all the vicissitudes of the narrative. In the cinematic experience we will laud ourselves with all the gains of our ingratiated character and deny, as only

cinema, tragic outcomes of our hero. Within cinema we manage to look at all our parts from a safe distance. But be careful for this discourse is masquerading as a story. Nichols proposes that the cinema itself, watching a bright screen in a darkened room is tantamount to a Lacanian return to the "Mirror phase<sup>6</sup>" in which the self is orchestrated. I assert that this is what we search for within the scopophilic fantasy of cinema.

Cinema in Lacanian terms is "an attempt to disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and win it for the Symbolic in the hope of extending the later by a new province.<sup>12</sup>" Widely established as the key to the power of the cinema and termed "The Imaginary Signifier.<sup>12</sup>" Touted as evoking our ability to align and transcend into as self, creating immediate alterity in cinema. As social geographical scape entrenched in the Imaginary, it hopes to make gains promised in the Symbolic. Cinema is a safe substitute for any experience. We view cinema as a fantasy to escape reality, knowing that we can escape cinema to go back to reality. It is wish fulfillment we never asked for. The never-ending cycle of desire unfulfilled, the object little a.

The Object little a or *Objet a* is the object cause of desire. Lacan calls it the "field of the image of the narcissist function of desire<sup>13</sup>". In the Lacan elementary scheme it exists as the fly in the ointment. It is the wall that prevents the ability to close the pleasure loop, representative of the "pleasure in pain<sup>14</sup>" of *jouissance*. Žižek calls it "the never ending, repeated circulation around the unattainable.<sup>14</sup>"

The Lacanian schema, introducing the *objet a* as a wall in the pleasure loop. Fig1

The desire and "*objet petit a*" revolves through an elders 'No'. The child diverts desire from the mother in the Real to big Other. The *objet a* is in the big Other and thus Symbolic Order. Anxiety is also linked to the big other. Frank's problem [Lynch's problem] is he doesn't know what he wants. The *objet a* within his Symbolic Order is asking him to react, yet not knowing what to desire has the affect of anxiety. These are the characteristics of Frank, his never ending anxiety linked to his desire.

The fundamental connection between gaze and *objet a* threatens to erupt in the Real. It is a misrecognition as already cited as a "lack<sup>6</sup>". We see something and want it but this is misunderstood, it is a narcissistic projection. For at the centre is our continuous desire. We have only grasped an illusion. According to Lacan the gaze has a male or a female mystic. The female gaze is non-phallic, not pleasure seeking gaze. Where as the male gaze can sit in judgment like a God. Frank abhors Dorothy's gaze. Dorothy's gaze is a phallic gaze, in the Lacanian sense of who initiates the law. It is Frank who interprets Dorothy's gaze as phallic/male and as such is enraged. He becomes violent. A psychoanalysis interpretation would phrase this as "resistance.<sup>6</sup>" The place of "transference.<sup>6</sup>" Lacan calls it "to confuse his contemplative eye with the eye with which God is looking at him must surely be of perverse *jouissance*.<sup>15</sup>" For Frank this is an area of great distress, expletive after expletive exemplifies his hurt.

Frank is of the Real, the dream like state of early infancy. As cinema itself denotes dreaming while awake we can accept that the audience is watching a fluid distortion of reality to tragedy, commensurate with the way dreams structure themselves. Charles Pierce poses; "Contemplating a painting, there is a moment when we lose consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears. It is for the moment a pure dream<sup>16</sup>" So too does the signifier and the

signified blend to leave us beholden to cinema. James Monaco laments that this signifier/signified meld is “the power of the film.<sup>17</sup>”

When Frank first sits down with Dorothy, he exhibits a sexual ritual and Lynch through this fantasy uses drone music to effect. The drone music brings emphasis. Marshall McLuhan explains this use of music, “With the sense of sight, the idea communicates the emotion, whereas with sound, the emotion communicates the idea, which is more direct and therefore more powerful.<sup>18</sup>” This is a fundamental secret to the mystery of the medium. We do not conjure up demons with pictures, we conjure with sounds. The music is a precursor to the unknown or as Barthes puts it “music is dangerous- music is an access to jouissance, to loss, as numerous popular examples would tend to show.<sup>17</sup>” In *Blue Velvet* is used by Frank to access his own sadistic jouissance.

He is quite overcome, transfixed and in the Real. In the Lacanian sense, a rude unchaste state. He has somehow acquired language ability without the *nom de pere* [name of the father]. As Lacan suggests a variable outcome in the entrance to the Symbolic order “... the penumbra of symbolic efficacy.<sup>6</sup>” Frank’s outcome would appear to be a shadow of this minimal eclipse as he crosses the threshold of the Imaginary but distinctly missed the social engineering of the Symbolic. Frank’s transference is loud but hidden in his milieu. His male group is poetically dysfunctional and hardly notices Frank’s out of place antics. Frank never acquired the instruments of self-discipline handed out by his elders.

Frank moves forward, kneels in front of Dorothy. It is at this moment that he comes to terms with the origin of desire. Lacan describes these desires comparable to “Aglama” in Plato’s *Symposium*. The story goes that this Aglama precious gem is stored in a worthless box and that this is the desire we seek within the other. The birth of desire comes at the departure from the Real to the symbolic, it is the residue left over from this reaction. The Aglama gem is metaphorical of this desire.

Frank, unable to enter the Symbolic Order is stuck in time between conception and language in the Real. Demanding overbearing, selfish and bearing the marks of a child unrestrained. As Yannis Stavrakakis says “The real is the domain of the inexpressible<sup>4</sup>”.

Frank looks frightened, as if an act of bravery, he leaps to the female genitalia, gas mask in hand. He breathes deeply into the mask. More nitrous oxide. He cries like a child. “Mammy mammy....

Dorothy says “Mammy loves you”

A purely Oedipal moment satorised by Lynch. Frank has found his *objet petit a* the unobtainable object of desire. The movie not once uses a word for the female genitalia, even with censorship abound it could have used any aphorism, the word is the ineffable name, Frank’s transference, resistance, the place, the border between Frank and the Imaginary/Symbolic. He sits in front of Dorothy’s genitalia conflicted with this mystery. The opposites battle it out in Frank’s mind. A Hegelian master/slave dialect. According to Hegelian discourse Frank confronts the binarism of his woman and dominates the picture, only to find that this does not give him the control he was after. Hence desire is perpetuated. Deleuze and Guattari describe this state of mind “a desiring machine, a real and productive force.<sup>20</sup>” Lacan sees it as something left over.

Frank has language but remains in the mindset of the Real. Interpreted as having problems with the Symbolic schema of male/female authority. Frank as pervert is

kept in service by his big Other that he needs to satisfy. The will to enjoy [volonte de jouir] is now the motivations of the big Other. What scares anyone remains physically outside of us and constitutes what Žižek calls the “Supreme evil being.<sup>15</sup>” It is fearful-alterity-other people. To keep these other people in check we must be sadistic, to prevent this unconscious cataclysm to erupt. These other people know they are evil and thus we justify their harm. The victim is aware of the evil nurtured inside of them and accepts the actions of the sadist. This is the sadomasochism of Frank. The sadist doesn’t care if the victim is not enjoying the punishment for they can easily convert their guilt to innocence by burdening themselves with the displeasure of viewing the pain they have inflicted. This is the equalising power of their culpability.

Freud was symbolic when announcing the Oedipal child wants to have sex with the mother and bash the father. He means it only in essence, a proposition in possibility more than actuality. An unspoken possibility within the extended family unit. Slavoj Žižek says “a violence grounded in no utilitarian or ideological reason<sup>15</sup>” is an “elementary imbalance in the relationship between ego and jouissance<sup>19</sup>” He specifically names this “The evil Id.<sup>15</sup>”

The fantasy of Blue Velvet and cinema per se can be divided into two. Firstly we are spectators in the realisation that it is a movie and we can rightly expect a slice of jouissance. We have paid for this, we expect some pleasure. We can suspend our reality for the exchange of jouissance in the Real to the Symbolic order. That is we understand “it’s just a movie”. In Deleuze “The Time Image” he postulates that cinema acts as a structuring system that has constitutive excess. We are a spectator of the movie and we wish to be merely entertained. Secondly we take note of how order is developed, how it is managed and what are the outcomes of personalising the movie. We float from the Real through the Imaginary to the Symbolic order. We are the projectionists, in the sense we project ourselves into the movie. An understanding is gathered; our joy is accepting parameters that are played out within the movie. As Lacan calls it a suture denoting a “Conjunction of the imaginary and the symbolic<sup>13</sup>.” This is the control a movie seeks. What the cinema per se demands. It is the police force we embrace. Žižek states the alternative is psychosis “A refusal to exchange enjoyment for the name of the father<sup>14</sup>”. Thus the lure of the cinema experience we have to enjoy or we are disturbed.

Lacan cites “Every truth has a partial truth.<sup>21</sup>” He reads the narratives of Plato, Hegel and Kierkegaard to elaborate on psychoanalysis theories. To define what is really going on in the libidinal economy. Many of the ideas are parable in style and we are told to take meanings as symbols not literally. As in the word “Phallic.<sup>6</sup>” Lacan has trespassed language constituting the neologism of the Real, Imaginary Order and Symbolic Order which in terms of semiotics makes a critique considering the words original meanings. I’m saying essentially he has hijacked them from original meanings. So we understand “every truth as a partial truth<sup>21</sup>” as a presage for a number of Freud/Lacan parables as unsubstantial. Noam Chomsky calls Lacan “amusing and perfectly self conscious charlatan.<sup>22</sup>” Lacan at best has given us some new building blocks to work with, at worst he has produced, what Foucault calls “obscurantist terrorism.<sup>23</sup>” Obscure in his writing and terrorism to those who don’t understand.

Blue Velvet has psychoanalytical roots. It nurtures the Real, the Imaginary Order and the Symbolic Order to embellish characters that exist in troubled illogical states. Lacan and Freud have brought rules to an understanding of popular cultural artifacts, mysteries have become tangible understandings. There is much more to do

concerning the foundations of this work. Slavoj Žižek has played a large part in re-defining a psychoanalysis cinema studies context. His books, "Enjoy Your Symptom" and "Looking Awry" have cultivated ways of deconstructing cinema. We have discovered Adam and Eve to be the castration complex. Much more can be done to look at and unravel these Lacanian "partial truths" that are still becoming. We can draw upon other cultures, other mythologies to derive theories to explain and nurture human capabilities of what Kant calls "the morality within". The gaze is an all important subject in terms of male/female divide, desire and meaning. Gaze can hold us, move us, direct us, disavow us within cinematic systems. The spectator is a willing participant in the control that cinema exerts. It can challenge or reinforce our beliefs, acting as law for paid up spectators, willing to succumb to a substitute for an experience. It may be seen as a selfish leisure time fantasy escape, the spectator only willing to be its only benefactor. Perhaps it may bring some of its reflection and ideas back into the present time-space continuum through discussion/conversation outside of the movie theatre, heralding community to a Symbolic Order.

Is psychoanalysis now saved from history rejuvenated by its use in visual culture?

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Posted by [Declan O'Gallagher](#) at [7:22 PM](#)

## "That's a human ear all right". *Blue Velvet* und das Ohr

von Oliver Speck

<https://parapluie.de/archiv/ohr/bluevelvet/> 18.09.18

*Blue Velvet, David Lynchs Kultfilm aus dem Jahr 1986, ist der einzige Film, der das Ohr nicht nur als Mittel zum symbolischen Zweck benutzt, sondern es bewußt zu Ende denkt. Dazu trennt Blue Velvet in seiner berühmten Anfangssequenz das Ohr vom Körper und damit auch den Sinn vom Organ. Wenn Sinn und Organ dann in einer Allegorisierung gegeneinander ausgespielt werden, zerstört dies nicht, wie man erwarten könnte, den Spaß am Film. Was hier "Ohr" genannt wird, ist nichts weniger als der Motor des Kinos -- die Übersetzung von Wortsinn in Bild und Bild in Sinn, und deren anschließende Zusammenfügung in einer phantasmatischen Szene.*

"Yes, that's a human ear all right." -- Mit diesem lakonischen Satz quittiert Detective Williams den unerhörten Fund, den Jeffrey Beaumont ihm in einer braunen Papiertüte überreicht. Das abgeschnittene Ohr, achtlos weggeworfen in einem Brachland, ist das erste Anzeichen dafür, daß etwas faul ist in dieser in David Lynchs Kultfilm *Blue Velvet* (1986) in Szene gesetzten idyllischen amerikanischen Kleinstadt. Denn das Ohr, wie Menschen mit einer Mittelohrentzündung leidvoll erfahren müssen, ist nicht nur zum Hören da, es dient auch dem Gleichgewichtssinn. Und dieses Gleichgewicht ist empfindlich gestört in Lumberton, USA: Korruption, Erpressung, Drogenhandel und Perversion regieren hinter der kleinbürgerlichen Fassade.

Fast zwanzig Jahre nach der Uraufführung, nach unzähligen Skandalen und Kriegen, wirkt die beißende Kritik an der amerikanischen Idylle hinter dem 'picket fence', dem allgegenwärtigen weißen Gartenzaun, möglicherweise etwas bemüht; *Blue Velvet* bleibt jedoch einer der wenigen Filme, die sich das Ohr zum Thema nehmen. Die Dialektik von Hören und Sehen wird natürlich von vielen Regisseuren zur Spannungssteigerung genutzt, allen voran Fritz Lang in seinem großartigen Film *M -- Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (1931). Die Stimme des Kindermörders bleibt wohl jedem Zuschauer in Erinnerung -- und zwar deswegen, weil man sie hilflos einem Körper zuordnen will. Michel Chion hat der Stimme aus dem Off, die er "akusmatisch" nennt, ein ganzes Buch gewidmet. Wer ein Geräusch hört, will die Quelle desselben erfahren. Dies ist eine ganz natürliche Reaktion unseres Hirnstammes, die sich jeder noch so billige Horrorfilm zunutze macht. Die Kombination von Sehen und Hören ist natürlich auch komisch -- Hitchcock läßt 1935 in *The 39 Steps* den schrillen Schrei einer Frau in das Pfeifen einer Lokomotive übergehen. Auch sollten *The Conversation* (1974) von Francis Ford Coppola und Brian DePalmas Thriller *Blow Out* (1981) nicht unerwähnt bleiben. Allein *Blue Velvet* aber dissoziiert das Ohr vom Körper, trennt den Sinn vom Organ

und spielt beide in einer Allegorisierung gegeneinander aus, ohne jedoch den Spaß am Film selbst zu zerstören; im Gegenteil, die Übersetzung von Wortsinn in Bild und Bild in Sinn ist der Motor des Kinos. Damit beschreibt *Blue Velvet* die grundlegende Funktion des Ohrs im Film als die einer Trennung von Bild und Wort und deren anschließende Zusammenfügung in einer phantasmatischen Szene.

Die Methode ist dabei außerordentlich komplex und vielschichtig. Ein kurze Szene zu Anfang des Films kann das Verfahren erläutern: Der Gerichtsmediziner, dem Jeffreys Fundstück vorgelegt wird, erklärt, daß das Ohr von einem lebenden Menschen stammt und "mit einer Schere" abgeschnitten wurde. Nach einem harten Schnitt sehen wir eine Schere in Großaufnahme, die ein Plastikband durchschneidet, von entsprechendem, überlautem Schnittgeräusch begleitet. Das Band dient der Polizei zur Absperrung. "DON'T CROSS" lesen wir und die Schere trennt das "DON" ab. Zu Don gehörte einmal das Ohr, und 'Don' ist ein Name, den wir noch oft im Film hören werden, vor allem, da der Akzent der Hauptdarstellerin es oft schwierig macht, zwischen 'Don' und 'don't' zu unterscheiden. Die Assoziation der brutalen Information ("ein Mensch, dem das Ohr mit einer Schere abgeschnitten wurde") verweist auf eine Kastration; mit dem Filmschnitt und dem Scherengeräusch ergibt sich fast zeitgleich ihre Dissoziation, da auf die Struktur des Texts selbst hingewiesen wird -- filmische Assoziation funktioniert schließlich durch Montage. Und die ständige Kastrationsdrohung, die die imaginäre Herrschaft des Zuschauers über den Film bedroht, sorgt wiederum für die emotionale Einbindung in den Film. Diese komplexe emblematische Dissoziation findet ihre Umkehrung in der Echolalie. Das Wort 'Fuck' zum Beispiel verliert durch die andauernde, sinnlose Wiederholung seine Schockwirkung: "Fuck you, you fucking fuck," erklärt der Gangster. Hier wird der Sinn quasi erschöpft, ausgelaugt, bis nur noch die entleerte Worthülse übrig bleibt.

Es ist an dieser Stelle nun nötig, kurz die Geschichte von *Blue Velvet* ins Gedächtnis zurückzurufen. Der Prolog definiert die Atmosphäre für den gesamten Film und hat David Lynch den Ruf eines postmodernen Regisseurs eingebracht. Nach einer Montage von hyperrealen Bildern (Rosen, so rot wie ein Feuerwehrgewagen, knallgelbe Tulpen vor einem weißen Zaun und einem tiefblauen Himmel) sehen wir einen Mann -- Jeffreys Vater, wie sich herausstellen wird -- beim Gießen. In einer schnellen Montage folgen nun Großaufnahmen des Gartenschlauchs, der sich im Gebüsch verfangen hat und des Mannes, der am Schlauch zerrt. Der folgende 'Unfall' bleibt rätselhaft: Ist es ein Schlaganfall, eine Herzattacke, ein Insektenstich oder gar ein Trauma? Während Jeffreys Vater hilflos am Boden liegt, eröffnet sich uns ein grausam-komisches Bild der Verknennung. Ein kleines Kind schaut fasziniert zu wie ein Hund mit dem Wasserstrahl spielt. Die Kamera nähert sich nun dem Gras und enthüllt in extremer Großaufnahme, was unter dem wohlgepflegten Vorstadtrasen vorgeht: Begleitet von Rascheln und Schmatzen, sehen wir schwarze Käfer, die sich anscheinend bekämpfen. Mag auch diese Metapher für den moralischen Zustand der Stadt etwas plakativ erscheinen, so ist doch die Betonung von "Ohr/(Zu-/Ver-)Hören" mehr als

nur ein Gag: Jeffrey's Abstieg in die Unterwelt wird von einer Kamerafahrt in die abgeschnittene Ohrmuschel buchstäblich eingeläutet -- auf der Tonspur hören wir seltsam dumpfe Geräusche, die an die Maschinengeräusche der monströsen Morlocks in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* erinnern.

Wie Jeffrey später herausfinden wird, gehört das Ohr Don Valens, dessen Ehefrau Dorothy (Isabella Rossellini) von Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) erpreßt wird. Frank hat nicht nur Don, sondern auch Donnie, Dorothys Sohn, in seiner Gewalt. Die Tochter des Detektivs, Sandy (Laura Dern), hat bei ihrem Vater gelauscht und Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan) auf die richtige Spur gebracht. Als Kammerjäger verkleidet, verschafft sich Jeffrey bei Dorothy, einer Nachtclubsängerin, Eintritt und entwendet einen Zweitschlüssel. Als er nachts Dorothys Apartment durchsucht, wird er von dieser überrascht und gezwungen, sich auszuziehen. Dorothy gibt der Situation schnell eine sadomasochistische Wendung. Als die beiden plötzlich von Frank überrascht werden, kann Jeffrey gerade noch in den Wandschrank fliehen. Er wird nun Zeuge der Szene, die sich den meisten Zuschauern ins Gedächtnis eingegraben hat: Frank, der erst ein geheimnisvolles Gas aus einem mitgebrachten Behälter inhaliert hat, regrediert sichtlich ("Baby wants to fuck! Baby wants to fuck *Blue Velvet!*"). Mit einem Stück blauem Samt als Nabelschnur inszeniert er eine lautstarke Kopulation, wobei Frank weder seinen Gürtel öffnet, noch die Hosen herunterläßt. Jeffrey als hilfloser Voyeur ist sichtlich fasziniert von dieser Urszene. Während sich zwischen Jeffrey und Sandy eine zarte Romanze entwickelt, hat die mysteriöse Dorothy eine dunkle Leidenschaft in Jeffrey entfacht. Bei seinem zweiten Besuch bei Dorothy (sie wohnt -- *nomen est omen* -- im Apartmentkomplex *Deep River*) schlafen die beiden miteinander und Dorothy muß Jeffrey nicht lange verführen, sie beim Sex auch zu schlagen.

Frank und seine Gang passen Jeffrey ab, als dieser Dorothys Apartment verläßt. Nach einem Zwischenstop bei Ben, der Dorothys Sohn gefangen hält und ein Bordell mit übergewichtigen und überreifen Damen führt, erklärt Frank, daß Jeffrey sein Doppelgänger sei, bevor er ihn unter den Klängen von *In Dreams* von Roy Orbison zusammenschlägt. Erst jetzt übergibt Jeffrey seine gesammelten Indizen an Detective Williams: Das wichtigste Mitglied von Franks Bande, der Mann in der gelben Jacke, ist ebenfalls Polizist und Detective Williams' Partner.

Dorothy erscheint nun verwirrt und blutig bei Jeffrey und bittet ihn um Hilfe. Was Jeffrey in Dorothys Apartment vorfindet, gleicht einem Alptraum. Der Mann in der gelben Jacke hat zwar eine Kopfwunde, steht jedoch noch auf seinen Beinen. Ein weiterer Mann, dem ein Ohr fehlt und von dem wir daher annehmen müssen, daß es Don ist, ist tot. Als Jeffrey das Apartment verlassen will, sieht er sich in einer Falle. Frank konnte der Polizei entkommen und ist auf dem Weg ins Apartment. Mit einem Trick gelingt es Jeffrey, sich Zeit zu verschaffen. Mit dem Funkgerät des Polizisten alarmiert er Detective Williams und teilt ihm mit, wo er sich versteckt, wohl wissend, daß Frank mithören kann. Die falsche Fährte

lenkt Frank lange genug ab. Jeffrey kann den Revolver des Polizisten an sich bringen und Frank damit erschießen.

Der Epilog beginnt mit einer Fahrt aus Jeffreys Ohr heraus. Wir sehen ihn in seinem kleinbürgerlichen Idyll auf einem Liegestuhl im Garten liegen. Sandys und Jeffreys Eltern verstehen sich großartig. Die letzte Einstellung zeigt ein Rotkehlchen, augenscheinlich mechanisch, das einen noch zappelnden, schwarzen Käfer im Schnabel hält.

Die Detailaufnahmen der Ohren -- erst des schimmlichen, abgetrennten Ohrs, dann, am Ende des Ohrs von Jeffrey -- klammern die Handlung ein. Diese Kamerafahrten könnten natürlich bedeuten, daß wir es hier mit einem Alptraum zu tun haben, das alles nur "im Kopf" stattfindet. Roy Orbisons Ohrwurm scheint zunächst auch dafür zu sprechen -- *In Dreams*, Franks Lieblingslied, das dieser jedoch nach der ersten Zeile "Candy-Colored Clown" nennt:

"A candy-colored clown they call the sandman  
Tiptoes to my room every night  
Just to sprinkle stardust and to whisper  
Go to sleep, everything is all right.

I close my eyes, then I drift away  
Into the magic night. I softly say  
A silent prayer like dreamers do.  
Then I fall asleep to dream my dreams of you.

In dreams I walk with you, in dreams I talk to you.  
In dreams you're mine, all of the time we're together  
In dreams, in dreams.

But just before the dawn, I awake and find you gone.  
I can't help it, I can't help it, if I cry.  
I remember that you said goodbye.

It's too bad that all these things, can only happen in my dreams  
Only in dreams, in beautiful dreams."

Der Satz "In dreams I walk with you, in dreams I talk to you" bekommt hier eine sinistre Bedeutung alleine dadurch, daß die Szenen uns zwingen, genauer zu lauschen und die süßliche Melodie als ironischen Bruch zu verstehen. Mit dem Ohr ist die Trennung zwischen Traum und Wirklichkeit abhanden gekommen. Der Alptraum kann ungehindert in die Welt entweichen.

Auch die Verweise auf andere Filme stellen einen intertextuellen Bezug zum Ohr her. Der erste Spaziergang von Jeffrey und Sandy verweist auf den Spaziergang von George und Mary in *It's a Wonderful Life* von Frank Capra (1946). Der Held dieser berühmten Weihnachtsschnulze ist auf einem Ohr taub, da er einst seinen Bruder vor dem Ertrinken gerettet hatte. Als George und Mary noch fast Kinder sind, fragt Mary einmal: "Is

this the ear you can't hear on?" Danach flüstert sie in das taube Ohr: "George Bailey, I'll love you 'til the day I die." In der virtuellen Welt ohne die Tat, die zum Verlust des Hörsinns führt, ist die uramerikanische Kleinstadt zu einem Sündenpfuhl heruntergekommen. In *It's a Wonderful Life* trennt das Ohr die Welten säuberlich in eine aktuelle und eine virtuelle, während in *Blue Velvet* das Böse direkt unter der Oberfläche lauert. Der intertextuelle Dialog mit *It's a Wonderful Life* beweist jedoch, daß *Blue Velvet* das Vorbild nicht unterschätzt. Das virtuelle Bedford Falls, die heruntergekommene Stadt der Betrüger und Trinker, spiegelt natürlich das real existierende Amerika wider, während die heile Welt mit George Bailey in ihr die amerikanische Kleinstadt, eine filmische Phantasie, darstellt.

Wie bereits eingangs erwähnt wurde, trennt *Blue Velvet* das Ohr buchstäblich vom Hören, genauer gesagt vom Hörsinn, wie in der Doppeldeutigkeit von 'Don' und 'don't', oder der Betonung des Wortes Blau: "Heineken? Fuck that shit! Pabst Blue Ribbon!", erklärt Frank. Etwas eleganter als dieses Bekenntnis zum proletarischen Geschmack ist da zum Beispiel Sandys erster Auftritt, der eher eine Erscheinung als ein Erscheinen ist. Zuerst hören wir ihre Stimme, dann erfolgt ein point-of-view-shot aus der Perspektive Jeffreys. Wir sehen allerdings zuerst nur die schwarz-blaue Nacht, aus der Sandy dann hervortritt. Sie kommt buchstäblich 'out of the blue' (eine idiomatische Redewendung für 'aus heiterem Himmel'). Eine ähnliche lautmalerische Konstruktion liegt Franks blutigem Ende zugrunde: "I'll blow his fuckin' brains out!" -- diesen Satz hört man oft in amerikanischen Filmen. Wir sehen Frank dann in der Tat erschossen daliegen, sein Gehirn über dem Boden verteilt. Ein weiterer 'sight gag' bedarf vielleicht der Erklärung: Der Mann in Gelb trägt eine gelbe Jacke (engl.: 'a yellow jacket'). 'Yellow Jacket' aber ist die umgangssprachliche Bezeichnung für eine Hornisse. *Blue Velvet* inszeniert noch mehr solcher Scharaden. Die genannten Beispiele sollten jedoch genügen, das Verfahren klarzumachen: Ein Homonym oder eine ideomatische Redewendung werden als Rebus inszeniert. Die Interpretation dieser Übersetzungsleistung kann natürlich immer nur nachträglich geschehen, nach dem Film, beim zweiten oder dritten Sehen -- eine Dissoziation, die verhindert, daß der Film unreflektiert konsumiert wird.

Überhaupt ist das Hören und das Miß- und Nichtverstehen wichtig für *Blue Velvet*. Wenn Sandy, die vor Dorothis Apartmenthaus Schmiere steht, das verabredete Signal gibt (sie hupt), betätigt Jeffrey gerade die Toilettenspülung, da er zuvor zuviel Heineken getrunken hatte. Im Rauschen der Toilettenspülung geht die Warnung unter ("the signal is drowned out") und Jeffrey muß sich im Wandschrank verstecken. Während dieses Überhören die Geschichte erst so richtig ins Rollen bringt, wäre der Amateurdetektiv Jeffrey schon zu Anfang gescheitert, hätte Sandy nicht ihren Vater belauscht. Zu Franks sadistischen Tricks schließlich gehört das absichtliche Mißverstehen:

"Frank: You wanna go for a ride?

Jeffrey: No thanks.

Frank: No thanks. What does that mean?

Jeffrey: I don't want to go.

Frank: Go where?

Jeffrey: On a ride.

Frank: A ride? Hell, that's a good idea. Okay, let's go! Hey, let's go!"

Da Frank hier und in vielen anderen Szenen das richtige Verstehen für sich selbst in Anspruch nimmt, ist es bezeichnend, daß er den simplen Trick Jeffreys am Ende nicht durchschaut, wenn dieser per Funkgerät verkündet, daß er sich im hinteren Zimmer verstecken werde. Ganz wie in Lacans berühmter Interpretation von "The Purloined Letter" geht es hier um wechselnde Positionen. Der Große Andere ist wie immer ahnungslos, während Frank mit Jeffrey die Position wechselt. Letzterer ist nun buchstäblich am Drücker, während Frank hört, aber nicht sieht: "I can hear your fucking radio, you stupid shit!"

Was an *Blue Velvet* besticht, ist, daß -- allen Dekonstruktionen zum Trotz -- der Film als Film faszinierend bleibt und nicht in intellektuelle Rätselspielchen zerfällt. Der Schlüssel hierzu ist die Urszene mit Jeffrey, Frank und Dorothy. Auch hier scheint die Symbolik zunächst allzu offensichtlich: Jeffrey fungiert als Platzhalter für die voyeuristischen Gelüste der Zuschauer. Statt 'echtem' Sex bekommen wir dann allerdings nur eine Travestie zu sehen. Daß uns diese -- allerdings faszinierende -- Travestie unverständlich bleibt und bedrohlich erscheint, verweist auf die Freudsche Urszene, denn aus der Perspektive des vorpubertären Kindes muß der elterliche Sex als unverständliche Handlung traumatisieren. Im Falle von *Blue Velvet* drängt sich die vorschnelle symbolische Interpretation nun geradezu auf: "Aha! Hier liegt der Ursprung der Neurose!" An diesem Punkt zeigt sich jedoch die wahre Brillanz des Films: Wie viele andere Symbole in *Blue Velvet* führt auch dieser hastige Schluß in die Irre. Denn was die Trennung von Ohr und (Hör-)Sinn auseinanderreißt, kann man nicht so einfach wieder zusammenfügen (Symbol, von *symballein* (gr.: zusammenfügen). Die Neurose hat nun mal keinen Ursprung, sondern setzt sich diesen paradoxerweise retrospektiv selbst. Nur aus der radikal eingeschränkten Perspektive der Neurose macht dann nachträglich alles Sinn. Freuds 'Nachträglichkeit' muß man in diesem Sinne verstehen.

In der Ambivalenz der Geräusche (Ist es Lust? Ist es Schmerz?) liegt der Schlüssel zu *Blue Velvet*. Es sind natürlich die ambivalenten Geräusche aus dem elterlichen Schlafzimmer, die das Kind neugierig machen. Der springende Punkt ist jedoch, die Urszene nicht als Zuschauer, quasi von außen, mißzuverstehen, sondern die Szene als Urszene aller folgenden Szenarien zu begreifen. Denn bei Freud illustriert die Urszene nicht das traumatisierende Nichtverstehen des unaufgeklärten Kindes, sondern ein grundlegendes Phantasma: Die Urszene beschreibt das unstillbare Verlangen, der eigenen Zeugung beizuwohnen. Wie auch die kindliche Rachephantasie, Zeuge der eigenen Beerdigung zu sein, leugnet das Phantasma der Urszene unsere Sterblichkeit. In Mark Twains *The*

*Adventures of Tom Sawyer* finden wir ein schönes Beispiel für dieses 'Wenn ich tot bin, werdet ihr schon sehen ...' - die beiden totgeglaubten Helden werden hier Zeuge ihrer eigenen Beerdigung. Die Perspektive dieses Phantasmas ist die des gottgleichen Beobachters im Hollywoodkino, der stets seine Eingebundenheit in die Szene verkennt. Die Urszene in *Blue Velvet* ist damit zugleich die Urszene des Kinos und diese ist nicht der Voyeur, sondern der neugierige Lauscher, der das eindeutige Bild und den undeutlichen Ton zusammenbringen will. Das Emblem dieser nachträglichen Zusammenfügung ist das abgeschnittene Ohr, das weiterhin hört, das Ohrorgan. Die Mehrdeutigkeiten in *Blue Velvet* (der rätselhafte Unfall des Vaters, der lebende Tote am Ende, etc.) sind daher tatsächlich postmodern, wenn wir die Postmoderne als Abkehr von einer modernen Rekonstruktion eines mythischen Ursprungs verstehen.

Das Emblem des abgeschnittenen Ohrs erlaubt uns, das komplexe Programm von *Blue Velvet* zu erfassen. Die Dissoziierung von Ohr und Körper trennt Sinn von Organ. Zuerst muß das Glied vom Leben abgetrennt werden, damit wir es lesen können, denn, wie Walter Benjamin es im Trauerspielbuch ausführt, "die Allegorisierung der Physis kann nur an der Leiche sich energisch durchsetzen." Dieses Trauma der Dissoziierung impliziert nachträglich, daß Sinn und Wort im Organ ursprünglich ihre Einheit fanden. Das klassische Hollywoodkino macht sich dies zu Nutze, wenn es eine Heilung dieses Traumas im Symbol verspricht. Der Effekt des Ohr-Emblems, des Ohrorgans, in *Blue Velvet* ist aber, daß der paradoxe Charakter dieser Zusammenfügung, die ihre ursprüngliche Trennung nachträglich setzt, nun offensichtlich wird. Es ist die Allegorie des Kinos selbst: Dem Zuschauer von *Blue Velvet* wird klar, daß er stets (Wort-)Sinn in Bild und Bild in (Wort-)Sinn übersetzen muß und daß diese Über/setzung nie ganz aufgehen kann. Walter Benjamin stellt anlässlich dieser Diskrepanz zwischen "bildlichem Sein und Bedeuten" fest, daß im "Abgrund der Allegorie die dialektische Bewegung braust".

Die Trennung von Wort und Sinn in *Blue Velvet* verkündet damit nichts weniger als eine Überlegenheit der Allegorie über das Symbol. Die gesamte Symbolik in *Blue Velvet* kann daher auch zu nichts anderem führen als zu vorschnellen Schlüssen. Das Rotkehlchen zum Beispiel symbolisiert für Sandy eine Welt der Liebe und des Lichts; wenn das Rotkehlchen dann am Ende des Films mit dem schwarzen Käfer im Schnabel als unheimliche Maschine auftaucht, ist dieses Symbol genauso eindimensional wie die Doppelgänger, die der Film manichäisch inszeniert (Jeffrey und Frank, Dorothy und Sandy, Detective Williams und sein Partner). Interessanterweise aber zerstört diese Allegorisierung nicht den Spaß am Film, im Gegenteil, *Blue Velvet* bleibt trotz der ständigen Selbstreferenzen faszinierend. Unter diesem Gesichtspunkt ist *Blue Velvet* zum Beispiel Godards *Notre Musique* (2004) überlegen. Godards filmischer Essay über den Bürgerkrieg im ehemaligen Jugoslawien, die westliche Kultur, ihre Bilder und Musik läßt verschiedenste Allegorien im Text selbst erscheinen. Der Regisseur zum Beispiel tritt unter seinem eigenen Namen auf als alternder Voltaire, der hilflos seinen Garten pflegt und der Jugend nichts mehr beibringen kann. Indianer in voller Tracht laufen durch das

zerstörte Sarajevo, eine Allegorie der Völker, die der Westen zerstört hat. Das Paradies schließlich ist ein Strand, von amerikanischen GIs bewacht, an dem sich die Jugend in narzißtischen Spielen ergeht. Im Fall von *Blue Velvet* dagegen inszeniert der Text selbst die Allegorie des Ohrs im Film. Während Godard auf eine Wahrheit hinter den Bildern verweist, auch wenn diese Wahrheit verkündet "Es gibt keine Wahrheit", bleibt *Blue Velvet* einem viel radikaleren Modell verhaftet. Wie das Rebus des Traums, der bei Freud nicht beliebig interpretierbar ist, oder die strukturelle Position des Analytikers als "Subjekt supponiert zu wissen", bleibt der Film eine geradezu götzenhafte Instanz, die dogmatisch den Platz der Wahrheit einnimmt: In einem Film hat alles Bedeutung.

Andreas Thomas

## **Blue Velvet [Filmzentrale]**

<http://www.filmzentrale.com/rezis/bluevelvet.htm>

USA, 1985, 120 min

[Andreas Thomas ist auch Herausgeber der Homepage [filmzentrale.de.vu](http://filmzentrale.de.vu)]

*„So ein abgeschnittenes Ohr kann - wie Sie wissen - mitunter wahre Abgründe auf tun. Nun, "Blue Velvet" war vielleicht Mitte der 80er-Jahre schockierend. Gemessen an dem, was uns heutzutage in Talkshows serviert wird - Inzest, Pädophilie, Selbstverstümmelung, also fast jede Form menschlicher Abartigkeit - wirkt der Film doch recht harmlos..."*

David Lynch im Interview, nach dem Jahrtausendwechsel

Die Welt von Lumberton ist heil, so heil, dass in ihr notwendig das blanke Böse enthalten sein muss. Wir stecken in der Zange des in Zeitlupe lachenden Feuerwehrmannes, der den Film zusammenhält. Er winkt langsam, als wolle er sagen: Entspann dich, mein Kind, es kann dir nichts geschehen. Nette alte Damen geleiten uns über die Straße zur Schule, der Himmel ist blau, die Rosen vorm weißen Zaun, der unser Haus umgibt, blühen überreal rot, Holztransporte rollen schwer auf unseren heimatlichen Straßen. Der Fernseher zeigt Krimi, der Rasen wird gesprengt, und wenn der Schlauch sich um den Strauch wickelt, dann bremst das nicht nur das Wasser, sondern blockiert auch Vatis Blutgefäße im Hirn. Ein Schlaganfall, oder so, jedenfalls ein Grund für Student Jeffrey Beaumont, als Stellvertreter des Vaters zurück in seine Kindheit zu gucken, und darüber hinaus, jenseits der Lincoln Street, da, wo nur die großen Jungs hin kommen und böse große Jungssachen machen.

Geahnt hatten wir schon von klein auf, dass jener verkrampften Beschwörung der guten, heilen Welt eine mindestens ebenso muskulöse Antithese der bösen, kaputten Welt entgegenwirkt. Aber David Lynch war einer der ersten, die uns sogar das Enthaltensein der einen in der anderen gezeigt haben. In jeder Faser der Fernsehfamilienidylle der Beaumonts (schöne Welt) steckt schon das Unheilvolle, vom Traum zum Alb mutierende, so als lebe in der frommen Lüge die gottlose Wahrheit. Lynch zeigt das nicht plakativ, wie z.B. ein Waters das täte, er gibt sich nur bis zur Naivität aufgeschlossen den unheilvoll harmlosen Kleinstadt-Bildern Lumbertons und seiner Bewohner hin, und kommt ihnen und ihren amerikanischen Codes dadurch näher als ein a priori Skeptiker das täte.

Jeffrey findet auf einer Wiese ein abgeschnittenes Ohr. Ordnungsgemäß bringt er es zur Polizei. Das Ohr ist Symbol der Lynch-Welt, denn kaum ein Regisseur setzt Sounds so bewußt ein wie er. Oft sind es banale Bilder untermalende, dräuend grummelnde Bässe, die uns verunsichern. Lynchs Geräuschtapeten sind seinen Bildern gleichberechtigt und meistens ebenso aufwändig (in "Blue Velvet" von Alan Splet und ihm) hergestellt und durchkomponiert worden. In das mit einer Schere abgetrennte Ohr

eines Fremden wird der Kamerablick gezogen, dessen Inneres ist plötzlich eine düstere Höhlenlandschaft, und der Sound schwillt an, - Jeffrey ist von seinem Fund erschreckt und fasziniert, das morbide Geheimnis weckt seine Neugier.

Zusammen mit Sandy (Laura Dern), der Tochter des Inspektors, spielt er Detektiv. Er ermittelt aus einem Versteck heraus, wird dadurch zum Voyeur,- und wir mit ihm. Jeffrey ist rein und unschuldig verliebt in die ebensolche Sandy, schmutzig und verdorben in Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) und beides gleichzeitig. Klare Freudsche Muster: Die helle, reine, unschuldige ist die Blondine. Die kranke, gedemütigte, erotisierende ist die Schwarzhaarige. In "Blue Velvet" ist Sex stets verknüpft mit Macht, Unterdrückung, Gewalt, Perversion und Psychose. Liebe dagegen schliesst die Libido scheinbar aus. Wir sehen zwar, dass Sandy und Jeffrey sich küssen, aber dieser Kuss ist eher die Besiegelung zärtlicher Verbundenheit als der Beginn eines Vorspiels. Dorothys Kuss dagegen und ihre sadomasochistischen Wünsche wecken in Jeffrey abgründige sexuelle Begierden.

Der expressivste Charakter und das Konzentrat dieser Abgründigkeiten ist zweifelsohne Dennis Hopper als Frank Booth (Abraham Lincolns Mörder trug übrigens denselben Namen). Als Hopper das Drehbuch für "Blue Velvet" gelesen hatte, rief er Lynch an und erklärte, er müsse den Frank Booth spielen, weil er Frank Booth sei. Lynch: "Ich saß in der Klemme, denn ich hatte nicht die geringste Lust mit jemandem wie Frank Bekanntschaft zu machen. [Lacht]" (aus "Lynch über Lynch")

Vermutlich ist Frank Booth tatsächlich für Hopper die Rolle seines Lebens. Selten sah man ihn so auf dem Punkt, wie hier als der komplex psychotische, von merkwürdigen Drogen abhängige (er inhaliert z.B. immer wieder ein Gas, das er in einer Flasche mit sich führt) Booth. Antrieb für alle seine Taten scheint seine Impotenz zu sein. Um sich Dorothy gefügig zu machen, entführte er ihren Sohn und Ehemann, und schnitt letzterem das Ohr ab. Nur die Anwendung einer Mixtur aus Drogen, Gewalt, daraus resultierender Macht, Sadomasochismus und Fetischismus (blaue Samtfetzen, die er sich und seinen Opfern in den Mund steckt) scheint ihm einen Rest von Befriedigung verschaffen zu können. Als Anführer eines kriminellen Freundeskreises ist jedes zweite seiner Worte: "fuck", aber sicher fühlt er sich nur im Verborgenen, Dunklen, wo keiner merkt, dass er gerade das nicht mehr kann. Unfähig zu Gefühlen, Kommunikation und Beischlaf kommt sein "Liebesbrief" aus seiner "Kanone": ein männlicher Konflikt mit einer männlichen Lösung...

Isabella Rossellini spielt sein Opfer mit einer Offenheit, die zum Äussersten geht. Sie - damals als Top-Fotomodell unter Vertrag - zeigt ihren Körper als verletztlich, versehrt, deformiert. Manchmal wirkt ihre (mißbrauchte) Nacktheit nahezu krankhaft aufgedunsen und morbide. Das Darstellen des Häßlichen (einer eigentlich schönen Frau), gepaart mit innerer Verzweiflung, geht weit über das übliche Kino-Frauenbild hinaus. Es wirkt wie ein Sinnbild der Frau als Unterdrückte und Sexualobjekt. Wenn Rossellini später geschunden, geschändet und nackt in Jeffreys

Vorgarten steht, ist das ein Bild von Ausbeutung und Deprivation, das seinesgleichen sucht. Auch wenn Lynch sich massiv gegen eine solche Verallgemeinerung wehren würde: Natürlich herrscht Frank mit Gewalt über Dorothy, um ihren Körper benutzen zu können. Natürlich hatten und haben Männer mehr Macht, weil sie sich nicht genieren, Gewalt anzuwenden.

Auch Dean Stockwell, notorischer Nebendarsteller etlicher Filme seit 1944 (!), hat in "Blue Velvet" vermutlich den Höhepunkt seiner Karriere erlebt. In seiner Rolle als tuntiger Bordellbesitzer Ben hat er seinen Glanzauftritt, indem er zu Roy Orbisons "In Dreams" pantomimisch die Lippen bewegt, sein Gesicht beleuchtet von einer wie ein Mikrophon benutzten Arbeitslampe.

Jeffreys unfreiwilliger Besuch bei Ben ist wie der Aufenthalt in einer Vorhölle. Jeffrey spürt in diesem Ambiente die konsequente Verwirklichung jener "dunklen Seite". "Es ist eine fremde, seltsame Welt."-"It's a strange world" fasst Jeffrey mehrfach seine Erlebnisse in Worte, weil das Dunkle, Gedeckelte, Gewalttätige mit Macht sich nicht nur seinem voyeuristischen Blick entdeckt, sondern eine Spur dessen sich ihm selber, als ureigener Trieb entpuppt. Vielleicht ist es der Sexual-Trieb an sich, den sich der adoleszente Mann zu entdecken hat, aber es ist auch die Dichotomie zweier Prinzipien, die ihn und uns bannt: Die reine, naive und auch verlogene, neurotische, lustfeindliche bürgerliche Ordnung steht gegen die unverhohlenen brutale, exzessive, kriminelle, schliesslich psychotische (Un)ordnung proletarischer Couleur.

Wir sehen gepflegt-geordnetes amerikanisches Bürgerleben in der aufregendsten Skizzierung, wir sehen die definitive Artikulation der Impotenz (Hopper, seine beste Rolle), wir sehen wirklich verlorene Wesen (Rossellini, ihre beste Rolle), wir sehen den Entwicklungsroman (MacLachlan, seine beste Rolle). Aber wenn uns beim Happy-End wieder der Feuerwehrhauptmann zuwinkt, haben wir Heranwachsenden endgültig gelernt: Diese seltsame Welt da draußen jenseits der Lincoln Street ist gar nicht wirklich erforscht und besiegt, denn sie ist noch undurchdringlicher, mächtiger und verschlingender geworden, und ihre Flammen züngeln in unsere Fernsehserienfamilienwelt hinüber - seit wir auf sie einen genüsslich masochistischen Blick werfen durften, und wir wissen, dass sie auch in uns selber existiert.

Ich glaube, David Lynch ist kein Träumer, sondern einer der wenigen Realisten des amerikanischen Kinos, mit einem scharfen und mutigen Blick für die innere Logik individueller aber auch sozialer Psyche. "Psychic Reality" hat das mal jemand genannt. Aber das besonders Nette an Lynch ist, dass er uns neben dem Schauer auch den Spaß an dieser unserer unheilen psychischen Realität vermittelt.

"Blue Velvet" ist einer der wenigen Filme Lynchs, in denen das Surreale zwar angedeutet aber noch weitestgehend von einer in sich schlüssigen Handlung losgelöst existiert. In seinen späteren Filmen: "Wild At Heart" (1990), "Twin Peaks - Fire Walk With Me"(1992), "Lost Highway"(1996)

und "Mulholland Drive"(2001) sind surreale und reale Elemente gleichberechtigte, miteinander untrennbar verwobene Handlungsbestandteile, wie auch zuvor schon in "Eraserhead"(1976). "Der Elefantenmensch"(1980) arbeitet, wie auch der Science Fiction - Film "Dune (Der Wüstenplanet)" (1984) mit ausdrucksstarken Traumsequenzen, ohne sie als real zu apostrophieren, und einzig "The Straight Story" (1999) scheint ohne Irrationales auszukommen,- wäre da nicht die Szene mit der Autofahrerin, die, um die Rehe zu verscheuchen, auf Landstrassen so laut sie kann "Public Enemy" aufdreht, und dennoch jedes Mal eines totfährt. Aber das gehört woanders hin...

[Andreas Thomas](#)

David Thomson's Top Ten Films: Blue Velvet

## The bogeyman we hate to love

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/david-thomsons-top-ten-films-blue-velvet-172232.html>

*The Independent*, Sunday 4 August 2002 00:00

In an age when, increasingly, American films are made for children, or for those who decline to grow up, is it any wonder that the great American movie resorts to that alarmed, paranoid vision on the tender side of immaturity? *Blue Velvet* is a parable about coming of age in a society that has no place for adulthood. All the grown people defy or mock the attempt by Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan) to pass beyond infancy or primitive states. The old American dream of taming the frontier (and its wild men) to make a decent place to live receives its grisly comeuppance in Lumberton, that naive, flag-bright strip of Americana. This sham culture cannot stop heeding the roar of its outlaw genius, Frank Booth, the beast who urges "fuck-fuck" upon Jeffrey and everyone else.

David Lynch is not an artist filled with recrimination for lesser talents. Still, it's hard in hindsight not to see his assemblage of terrors (and these have mounted in *Twin Peaks*, *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Dr*) as a rebuke to the addled fondness for tidiness and small town small mindedness that besets Spielberg and Lucas – the gigantic exponents of modern movie marketing.

By contrast, Lynch – so unhip and inarticulate as to seem out of touch – but hugely stubborn and determined, too, is an exponent not just of independent film, but of art school solitude. As American as a hot dog, Lynch is also raised in European, avant garde traditions. He is so comfortable in the surrealist tradition, that the "Dr" in *Mulholland Dr* plainly stood for "dream" and not just "drive". Yet Lynch, somehow, got that dragon of the old industry, Dino de Laurentiis, to let him make *Blue Velvet*. And at the art-house level, their picture did business. Even in the zombie Eighties, Lynch's film found an audience and left it tingling with a mixture of dread and delight. And though this trick happens far less often now, once again America demonstrated its rare capacity to make a film that was hauntingly artistic and sensational at the same time. Yet Lynch knows that the world outside the cinema is a version of Lumberton, and that's why, while he wants to like Jeffrey and his chances, still he will not give up on Frank Booth, and Frank's insistence that Jeffrey is like him.

Jeffrey is a good little boy – Kyle MacLachlan has an air of Bobby Harron or Richard Barthlemess, handsome heroic youths from the silent era. He lives in a picket fence prison, and his father has been put to sleep by a stroke. Then Jeffrey finds the severed ear, the gold that always lurks in American undergrowth. That ripped tissue is a promise of the potent white

flesh of Dorothy Valance, her blood lips, the suffocating pink-brown vaginal warmth of her apartment, and that siren song, "Blue Velvet".

Jeffrey has a nice girl in view (Laura Dern), but Dorothy is outrageously alluring, not least in the way the unformed Jeffrey is allowed to be her voyeur, then offered the chance of possessing her and beating her.

In an instant, nearly, he runs the gamut of sexual experience – and coincidentally, it is still the best way to interpret Buñuel's *Un chien Andalou* as a similar rite of passage. But what is unique to Lynch's vision is the night-town ordeal of Frank (Dennis Hopper), Raymond (the hideously suave Dean Stockwell) and the dreamy murder mystery that Jeffrey is drawn into.

Of course, *Blue Velvet*, for all its attempt at fairy-story, is also a horror film determined to maintain the humdrum texture of gruesome Americana – it's in the tradition of *Psycho* and *Jeffrey Dahmer*. Things seem to end well for our Jeffrey, if that's how you care to feel about it. The bogey-men have been dispelled, Dorothy may be on her way to recovery. And maybe Jeffrey will marry his sweetheart and be a pillar of the community in Lumberton.

But after 100 years of film, we all walk with our fantasies now. So how can Jeffrey forget Dorothy – that pale bush sprouting up in the suburban garden – not just a guilty nightmare, but the personification of Edenic shame? How are we to forget Frank or his taste for that inflaming gas and all his language? How can we let go of Dean Stockwell's languorous rendering of "In Dreams"? How can this arsenal of progress called America stay awake – instead of lapsing into the eternal trance of horror? What have we done to ourselves in letting movie in? After all, a moment ago historically, no one knew what it was or had dreamed of it. We were literate.

Fuck literate – you can hear Frank's tirade building. The dark ages are back. Why else do so many of us resolve to sit still in the dark – when there is daylight left?

# Slavoj Žižek: The Lamella of David Lynch

Artikel aus:

Feldstein, Richard, Bruce Fink & Maire Jaanus (eds). (1995). *Reading Seminar XI. Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, p. 205-220.

<https://www.facebook.com/zlazloj.zizek/posts/slavoj-zizek-on-david-lynchin-chapter-15-of-seminar-xi-lacan-introduces-the-myst/1000276423346221/> posted 3.7.2015

In chapter 15 of Seminar XI, Lacan introduces the mysterious notion of the "lamella": the libido as an organ without body, the incorporeal and for that very reason indestructible life substance that persists beyond the circuit of generation and corruption.<sup>(1)</sup> It is no accident that commentaries on this passage are rare (for all practical purposes nonexistent); the Lacan with whom we are confronted in this passage does not have a lot in common with the usual figure of Lacan which reigns in the domain of cultural studies. The Lacan of the lamella is "Another Lacan," as Jacques-Alain Miller put it, a Lacan of drive not desire, of the real not the symbolic.

How are we to approach this notion of lamella? Let us risk a detour. If, today, the term "post-modernism" is of any theoretical use, then lamella is a post-modern notion par excellence—the shift from the Lacan of the symbolic to the Lacan of the real is the shift from modernism to post-modernism. For that reason, one should not be surprised that lamella is the central preoccupation of the person whose work epitomizes post-modernism in cinema, David Lynch. And, in order to expose as clearly as possible Lynch's Post-modernism, let us risk an additional detour via those who were, in all probability, the first post-modernists avant la lettre: the Pre-Raphaelites.

1

In art history, the Pre-Raphaelites function as the paradoxical border case of avant-garde overlapping with kitsch. They were first perceived as bearers of an anti-traditionalist revolution in painting, breaking with the entire tradition from the Renaissance onwards, only to be devalued shortly thereafter—with the rise of Impressionism in France—as the very epitome of damp Victorian pseudo-romantic kitsch. This low rating lasted till the 1960s, i.e., until the emergence of post-modernism. How was it, then, that they became "readable" only retroactively, from the post-modernist paradigm?

In this respect, the crucial painter is William Holman Hunt, usually dismissed as the first Pre-Raphaelite to sell out to the establishment, becoming a well-paid producer of sweetish religious paintings (The Triumph of the Innocents, etc.). However, a closer look unmistakably confronts us with an uncanny, deeply disturbing dimension of his work;

his paintings produce a kind of uneasiness or indeterminate feeling that, in spite of their idyllic and elevated "official" content, there is something amiss.

Let us take the *Hireling Shepherd*, apparently a simple pastoral idyll depicting a shepherd engaged in seducing a country-girl, and for that reason neglecting to care for a flock of sheep (an obvious allegory of the Church neglecting its lambs). The longer we observe the painting, the more we become aware of a great number of details that bear witness to Hunt's intense relationship to enjoyment, to life-substance, i.e., to his disgust at sexuality. The shepherd is muscular, dull, crude, and rudely voluptuous; the cunning gaze of the girl indicates a sly, vulgarly manipulative exploitation of one's own sexual attraction; the all too vivacious reds and greens mark the entire painting with a repulsive tone, as if we were dealing with turgid, overripe, putrid nature. It is similar to *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* where numbers details belie the "official" Tragic-religious content (the snake-like head, the skulls on the brim of the vase, etc.). The sexuality radiated by the painting is damp, "unwholesome," and permeated with the decay of death, and it plunges us into the universe of David Lynch, the filmmaker.

Lynch's entire "ontology" is based upon the discordance or contrast between reality, observed from a safe distance, and the absolute proximity of the real. His elementary procedure consists in moving forward from an establishing shot of reality to a disturbing proximity which renders visible the disgusting substance of enjoyment, the crawling and twinkling of indestructible life—in short, the lamella. Suffice it to recall the opening sequence of *Blue Velvet*. After the shots that epitomize the idyllic small American town and the father's stroke while he waters the lawn (when he collapses, the jet of water uncannily recalls surreal, heavy urination), the camera approaches the grass surface and depicts the bursting life, the crawling of insects and beetles, their rattling and devouring of grass. At the very beginning of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, we encounter the opposite technique which produces the same effect. First we see abstract white protoplasmic shapes floating in a blue background, a kind of elementary form of life in its primordial twinkling; then the camera slowly moves away and we become aware that what we were seeing was an extreme close-up of a TV screen.<sup>(2)</sup> Therein lies the fundamental feature of post-modern hyperrealism: the very over-proximity to reality brings about the "loss of reality." Uncanny details stick out and perturb the pacifying effect of the overall picture.<sup>(3)</sup>

The second feature, closely linked to the first, is contained in the very designation "Pre-Raphaelitism": the reaffirmation of rendering things as they "really are," not yet distorted by the rules of academic painting first established by Raphael. However, the Pre-Raphaelites' own practice belies this naive ideology of returning to the "natural" way of painting. The first thing that strikes the eye in their paintings is the feature which necessarily appears to us, accustomed to modern perspective-realism, as a sign of clumsiness. The Pre-Raphaelite paintings are somehow flat,

lacking the "depth" of space organized along the perspective lines which meet in an infinite point; it is as if the very "reality" they depict were not a "true" reality but rather structured as a relief. Another aspect of this same feature is the "dollish," mechanically composite, artificial quality of the depicted individuals: they somehow lack the abyssal depth of personality we usually associate with the notion of "subject." The designation "Pre-Raphaelitism" is thus to be taken literally, as an indication of the shift from Renaissance perspectivism to the "closed" medieval universe.

In Lynch's films, the "flatness" of the depicted reality responsible for the cancellation of infinite perspective openness finds its precise correlate or counterpart at the level of sound. Let us return to the opening sequence of *Blue Velvet*: its crucial feature is the uncanny noise that emerges when we approach the real. This noise is difficult to locate in reality. In order to determine its status, one is tempted to evoke contemporary cosmology which speaks of noises at the borders of the universe; these noises are not simply internal to the universe—they are remainders or last echoes of the Big Bang that created the universe itself. The ontological status of this noise is more interesting than it may appear, since it subverts the fundamental notion of the "open," infinite universe that defines the space of Newtonian physics. That is to say, the modern notion of the "open" universe is based on the hypothesis that every positive entity (noise, matter) occupies some (empty) space; it hinges on the difference between space as void and positive entities which occupy it, "fill it out." Space is here phenomenologically conceived as something that exists prior to the entities which "fill it out." If we destroy or remove the matter that occupies a given space, this space as void remains. The primordial noise, the last remainder of the Big Bang, is on the contrary constitutive of space itself: it is not a noise "in" space, but a noise that keeps space open as such. If, therefore, we were to erase this noise, we would not get the "empty space" which was filled out by it. Space itself, the receptacle for every "inner-worldly" entity, would vanish. This noise is, in a sense, the "sound of silence." Along the same lines, the fundamental noise in Lynch's films is not simply caused by objects that are part of reality; rather, it forms the ontological horizon or frame of reality itself, i.e., the texture that holds reality together. Were this noise to be eradicated, reality itself would collapse, from the "open" infinite universe of Cartesian-Newtonian physics, we are thus back to the pre-modern "closed" universe, encircled, bounded, by a fundamental "noise."

We encounter this same noise in the nightmare sequence of *The Elephant Man*. It transgresses the borderline that separates interior from exterior, i.e., the extreme externality of a machine uncannily coincides with the utmost intimacy of the bodily interior, with the rhythm of heart palpitations. This noise also appears after the camera enters the hole in the elephant-man's hood, which stands for the gaze. The reversal of reality into the real corresponds to the reversal of the look (the subject looking at reality) into gaze, i.e., it occurs when we enter the "black hole," the crack in the texture of reality.

2

What we encounter in this “black hole” is simply the body stripped of its skin. That is to say, Lynch perturbs our most elementary phenomenological relationship to the living body, which is based on the radical line of separation between the surface of the skin and what is beneath it. Let us recall the uncanniness, and even disgust, we experience when we endeavor to imagine what goes on just under the surface of a beautiful naked body—muscles, glands, veins, etc. In short, our relating to the body implies the suspension of what lies beneath the surface, and this suspension is an effect of the symbolic order—it can occur only insofar as bodily reality is structured by language. In the symbolic order, we are not really naked even when we are without clothes, since skin itself functions as the “dress of the flesh.”(4) This suspension excludes the real of the life-substance, its palpitation; one of the definitions of the Lacanian real is that it is the flayed, skinned body, the palpitation of raw, skinless red flesh.

How, then, does Lynch perturb our most elementary phenomenological relationship to the bodily surface? By means of the voice, of a word which “kills,” which corrodes or breaks through the skin surface and directly cuts into the raw flesh—in short, by means of a word whose status is that of a real. This feature is at its most expressive in Lynch’s version of Herbert’s *Dune*. Suffice it to recall members of the space-guild who, because of their over-indulging in “spice,” the mysterious drug around which the story turns, become distorted beings with gigantic heads, worm-like creatures made of skinless, raw flesh, indestructible life-substance, a pure embodiment of enjoyment.

Another case of similar distortion is the corrupted kingdom of the evil Baron Harkonnen where we see faces whose surface is distorted in an uncanny way—sewn-up eyes and ears, etc. The face of the Baron himself is full of disgusting protuberances, “sprouts of enjoyment,” in which the inside of the body breaks through the surface. The unique scene, where the Baron attacks a young boy in an ambiguous oral-homoerotic way, also plays on this ambiguity of the relationship of the inside and the surface. The Baron attacks him by pulling out his heart-cork, so that blood starts to squirt out. (What we have here is Lynch’s typical child-fantasy notion of a human body as a balloon, a form made of inflated skin, with no substance behind it.) The skulls of the servants of the space-guild also start to crack when they run out of spice—again a case of distorted, fractured surfaces. What is crucial here is the correlation between these cracks in the skull and the distorted voice: the guild-servant actually utters unintelligible whispers which are transformed into articulated speech only by means of the microphone or, in Lacanian terms, by passing through the medium of the Other. This delay—i.e., the fact that the sounds we utter are not speech in an immediate way, but only through the intervention of the external, machine-like, symbolic order—is usually concealed; it is rendered visible only when the relationship

between surface  
and its beyond is perturbed.

In *Twin Peaks*, the dwarf in the Red Lodge speaks an incomprehensible, distorted English, rendered intelligible only with the help of subtitles that play the role of the microphone, i.e., the medium of the Other. What we have here is the hidden reversal of the Derridian critique of logocentrism in which the voice functions as the medium of illusory self-transparency and self-presence: the obscene, cruel, superego-like, incomprehensible, impenetrable, traumatic dimension of the voice which is a kind of foreign body perturbing the balance of our lives.(5)

The relationship to surface is also perturbed in the case of Paul's—Dune's hero's—mystical experience of drinking the "water of life." (Mysticism, of course, stands for the encounter with the real.) Here, again, the inside endeavors to invade the surface—blood drips not only from Paul's eyes but also from the mouth of his mother and sister, who are aware of his ordeal by direct, non-symbolic, empathy. (The ruler's counselors, the "living computers" who are able to read others' thoughts and see into the future, also have strange blood-like stains around their lips.) Finally, there is the voice of Paul Atreid himself, which has a directly physical impact. By raising his voice, he is able not only to derange his adversary, but even to blow up the hardest rock. At the end of the film, Paul raises his voice and shouts back at the old priestess who tried directly to penetrate his mind; as Paul himself says, his word can kill, i.e., his speech is not only a symbolic act but can directly cut into the real. The disintegration of the "normal" relationship of bodily surface and its underside is strictly correlative to the change in the status of speech, to the emergence of a word which operates directly at the level of the real.

3

There is another crucial feature of this last scene. The old priestess reacts to Paul's words in an exaggerated, almost theatrical way, so that it is not clear if she is reacting to his actual words or to the distorted, overblown way she perceives his words. In short, the "normal" relationship between cause (Paul's words) and effect (the woman's reaction to it) is perturbed here; it is as if there is a gap separating them, as if the effect never fits or corresponds to its alleged cause. The usual way to read this gap would be to conceive of it as an index of woman's hysteria: women are not able to perceive clearly external causes, they always project into them their own distorted vision of them. Michel Chion, however, provides here a true stroke of genius and proposes a rather different reading of this disturbance.(6) One is tempted to "order" his rather non-systematic way of proceeding in his book on Lynch, by arranging it into three consecutive steps.

I) Chion's starting point is the gap or discord between action and reaction that is always at work in Lynch's films: when a subject—as a rule a man—addresses a woman or "electrocutes" her in some other way, the woman's reaction is always somehow incommensurate with the "impulse" she

receives. What is at stake in this incommensurability is a kind of short-circuit between cause and effect: their relationship is never "pure" or linear. We can never be quite certain to what extent the effect itself retroactively "colored" its own cause. We encounter here the logic of anamorphosis presented in an exemplary way in Shakespeare's *Richard II* (Act II, Scene II) by the words of the Queen's faithful servant Bushby:

Like perspectives, which rightly gaz'd upon,  
 Show nothing but confusion; ey'd awry  
 Distinguish form: so your sweet majesty  
 Looking awry upon your lord's departure,  
 Finds shapes of grief more than himself to wail;  
 Which, look'd on as it is, is nought but shadows  
 Of what is not.

In her answer to Bushby, the Queen herself locates her fears in the context of causes and effects:

... conceit is still deriv'd  
 From some forefather grief; mine is not so,  
 For nothing hath begot my something grief;  
 Or something hath the nothing that I grieve:  
 'Tis in reversion that I do possess;  
 But what it is, that is not yet known; what  
 I cannot name; 'tis nameless woe, I wot.(7)

The incommensurability between cause and effect thus results from the anamorphic perspective of the subject who distorts the "real" preceding cause, so that his act (his reaction to this cause) is never a direct effect of the cause, but rather a consequence of his distorted perception of the cause.

2) Chion's next step consists of a "crazy" gesture worthy of the most daring Freudian interpretation: he proposes that the fundamental matrix, the paradigmatic case, of this discord between action and reaction is sexual (non)relationship between man and woman. In sexual activity, men "do certain things to women," and the question to be raised is: is woman's enjoyment reducible to an effect, is it a simple consequence of what men do to her? From the good old days of Marxist hegemony, one may perhaps be reminded of the vulgar, materialist, "reductionistic" endeavors to explain the genesis of the notion of causality on the basis of human practice, of man's active relating to his environs: we arrive at the notion of causality by generalizing the experience of how, every time we accomplish a certain gesture, the same effect occurs in reality. Chion proposes an even more radical reductionism: the elementary matrix of the relationship between cause and effect is offered by the sexual relationship. In the last analysis, the irreducible gap that separates an effect from its cause amounts to the fact that "not all of feminine enjoyment is an effect of the masculine cause." This "not-all" has to be conceived precisely in the sense of the Lacanian logic of not-all (*pas-tout*)(8): it in no way entails that a part of feminine enjoyment is not the

effect of what men do to a woman. In other words, "not-all" designates inconsistency and not incompleteness: in the reaction of a woman, there is always something unforeseen. A woman never reacts as expected—all of a sudden, she does not react to something that, up to that time, infallibly aroused her, yet she is aroused by something that a man does in passing, inadvertently Woman is not fully submitted to the causal link. With her, this linear order of causality breaks down or, to quote Nicholas Cage when, in Lynch's *Wild at Heart*, he is surprised by an unexpected reaction of Laura Dern's: "The way your mind works is God's own private mystery."

3) The last step is in itself twofold: a further specification or narrowing-down, followed by a generalization. Why is it precisely woman who, by way of her incommensurate reaction to man's impulse, breaks asunder the causal chain? The specific feature which seems reducible to a link in the causal chain, yet actually suspends and inverts it, is feminine depression—woman's suicidal propensity to slide into permanent lethargy. Man bombards woman with shocks in order to stir her out of this depression.

4

At the center of *Blue Velvet* (and of all of Lynch's opus), there is the enigma of woman's depression. That the fatal Dorothy (Isabella Rosselini) is depressed goes without saying, since the reasons for it seem obvious: her child and husband were kidnapped by cruel Frank (Denis Hopper), who even cut off her husband's ear, and he blackmails Dorothy by exacting sexual favors as the price for keeping her husband and child alive. The causal link seems thus clear and unambiguous. Frank is the cause of all troubles, he broke into the happy family and provoked the trauma; Dorothy's masochistic enjoyment is a simple after-effect of this initial shock—the victim is so bewildered and thrown off by the sadistic violence she is subjected to, that she "identifies with the aggressor" and sets out to imitate his game. However, a detailed analysis of the most famous scene from *Blue Velvet*—the sadomasochistic sexual play between Dorothy and Frank, observed by Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan) while he is hiding in the closet—requires us to reverse the entire perspective. The crucial question to be asked here is: for whom is this scene staged?

The first answer seems obvious: for Jeffrey. Isn't it an exemplary case of a child witnessing parental coitus? Isn't Jeffrey reduced to a pure gaze present at the act of his own conception (the elementary matrix of fantasy)? This interpretation can be supported by two peculiar features of what Jeffrey sees: Dorothy stuffing *Blue Velvet* into Frank's mouth, and Frank putting an oxygen-mask on his mouth and then breathing heavily. Aren't both of these visual hallucinations based on what the child hears? When eaves-dropping on parental coitus, the child hears hollow speaking and heavy, gasping breathing; he or she imagines that there must be something in the father's mouth (perhaps part of the sheet, since he is in bed), or that he is breathing through a mask.(9) Yet what this reading leaves out is the crucial fact that the sadomasochistic game is thoroughly

staged and theatrical. Both of them—not only Dorothy who knows that Jeffrey is watching since she put him in the closet—act (or even overact) as if they knew they were being observed. Jeffrey is not an unobserved, accidental witness to a secret ritual; the ritual is, from the outset staged for his gaze. From this perspective, the true organizer of the game seems be Frank. His noisy, theatrical manner, bordering on the comical and recalling the movie-image of a villain, bears witness to the fact that he is desperately trying to fascinate and impress the third gaze. In order to prove what? The key is perhaps offered by Frank's obsessive repeating to Dorothy: "Don't you look at me!" Why shouldn't she? There is only one answer possible: since there is nothing to see. There is no erection to see, since Frank is impotent.

Read this way, the scene acquires quite a different meaning: Frank and Dorothy feign a wild sexual act in order to conceal from the child the fact that his father is impotent; all Frank's shouting and swearing, his comical-spectacular imitation of coital gestures, is designed to mask its opposite. In traditional terms, the accent shifts from voyeurism: Jeffrey's gaze is but an element in the exhibitionist's scenario. Instead of a son witnessing parental coitus, the father desperately attempts to convince his son of his potency.

There is, however, a third possible reading, centered on Dorothy. What I have in mind here are not anti-feminist commonplaces about feminine masochism, claiming that women secretly enjoy being brutally mistreated, etc. My point is rather the following: what if—bearing in mind that, with woman, the linear causal link is suspended, and even reversed—depression is the original fact? What if depression comes first, and all subsequent activity—i.e., Frank's terrorizing of Dorothy—far from being its cause, is rather a desperate "therapeutic" attempt to prevent her from sliding into the abyss of absolute depression, a kind of "electroshock" therapy which endeavors to attract her attention? The crudeness of his "treatment" (the kidnapping of husband and son; the cutting off of the husband's ear; the required participation in the sadistic sexual game) simply corresponds to the depth of her depression; only such rude shocks can keep her active.

In this sense, Lynch can be said to be a true anti-Weininger. In Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*, the paradigm of modern anti-feminism, woman proposes herself to man, endeavoring to attract and fascinate his gaze and thus drag him down from spiritual heights into the lowliness of sexual debauchery. For Weininger, the "original fact" is man's spirituality, whereas his fascination with woman results from his Fall; for Lynch, the "original fact" is woman's depression, her sliding into the abyss of self-annihilation and absolute lethargy, whereas man, on the contrary, proposes himself to woman as the object of her gaze. Man "bombards" her with shocks in order to arouse her attention and thereby shake her out of her numbness in short, in order to reinclude or reinstate her in the "proper" order of causality.

The tradition of such a stiff, lethargic woman aroused from her numbness by a man's call was alive and well in the nineteenth century. Suffice it to recall here Kundry from Wagner's Parsifal who, at the beginning of Act II and Act III, is awakened from a catatonic sleep (first through Klingsor's rude summons, then through Gurnemanz's kind care). And from "real" life, consider the unique figure of Jane Morris, the wife of William Morris and the mistress of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The famous photo of Jane Morris from 1865 presents a depressive woman, deeply absorbed in her thoughts, who seems to await man's impulse to shake her from her lethargy; this photo perhaps offers the closest approach to what Wagner had in mind when he created this figure of Kundry.(10)

What is of crucial importance is the universal, formal structure at work here: the "normal" relationship between cause and effect is inverted. The "effect" is the original fact, which comes first, and what appears as its cause—the shocks which allegedly set in motion the depression—is actually a reaction to this effect, a struggle against depression. The logic is once again that of a "not-all." "Not-all" of depression results from the causes which trigger it; yet at the same time there is nothing, no element of depression, which is not triggered by some external active cause. In other words, everything in depression is an effect—everything except depression as such, i.e., except the form of depression. The status of depression is thus strictly "transcendental": depression provides the a priori frame within which causes can act the way they do.(11)

It may appear that I have simply reproduced the most common prejudice about female depression, i.e., the notion of a woman who can be aroused only by a man's stimulation. There is, however, another way to look at it. Doesn't the elementary structure of subjectivity consist in the fact that not-all of the subject is determined by the causal chain? Isn't the subject the very gap that separates the cause from its effect? Doesn't it emerge precisely insofar as the relationship between cause and effect cannot be accounted for?(12) In other words, what is this feminine depression that suspends the causal link, the causal enchainment of our acts to external stimuli, if not the founding gesture of subjectivity, the primordial act of freedom, of breaking up our insertion into the nexus of causes and effects.(13) The philosophical name for this "depression" is absolute negativity, i.e., what Hegel called "the night of the world," the withdrawal of the subject into itself. In short, woman, not man, is the subject par excellence. And the link between depression and the bursting of the indestructible life-substance is also clear: depression and withdrawal-into-self is the primordial act of retreat, of acquiring a distance from the indestructible life-substance, which makes it appear as a repulsive scintillation.

5

In conclusion, emphasis should be laid on the inherent political dimension of this notion of enjoyment, i.e., on the way the lamella, this kernel of enjoyment, functions as a political factor. Let us approach this dimension by way of one of the enigmas of cultural life in post-Socialist Eastern

Europe: why does Milan Kundera even now, after the victory of democracy, suffer a kind of excommunication in Bohemia? His works are rarely Published, the media pass over them in silence, and everybody is somehow embarrassed to speak about him. In order to justify such treatment, one rakes up old stories about his hidden collaboration with the Communist regime, about his taking refuge in private pleasures and avoiding the righteous battle á la Havel, etc. However, the roots of this resistance are deeper—Kundera conveys a message unbearable to “normalized” democratic consciousness.

In a first approach, the fundamental axis that structures the universe of his works seems to be the opposition between the puffy, pretentious Pathos of official Socialist ideology and the islands of everyday private life, its small joys and pleasures, laughter and tears, beyond the reach of ideology. These islands enable us to assume a distance that renders visible the ideological ritual in its vain, ridiculous pretentiousness and grotesque meaninglessness: it is not worth the trouble to recalcitrate against the official ideology with pathetic speeches on freedom and democracy. Sooner or later, this leads to a new version of the “Big March,” of ideological obsession. If Kundera is reduced to this attitude, it is easy to dismiss him by confronting him with Vaclav Havel’s fundamental “Althusserian” insight into how the ultimate conformist attitude is an “apolitical” distance which, while publicly obeying the imposed ritual, privately indulges in cynical irony. It is not sufficient to ascertain that the ideological ritual is a mere appearance which nobody takes seriously; this appearance is essential in its very capacity of appearance, which is why one has to take a risk and refuse to participate in the public ritual. (See Havel’s famous example, from his essay “The Power of the Powerless,” of a common man, a greengrocer, who of course does not believe in Socialism, and yet, when the occasion demands it, dutifully decorates the windows of his store with official Party slogans, etc.)

One therefore has to go further by taking into account the fact that there is no way to simply step out of ideology. The private indulgence in cynicism and the obsession with private pleasures are all ways in which totalitarian ideology is at work in “non-ideological” everyday life; life is determined by ideology, and ideology is “present in it in the mode of absence,” if we may resort to this syntagm from the heroic epoch of structuralism. The depolitization of the private sphere in late Socialist societies is “compulsive,” marked by the fundamental prohibition of free political discussion; for that reason, it always functions as an avoidance of what is truly at stake. This accounts for the feature which immediately strikes the eye in Kundera’s novels: the depoliticized private sphere is in no way the free domain of innocent Pleasures. There is always something damp, claustrophobic, inauthentic, and even desperate in this striving for sex and other pleasures. In this respect, the lesson of Kundera’s novels is the exact opposite of a naive reliance on the innocent private sphere: totalitarian Socialist ideology vitiates from within the very sphere of privacy in which we take refuge.

This, however, is far from being all there is to it. We must take another step here, since the lesson we learn from Kundera is even more ambiguous. Notwithstanding the dampness of the private sphere, the fact remains that the totalitarian situation gave rise to a series of phenomena attested to by numerous chronicles of everyday life in the Socialist East. In reaction to totalitarian ideological domination, there was not only a cynical escape into the "good life" of private pleasures, but also an extraordinary flourishing of authentic friendship, visits, dinners, passionate intellectual conversations in closed societies—features which usually fascinated visitors from the West. The Problem, of course, is that there is no way to draw a clear-cut line between the two sides: they are the front and back of the same coin which is why, with the advent of democracy, they both disappear. It is to Kundera's credit that he does not conceal this ambiguity: the spirit of "Middle Europe," of authentic friendship and intellectual sociability, survived in Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland only as a form of resistance against totalitarian ideological domination.

Perhaps yet another step can be ventured here. The very subordination to the Socialist order brought about a specific enjoyment, not only the enjoyment provided by our awareness of living in a universe in which here IS no uncertainty since the System has (or claims to have) an answer for everything, but above all enjoying the very stupidity of the System—relishing the emptiness of official rituals and the worn-out stylistic figures of the predominant ideological discourse. (Suffice it to recall here the extent to which certain key Stalinist syntagms became ironic figures of speech even among Western intellectuals: "objective responsibility," etc. "Stalinism" confronts us with what Lacan designated as the imbecility inherent in the signifier.) The contemporary Russian composer Alfred Schnittke succeeded in exposing this feature in his opera *Life with an Idiot*. The opera tells the story of an ordinary married man (known as "I") who, as a punishment imposed by the Party, is forced to bring someone from an insane asylum to live with his family. The idiot, Vava, who has the appearance of a normal, bearded, bespectacled intellectual and prattles meaningless political phrases all the time, soon shows his true colors as an obscene intruder by first having sex with I's wife and then with I himself. Insofar as we are living in a universe of language, we are condemned to this imbecility: we can assume a minimal distance from it, thus rendering it more bearable, but we can never get rid of it.

The ambiguity of Kundera's universe in which Socialist "repression" creates the conditions for authentic happiness is perhaps best rendered at the end of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Philip Kaufman's unjustly depreciated film version of the novel resorts to a temporal displacement that successfully condenses the end of Kundera's novel. Late at night, the hero, a dissident doctor exiled to the Czech countryside, returns home with his wife from a dance in a small nearby town; the last sight of them is a point-of-view shot of the dark macadam road illuminated by the lights of their truck. The film suddenly cuts to California a couple of weeks later; their friend Sabina, who lives there as a sculptor, receives a letter

informing her of their death in a traffic accident while returning home from a dance, and comments that "they must have been happy at the time of their death." The film then cuts back to the previous scene, a simple continuation of the point-of-view shot, from the driver's seat, of the road into which our gaze penetrates.

The sublime effect of this last shot results from a temporal displacement: it hinges on the coexistence of the spectator's knowledge that the hero and his wife are already dead, with their forward-moving gaze on a strangely illuminated road. The point is not only that the allure of this strange illumination acquires the meaning of death, but rather that this last point-of-view shot belongs to people who are still alive, although we know that they are already dead. After the flash-forward to California informing us of their death, the hero and his wife dwell in the domain "between two deaths", the same shot which was, prior to the flash-forward, a simple point-of-view shot of living subjects, now renders the gaze of the "living dead."

1. See pp. 197-198. For a reading of this passage, see chapter 5 of Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1993.
2. The same procedure was applied by Tim Burton in the outstanding credits-sequence of *Batman*: the camera errs along nondescript, winding, unsmooth metal funnels; after it gradually backs off and acquires a "normal" distance from its object, it becomes clear what this object actually is: the tiny Batman badge.
3. The counter to this Lynchian attitude is perhaps the philosophy of Leibniz: Leibniz was fascinated by microscopes because they confirmed to him that what appears from the "normal," everyday point of view to be a lifeless object, is actually full of life. One has but to take a closer look at it, i.e., to observe the object from absolute proximity: under the lens of a microscope, one can perceive the wild crawling of innumerable tiny living things. Cf. chapter 2 of Miran Božović, *Der grosse Andere: Gotteskonzepte in der Philosophie der Neuzeit*, Vienna and Berlin, Turia und Kant, 1993.
4. The exception is provided here by the naked body of Isabella Rossellini towards the end of *Blue Velvet*: when, after the endured nightmare, she leaves the house and approaches Jeffrey, it is as if a body belonging to another, dark, nightly, infernal realm all of a sudden found itself in our "normal" daily universe, out of its own element, like a stranded octopus or some other creature from the deep sea—a wounded, exposed body whose material presence exerts an almost unbearable pressure on us.
5. It was Chaplin's *Great Dictator* which already bore witness to a homologous disturbance in the relationship between the voice and the written word: the spoken word (the speeches of the dictator

Hynkel) is obscene, incomprehensible, and absolutely incommensurate with the written word.

6. See Michel Chion, *David Lynch, Paris, Cahiers du Cinema*, 1992, especially pp. 108-117 and 227-228.
7. For a more detailed reading of these lines from *Richard II*, see chapter 1 of Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991.
8. As to this logic, see Lacan's Seminar XX.
9. In the analysis of films, it is therefore crucial to expose homogeneous, continuous, diegetic reality as a product of "secondary elaboration," i.e., to discern in it the part of (symbolic) reality and the part of fantasy hallucination. Suffice it to recall *Home Alone*. The entire film hinges on the fact that the boy's family—his proper intersubjective environs, his Other—and the two burglars that threaten him when the family is away never cross paths. The burglars enter the scene when the boy finds himself alone, and when, at the end of the film, the family returns home, all traces of the burglars' presence almost magically evaporate, although, as a result of their confrontation with the boy, practically the entire house should lie in ruins. The very fact that the burglars' existence is not acknowledged by the Other, undoubtedly bears witness to the fact that we are dealing with the boy's fantasy. The moment the two burglars enter the scene, we change terrain and jump from social reality into the fantasy universe in which there is neither death nor guilt; into the universe of silent slapstick pictures and cartoons, in which a heap of iron falls on your head, yet all you feel is a slight bump; in which a gallon of gasoline explodes on your head, yet the only damage you suffer is that some of your hair is burned. Perhaps this is how one has to conceive of Macaulay Culkin's notorious scream: not as an expression of his fear of the burglars, but rather as an expression of his horror at the prospect of being thrown (again) into his own fantasy universe.
10. One also encounters this motif of a woman shaken out of her lethargic numbness where one would not normally look for it—in Henry James' *Aspern Papers*, for example. The narrator forces his way into a decaying Venetian palazzo, the home of two ladies, an old American who was in her youth, ages ago, a mistress of the great American poet Aspern, and her somewhat younger niece. He uses every possible ruse to obtain the object of his desire: a bundle of Aspern's unknown love letters carefully kept by the old lady. What he fails to take into account, obsessed as he is by the object of his desire, is his own impact on life in the decaying palazzo; he brings with him a spirit of vivacity which awakens the two ladies from their lethargic vegetation and even stirs up, in the younger one, sexual lust.

11. The logic here is exactly homologous to that articulated by Deleuze apropos of the Freudian duality of the pleasure (and reality) principle and its "beyond," the death-drive. (What is the depression of Lynch's heroines if not a manifestation of the death drive?) Freud's point is not that there are phenomena that cannot be accounted for by the pleasure and reality principle (it is easy for him to demonstrate, apropos of every example of "pleasure in pain," apparently running counter to the pleasure principle, the hidden narcissistic gain conveyed by the renunciation of pleasure), but rather that, in order to account for the very functioning of the pleasure and reality principles, we are obliged to posit the more fundamental dimension of the "death drive" and the compulsion-to-repeat which hold open the space where the pleasure principle can exert its rule. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," in *Masochism*, New York, Zone Books, 1991.
12. This "unaccountability" is what Freud was aiming at with his concept of overdetermination: a contingent external cause can trigger unforeseen catastrophic consequences by stirring up the trauma which always already glows under the ashes, i.e., "insisting" in the unconscious.
13. This suspension of linear causality is at the same time the constitutive feature of the symbolic order. In this respect, the case of Jon Elster is very instructive. Within the framework of the "objective" socio-psychological approach, Elster endeavors to isolate the specific level of mechanism, located between a merely descriptive or narrative ideographic method and the construction of general theories: "A mechanism is a specific causal pattern that can be recognized after the event but rarely foreseen. . . . It is less than a theory, but a great deal more than a description" (Jon Elster, *Political Psychology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 3 and 5).

## Slavoj Zizek über Blue Velvet

(Aus: Slavoj Zizek & Sophie Fiennes. (2006). *The pervert's guide to cinema*. Dokumentarfilm. Transskription D. Sträuli)

<https://biblioklept.org/2014/04/16/slavoj-zizek-on-david-lynchs-blue-velvet/>

*[Frank enters Dorothy's apartment. She recedes backward from the door. Dorothy: "Hello, Baby." Frank: "Shut up! It's Daddy! Where's my Bourbon?!"]*

Dorothy's apartment is one of those hellish places which abound in David Lynch's films – a places [sic] where all moral and social inhibitions seem to be suspended, where everything is possible: the lowest masochistic sex, obscenities, the deepest level of our desires that we are not even ready to admit to ourselves – we are confronted with them in such places. *[Frank: "Spread your legs. ... Wider. ... Don't you fucking look at me!" Frank inhales.]*

From what perspective should we observe this scene?

Imagine the scene as that of a small child, hidden in a closet or behind a door, witnessing the parental intercourse. He doesn't yet know what sexuality is, how we do it; all he knows is what he hears, this strange, deep breathing sound. And then he tries to imagine what goes on.

At the very beginning of *Blue Velvet* we see Jeffrey's father having a heart attack, falling down. We have the eclipse of the normal paternal authority. *[Hospital room, father tries vainly to speak. Heavy breathing. Then: Frank inhaling: "Oh Mommy, Mommy! Mommy! ... Baby wants to fuck!"]*

It is as if Jeffrey fantasizes this wild parental couple of Dorothy and Frank, as a kind of phantasmatic supplement to the lack of the real paternal authority. *[Frank screams: "You fuck! You fucker's fucker! You fucker!" He then beats Dorothy in the face. "Don't you fucking look at me!"]*

Frank not even obviously acts, but even overacts, it is as if he is ridiculously overexcessive, gesticulating, shouting and so on, are here to cover up something. The point is of course the elementary one: to convince the invisible observer that father is potent, to cover up father's impotence.

So, the second way to read the scene would have be as a spectacle, a ridiculously violent spectacle set up by the father to convince the son of his power, of his overpotency. *[Frank "fucks" Dorothy.]*

The third way would have been to focus on Dorothy herself. Many feminists of course emphasize the brutality against women in this scene, the abuse, how the Dorothy character is abused. There is obviously this dimension in it.

But I think one should risk a more shocking and obverse interpretation. What if the central, as it were, problem of this entire scene is Dorothy's

passivity? [*Frank screaming "Don't you fucking look at me!"*] So, what if what Frank is doing is a kind of a desperate, ridiculous, but nonetheless effective attempt of trying to help Dorothy, to awaken her out of her lethargy, to bring her into life. [*Frank exhaling forcefully, like a shaman.*] So, if Frank is anybody's fantasy, maybe he is Dorothy's fantasy. There is kind of a strange interlocking of mutual fantasies? It's not only ambiguity, but oscillation between three focal points. This I think is what accounts for the strange reverberations of this scene.

## Through a bottle darkly: Blue Velvet's Freudian beers

*Do beers maketh David Lynch's men?*

Michael Zunenshine

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*Web exclusive*



Credit: Simon Cooper / cooperillo.com

In David Lynch's 1986 film [Blue Velvet](#), college prep Jeffrey Beaumont asks the eager high-schooler Sandy if she's ever tried Heineken. No, she answers, but her police-detective dad likes Bud. Maniacal, gas-huffing Frank meanwhile enthuses that he only drinks Pabst Blue Ribbon, adding that he'll "fuck anything that moves".

If we take these three beer brands as personality cues, we can extend an interesting line of inquiry through Sigmund Freud's triumvirate domain of selfhood. Pabst, Heineken and Budweiser stand in respectively for the id, the ego and the superego, and add another dimension to the dynamics between the characters who drink them. Here goes a thought experiment inspired by one of Lynch's little details. Let's drink up.

### *Jeffrey – the ego – Heineken*

Just as Jeffrey ([Kyle MacLachlan](#)) is Blue Velvet's main character, so the ego is the main character of the life narrative.

There are two ways to consider it. One is that the ego is the core self which constantly has to negotiate the drives of the id and reprimands of

the superego. The other is that there is no core self and the ego is just an empty subjective space which sometimes gives the id more room to play and at other times gives the superego more room to punish. Either way, it's the least interesting of all three Freudian concepts in itself, just as Jeffrey is presumably a naïve dullard before the film's events kick off.



But this bland normality is the perfect vehicle to bring us into Lynch's twisted narrative as it gives the viewer an easy, non-specific point of identification. Once he finds the severed ear after visiting his hospitalised father, Jeffrey demonstrates his enthusiasm for adventure and willingness to take risks, and we're willing to go along with him.

Although he starts out as normal as can be, the representative ego of the film, Jeffrey is soon struggling between other forces. He's easily overcome by visceral urges, like retrieving a severed rotten ear from an empty field. Nor can he resist the temptations of mystery, such as uncovering the identities of Dorothy Vallens and Frank Booth. This is the ego's response to the id. But Jeffrey also bends to the demands of the superego, whether he's assuming responsibility for shielding Sandy from the underworld (and guilt for involving her in it) or he's trying to protect Dorothy from Frank.

Heineken is a mainstream European beer that is popularly commercialised in North America. Neither wholly familiar nor completely foreign, it lies somewhere in between – like the ego. Jeffrey presents the beer as somewhat refined and sophisticated, discovered at whatever big-city college he has returned from. (It's nice to assume he attends a big-city university to contrast with his return to small-town Lumberton.)

As to what Jeffrey is studying, one can only guess. He has developed a worldly curiosity that could be related to the humanities but still retains his practical sensibilities, as exhibited by how comfortable he feels taking over his father's hardware store (albeit with the intention of borrowing equipment to use as a disguise). His affinity with Heineken therefore occupies the wonderful medial position of a curious mind but within the limits of normal reality. Though the green Heineken bottle skews our perception through its tinted glass, it doesn't completely darken our access to reality.

The green also signifies Jeffrey's naiveté, like spring vegetation ready to be cut and uprooted from the solid earth. And the colour resounds with envy (like Iago's "green-ey'd monster" in Othello), as Jeffrey isn't content with the simple life but is desirous of opportunity, experience and adventure.

### *Detective Williams – the superego – Budweiser*

Since Jeffrey's father suffers a heart attack at the beginning of the film, it is Sandy's father, the cold, eye-balling Detective Williams ([George Dickerson](#)), who stands as the film's ultimate authority figure. Playing watchdog is the domain of Freud's superego, keeping the ego in check from the wild ways of the id.

Detective Williams is the head of a solid, wholesome family, but not too strict or overbearing. He lets Sandy, a high-schooler, go on a date with the older Jeffrey, but not without giving the young suitor some good old-fashioned paternal advice.

He strongly warns Jeffrey against further pursuing his investigations, but keeps a cool head every time Jeffrey defies his warning. Like the superego, he is not concerned with discipline and punishment so much as with creating a space for the ego to play within the limits of normality. If the superego's power comes from warning and reprimand, it would be rendered impotent if the ego had no room for minor disobedience and reinterpretation of the rules. Detective Williams creates this space of allowance for Jeffrey, and the viewer, to go deeper into the dark mysteries of Lumberton.



But Detective Williams has a darker side, as it emerges that he, or at least his partner, is in league with the bad guys. We never really find out if that's part of a larger overall set-up, or if Williams is indeed corrupt and deftly able to turn the tables to cover his ass at the end. But from the outset there's something inherently shady about his looks and gestures, as well as the fact that he tells Jeffrey that police work can be "horrible". While the true superego has an overt mandate to keep order, it's not a simple yardstick for right and wrong. Like the id, it has its own motivations and methods of manipulation that it deploys to win over the ego. But just as Detective Williams may or may not be corrupt, so the id and superego may actually have a secret, perverse partnership to keep the ego from becoming too absorbed in either side of the personality spectrum.

Budweiser stands for several things. For one, it's a 'working-class beer' – working class with a strong work ethic and a sincere belief in the American way. It's one of the official sponsors of such all-American institutions as the Super Bowl and NASCAR's Chevrolet team. It is mainstream, trustworthy and straightforward. Even its nickname implies the friendly approachability of good, wholesome Americans: it's your 'bud'. The overall image is that of official authority mixed with kindly and well-meaning horse sense (like the [Budweiser Clydesdales](#)). It's unthreatening, but still strives to strongly influence a certain set of American values.

But Budweiser's parent company is also one of the largest and most powerful beverage companies in the world. Anheuser-Busch (actually wholly owned by the Belgian-Brazilian company AB InBev) has a history of aggressive takeovers and buyouts, and is also rated one of the most toxic companies in the USA. Its stately label has all the patriotic colours of the USA, while also faintly resembling legal tender in the form of a corporate bond. This discrepancy between 'working man's drink' and evil corporate giant perfectly sums up the role of the authorities in Blue Velvet. Indeed, can the average Joe really identify with a beer that calls itself King?

### *Frank – the id – Pabst Blue Ribbon*

Pabst, like Bud, is also seen as a low-class working man's beer. But we imagine Pabst drinkers as having less of a work ethic than those of Bud; they're blue-collar, but hate their jobs and resent the corporate world that enslaves them. Getting drunk isn't a reward after a long day's work but something you might do on your lunch break. It's a drink for misfits, and Blue Velvet's Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) is the biggest misfit of them all.



Blue Velvet (1986)

Frank disrupts the system of small-town harmony from the moment Jeffrey encounters him. He represents everything Jeffrey believed repressed in his idyllic Lumberton. But though Jeffrey is repulsed, even incredulous that someone like Frank can exist, he's spellbound by Frank and the underworld he emerges from. Jeffrey can't help compare Frank with his own impotent father, lying speechless in the hospital.

In everyday society, the id is the repressed element that lurks beneath the surface of civilised life and threatens to erupt whenever the picture gets too perfect. For perfection is not balance, it is a form of excess in itself. Even Frank needs to balance his sick authoritarian daddy complex ("It's 'Daddy', you shithead") with occasional lapses into Oedipal baby-need ("Baby wants to fuck").

Today, however, Pabst has taken on a new cultural significance. It has been appropriated as the beer of choice by the young, urban middle-class party-goers popularly and condescendingly known as 'hipsters'. This demographic is locked in an eternal present, heedless of the impending future and the hard work involved in staking out an independent life. Their priorities are looking good by looking different, knowing the latest trends before they are trends, engaging in random experimental sexual encounters, and getting drunk, high and having a good time.



Credit: Simon Cooper

Wild sex and intoxication are clearly within Frank's domain. He goes on drunken, drugged-up joy rides and is full of strange sexual perversities. This pleasure-seeking animal who lives for the moment is Freud's primitive id, providing the sexual and murderous fuel which can turn any routine existence into an exciting life-and-death narrative.

But just as the superego cannot function by having complete control, nor can the id persist too long without the risk of turning into its own rejected opposite. This is characterised by Frank's need to become a helpless baby, before instantly transforming back into the violent and perverse 'father'. Pabst drinkers want the freedom of adults without the responsibilities, and the endless fun of childhood without the rules of obedience – and, like Frank, they can instantly transform from one to the other depending on what they want or need in the moment.

Of course, this final analogy between Frank and hipster culture could not have been drawn when Blue Velvet was released in 1986; but it does seem true to the Pabst-drinking hipster culture that can appropriate any symbol of the past for its own expression – just as Frank himself is able to transform anything he touches (like a melancholic Roy Orbison love song) and any place he goes (the entire town of Lumberton) into a dark, surreal experience. If the world itself seems to be accommodating itself to David Lynch's vision, that at least testifies to his masterful ability to create deeply resonant films that bear, indeed beg, re-watching and reinterpreting, over and over, with or without a beer in hand.