LIZ GREENE

Bringing vinyl into the digital domain: Aesthetics in David Lynch's *Inland Empire* (2006)

ABSTRACT

This article will focus on the aesthetic choices made by David Lynch informed by both old and new technology in Inland Empire. *Considering Lynch's new digital cinematic practice this article will highlight the merits and pitfalls of this new approach to the soundtrack and outline how it is incorporated into Lynch's aesthetics. Utilising theories of Slavoj Žižek, Michel Chion and Lesley Stern, I will outline how Lynch consciously uses sounds of the past to play with our concepts of diegetic time and space. Within the filmmaking process, I suggest, he has also captured the sounds of the machinery, which creates a new sound to add to his eerie catalogue of soundscapes. This article will draw from Lynch's earlier collaborations with the sound designer Alan Splet onwards, and assess the evolution in Lynch's sound style. I have conducted an interview with Lynch who discusses his collaborative process and use of sound/noise in* Inland Empire *and I outline here how this informs his overall aesthetic choice.*

KEYWORDS

David Lynch
Inland Empire
digital
film
sound
noise
technology
performance
Hollywood

The New Soundtrack 2.2 (2012): 97–111
DOI: 10.3366/sound.2012.0032

www.eupjournals.com/SOUND

> 'From Hollywood, California, where stars make dreams and dreams make stars.'
>
> – Announcer (William H. Macy) on television chat show, *Marilyn Levens' Starlight Celebrity Show*, in *Inland Empire* (Lynch 2006)

This announcement, included as a tagline to the *Marilyn Levens' Starlight Celebrity Show*, highlights an entertainment industry that must perpetuate the star system as commodity. The actors Nikki Grace (Laura Dern) and Devon Berk (Justin Theroux) of the fictional film, *On High in Blue Tomorrows* – the film within the film of *Inland Empire* (Lynch 2006a) – are the reluctant interviewees of the caustic presenter Marilyn Levens (Diane Ladd). They perform their contractual role by promoting the film, attempting with some degree of success to maintain their personal integrity, as she lowers the tone of the show from gossip mongering into innuendo. Here we witness an exposé of an industry laid bare of the glitz and glamour, pinpointing the gutter press agenda of the mundane and banal promotional circuit. David Lynch is sharply critiquing the Hollywood star/studio system, and opening up an attack on a mode of production that his film is far removed from.

In this article I shall consider the narrative of *Inland Empire* and Lynch's adoption of new technology for aesthetic purposes, which are used here to critique both the star system and an outdated mode of production. Lynch obtained a significant performance from Dern in her dual role as Nikki/Susan Blue and I shall outline how his adoption of digital technology plays a part in eliciting such a performance, while also noting some of the pitfalls of this form of digital practice.

Inland Empire is a film that was made with new technology, some material coming from new platforms, such as Lynch's website, using his preferred filmmaking processes, that is, as an artist involved with every aspect of the project. He sought finance outside of Hollywood, from the French studio, Canal Plus (who had previously financed *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch 2001)), and shot a significant amount of the film in Lódz, Poland, with a Polish film crew. It took over two and a half years to make (Clarke 2007: 16). The origins of the project flies in the face of the older Hollywood system of production, but also the narrative (and I use that term loosely) is highly critical of Hollywood.

Kingsley Stewart (Jeremy Irons), the director of the film *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, announces to Nikki and Devon that the film they are making is in fact a remake. Devon retorts that he doesn't do remakes. Kingsley tells them both that the other film had a different name, and was never completed (which makes it an acceptable project for Devon to continue working on). However, when Nikki presses Kingsley as to why it was never finished, he discloses that the two lead actors died during the making of the film. A sinister aspect of the film industry is exposed here. The film is said to be cursed, the narrative stemming from an old Polish gypsy folktale. This has echoes to an earlier conversation Nikki had with her neighbour, Visitor #1 (Grace Zabriskie). The producers of

On High in Blue Tomorrows have kept this information from the talent and crew and it is only through the cunning probing by Kingsley's assistant Freddie Howard (Harry Dean Stanton) that the story comes out. Kingsley himself had also kept this information from the actors. Lynch draws attention to this in the feature length documentary film *Lynch (One)* (blackANDwhite2007), which contains behind the scenes footage of the making of *Inland Empire*. Here, Lynch is critical of the fictional filmmakers in *On High in Blue Tomorrows.* The lack of care shown by the producers and director for the wellbeing of cast and crew of the film is most evident, they lack any personal integrity, instead preferring to keep everyone in the dark as they attempt to make a tidy profit.

Freddie also asks the actors for money (to pay rent to his landlord) and is thus seen as a dubious character. This further indicates the parasitic nature of film production and perhaps could suggest that Hollywood is in fact bankrupt. The filmmakers here represented by the producers and the director's assistant, are using the actors for their own gain without any regard for their welfare. Nikki and Devon are buffeted between an uncaring production mode and an over-inflated star system.

In *Inland Empire*, Lynch revisits some narrative themes from his earlier film *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch 2001). Both films are concerned with the role of actresses in LA and how they are used, spat out and easily replaced. In *Inland Empire*, Lynch also draws loose connections between the trafficking of Eastern European women and prostitution in LA. The other side of the glamour industry and celebrity in Hollywood is the sight of women grafting as prostitutes (*Inland Empire*) and waitresses (*Mulholland Drive*). *Inland Empire* is a much grittier exposé of LA, containing one poignant scene of social realism, involving drug addicts and the homeless, which is unusual in Lynch's cinema. This is a scathing portrait of Hollywood where Nikki/Susan is seen spitting up blood over a Hollywood star symbol, Dorothy Lamour (see Totaro, Rist, Jordan 2009). What Lynch is critiquing here is an industry dedicated to large budgets, stars, and aesthetic facade. Instead of engaging in that process Lynch set about to make a film digitally, to a large extent away from Hollywood, in Poland, that undermines the very nature of the Hollywood studio film.

Whilst filming *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, a highly critical note is used to illustrate the unwieldy processes of shooting on film in the film within the film. The production is delayed due to a number of factors. At one point the actors are kept away from the set due to the tweaking of lights. A humorous scene occurs between the director and gaffer (chief electrician) about the lowering of a light on set. Within the narrative we see the frustration of Kingsley Stewart, the director. Kingsley is a quintessential English gentleman (could in fact Kingsley Stewart be a parody of the two British actors Ben Kingsley and Patrick Stewart?) On set, Kingsley grows frustrated with the gaffer, who cannot hear him properly (the gaffer is voiced by Lynch, un-credited). The gaffer is off-screen throughout this episode but we hear his voice mistake the orders Kingsley gives him. There is a hilarious verbal exchange about whether the

lamp should be lowered or not, but what is significant is that we are witnessing a cumbersome method of filmmaking that is holding up the process for everyone involved.

Furthermore, the camera needs to reload and the production must stop in order to allow for this. On another occasion, extraneous noises from outside can be heard which delay the crew from shooting. These difficulties inherent in making the film within the film seem to be a playful dig at the older studio apparatus. In the making of *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, we see the film apparatus revealed, including a Panavision 35mm film camera, crane, lighting, sets and large stages in the studio lot. We also hear saccharine sweet music accompanying some scenes in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*.

Lynch has spoken candidly of his frustrations with mainstream Hollywood filmmaking practices and his desire to get back to basics (Lim 2006). An early indication of this approach appeared with the online content on his website where subscribers were able to view original Lynch material. Elements of the rabbit sitcom show and *Axxon N* were available online much earlier to Lynch's fans in this different format. These elements were later incorporated into *Inland Empire*. Other works from the online site were later released on DVD as *Dynamic:01: The Best of DAVIDLYNCH.COM* (Lynch 2006b). Lynch's adoption of online resources has meant that he has been at the cutting edge of new technology for some time in order to be able to deliver all of this content as an ongoing web presence.

However, the fractured nature of this content led to some problems for *Inland Empire*. Lynch noted:

> I never saw any whole, W-H-O-L-E … I saw plenty of holes, H-O-L-E-S. But I didn't really worry. I would get an idea for a scene and shoot it, get another idea and shoot that. I didn't know how they would relate.
>
> (Lim 2006)

Lynch's approach meant that he was inventing the narrative as he went. He secured the finance for the film only when he was in the middle of shooting and he told Canal Plus, 'I don't know what I'm doing, and I'm shooting on DV' (Lim 2006). In interview with Dennis Lim he stated further that he did not have a specific moment of clarity of what it was all about, rather Lynch revealed 'something started to talk to me. It was as if it was talking to me all along but I didn't know it' (Lim 2006). The fractured narrative has divided critics and audiences, although one film scholar, Anna Katharina Schaffner (2009), offers an in-depth analysis of the plot.

The fractured narrative was the result of the approach utilised by Lynch in the making of the film alongside his choice of technology which also had an impact on his aesthetic choices. *Inland Empire* was shot on a Sony DSR-PD150 and transferred to a 35mm film print for cinematic release at 1.85:1 aspect ratio. The PD150 is a domestic/semi-professional range

camera. It is small, lightweight and easy to move within the scene. Lynch explains his choice of camera:

> The quality [of the digital image] reminds me of the films of the 1930s. In the early days, the emulsion wasn't so good, so there was less information on the screen. The Sony PD result is a bit like that; it's nowhere near high-def. And sometimes, in a frame, if there's some question about what you're seeing, or some dark corner, the mind can go dreaming. If everything is crystal clear in that frame, that's what it is – that's all it is. And high-def, unfortunately, is so crystal clear.
>
> (Lynch 2006c: 153)

Shooting on digital video, Lynch chooses not the best digital visual image, but one that gives some of the graininess and mystery back to the image. By not shooting in high definition he feels he is giving more depth to the visual aesthetic.

With the Sony PD150 he is also able to make extensive use of the close-up in *Inland Empire*. The lightweight camera lends itself well to being hand-held and moved around within the scene. In the early scene with the neighbour, Visitor #1, Lynch gets the camera so tight on the actor's face that the image becomes distorted, making her visit all the more odd and sinister. Walter Benjamin, in writing on the camera, highlights the important detail uncovered in the close-up shot. He noted:

> By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.
>
> (Benjamin 1936/1992: 677)

By getting so close to the actor Lynch increases the intensity of the action. It is unnerving to watch Visitor #1, with her predictions and folklore, foretelling Nikki's future. When she begins to curse and Nikki asks her to leave, it is a relief to have the image of her face and shrill voice literally removed from this intense scene. Her close-up is invasive and it is uncomfortable to be that tight to such an unpleasant character. But it is not only the visitor who is shot in close-up. Nikki is tightly framed and her discomfort as the scene progresses is highly evident.

Cutting between the two women's faces in close-up is abrupt and violent and adds to the dramatic tension within the scene. Film editor, Walter Murch, has commented on the process of editing and the use of the close-up in filmmaking practice:

> Film is a dramatic construction in which, for the first time in human history, the characters can be seen to think at even the subtlest level,

> and these thoughts can then be choreographed. Sometimes the thoughts are almost physically visible, moving across the faces of talented actors like clouds across the sky. This power is enhanced by two techniques that lie at the foundation of cinema itself: the close-up, which renders such subtlety visible; and the cut, the sudden switch from one image to another, which mimics the acrobatic nature of thought itself.
>
> (Murch 2002: 199)

Within this scene Lynch utilises both the close up and the cut in order to aesthetically foretell a nightmare vision of Nikki's future, and her fear is palpably registered on her face. Cutting between these very tight close ups heightens the tension in the scene. It is the lightweight nature of the digital camera which allows for such an invasive approach to framing.

However, one of the drawbacks of digital cameras, and in particular the lower-end models, is that they can be particularly noisy on the soundtrack if a microphone is placed too close to them. In a scene, such as the one just described, with the camera so tight on the actors' faces, it is possible that high frequency camera noise would leak onto the production dialogue recording.

R. Murray Schafer discovered, on asking students to produce a hum in meditation and ear training sessions, that they produce different notes depending on which part of the world they were from (Schafer 1977: 99). North American students produced a B natural note and their European counterparts produced a G sharp due to the frequencies of electricity in their respective countries. The specific frequency of electricity at 60 cycles per second in the US and Canada or 50 cycles per second in Europe could influence how people heard and interpreted their sound world.

In *Inland Empire*, this high frequency sound could have been influenced by the presence of the digital cinematic apparatus. This hum is further explored throughout the film and becomes the filmmaker's aesthetic choice. High-pitched hums and buzzes are utilised particularly in the second half of the film. Did Lynch consciously choose to impart *Inland Empire* with a similar sound aesthetic to that of the digital technology? Or, is it a response to the sound picked up in production that influenced the post-production process? Lynch is an intuitive filmmaker and this film, in particular, was open to organic changes. For example, the script was being written on a daily basis for the actors (Lim 2006). However, a conscious decision must have been made at some point to include the sounds of digital and analogue technology. The analogue sounds included are those of the crackling of a stylus on vinyl, and the white noise of the television set: the very sounds of analogue reproduction (see Randolph Jordan's MA thesis (2003) which outlines the importance of turntables in Lynch's cinema and also Dominic Power's review of *Inland Empire* (2007) which draws attention to these sounds). In a film, made with new digital technology, about a film made under the studio system with older technology, which is often undermined within the narrative, the

sounds of the past must have a significant meaning for the filmmaker and the story he is telling.

In interview, I asked Lynch about his use of digital noise in *Inland Empire*. However, he was typically vague and elusive when questioned about the specifics of his film. He suggested,

> Well, the camera makes noise and I'm sure they tried to get all that out. But you get things out in a really sophisticated way but sometimes the trade-off is if it eats into the voice and changes something critical, you go with that thing.
>
> (Greene 2007)

Lynch was reluctant to be drawn on the specifics of what went into the soundtrack but he does suggest that the noise may have been kept in order to maintain the integrity of the vocal performance of the actors.

The inclusion of noise in the sound design of *Inland Empire* conforms with Lynch's earlier work (with the exception of *The Straight Story* (1999)) in so far as a noisy soundscape accompanies the characters through various times and spaces. Where it differs, however, is in the ratio of low to high frequency noise. Lynch had previously made greater use of low-end rumbling sounds, limiting the high end of the sound spectrum to arcing and shorter pulsations of sound. The manner in which these new high frequency sounds, hisses, hums, buzzes and crackling, are used in *Inland Empire* emphasises a new departure for Lynch both technically and aesthetically. These frequencies also represent the shift from the low-end industrial Philadelphia on the East coast in the 1970s to the digital hum of Los Angeles in the West Coast in the noughties.

Firstly, the potential noise from the digital camera leaking onto the soundtrack, due to the nature of the camera used and the close proximity of the camera to subject, and thus the microphone, increases the traditional unwanted noise on the sound track. Secondly, the aesthetic choice to utilise high frequency hisses alongside the crackling sound of older analogue technology draws attention to the reproduction of the sound and the filmic apparatus. But what does it all mean? Is Lynch simply replacing one noise with another or are there broader questions to be raised or meanings to be drawn from such a new approach?

Slavoj Žižek recalls a rumour about the soundtrack of *Eraserhead* (Lynch 1977) that suggests that an inaudible sound, played at a low frequency was responsible for the feeling of unease in the audience:

> The status of this voice that no one can perceive, but which nonetheless dominates us and produces material effects (feelings of unease and nausea), is *real-impossible*: it is the voice which the subject cannot hear because it is uttered in the Other site of the fundamental fantasy – and is not Lynch's entire work an endeavour to bring the spectator 'to the point of hearing inaudible noises' and thus to confront the comic horror of the fundamental fantasy?
>
> (Žižek 2002: 44)

The suggested low frequencies that Žižek refers to are unlikely to have occurred as *Eraserhead* was released on a 35mm mono optical print. The Academy Curve attached to this print format, which was in existence since the 1930s, would have meant any frequencies below 25hz would be inaudible. As the human hearing threshold is considered to be as low as 20hz then it would have been impossible for Lynch and Splet to manipulate the soundtrack at frequencies below 25hz. However, what Žižek does highlight is the use of low-end frequencies to create unease in an audience. He stresses the subtleties of Lynch and Splet's soundtrack in *Eraserhead*. Lynch continued this concern for the soundscape throughout his films. Lesley Stern draws attention to how meaning can be found equally within noise and silence in *Blue Velvet*. Stern maintains that the meaning that is traditionally associated with silent or quiet reflection can similarly be achieved with Splet and Lynch's noisy tracks (Stern 1993: 85). Noise on the soundtrack is not used just to unsettle the audience but also as metonymic sound to illustrate the sonic worlds the characters inhabit and to suggest a deeper malaise within society. *Inland Empire* similarly uses noise and sound effect to heighten the meditative and unsettling aspects of the narrative through the sound design. Michel Chion also finds meaning in this noisy aspect of Lynch's cinema: 'He makes eager and frequent use of violent intensity contrasts that modern sound makes possible in cinema' (Chion 2003: 153). Žižek, Stern and Chion draw attention to how noisiness in the soundtrack can draw attention to the horrors within ourselves and society but equally, they show how the 'silences' of the soundtrack are also packed with affect. But, as Chion points out, Lynch's soundtracks are not always noisy – he uses the full dynamic range of sound. Chion illustrates how with digital Dolby technology the opportunity to get to a point of silence is greatly increased (Chion 2003: 151), see also Gustavo Constantini (2007). Lynch makes use of this technology by pushing his soundtracks to the extreme. This full utilisation of sound creates a shocking and complex soundscape. Although unlike the low frequencies that Žižek highlights in *Eraserhead*, which was an industrial nightmare, *Inland Empire* makes use of the high frequencies of the digital age.

In *Blue Velvet*, Lynch, through his collaboration with Ann Kroeber (production sound recordist) and Splet (sound designer), pushed the recording of Dorothy's (Isabella Rossellini) voice to its limits, which is only possible with analogue magnetic tape recording (Greene 2009: 68–69). Here they recorded a high level signal, which was overdriven, and rather than clip straightaway was able to progressively produce harmonically pleasing distortion, compressing the original signal, thus creating a saturated sound. In *Inland Empire* such an approach to the voice would have been impossible because the digital format does not allow for the same amount of saturation on the recording as magnetic tape. There is ample headroom on digital recordings at 24bit, but this would not provide a similar saturation that was possible on analogue magnetic tape. Headroom refers to the amount of space on the soundtrack before the sound clips or distorts, in order to maintain a strong signal to noise ratio. With analogue

magnetic tape recording some of the louder levels may become compressed with distortion and a clipping occurs on the waveform.

Using this digital technology in *Inland Empire*, Lynch needed to record Dern's voice differently to the previous technique in *Blue Velvet*, in order to use the sound metaphorically. Chion has coined the term 'synchresis' to describe the process of adding a sound to another sound in order to heighten its impact. Synchresis is a valuable term to describe how a sound effect is constructed from various sounds that when combined gives a greater effect to how we then 'audio-view' a visual object on screen. This is utilised at a key moment in *Inland Empire*.

In shooting the central scene of Nikki/Susan speaking with Mr K (Erik Crary), Lynch was able to record all of the action in one seventy-minute take (based on a fourteen-page monologue). Digital technology now allows for the shooting of long takes, with tape length being significantly longer than film magazines. Also, the lighting required for digital photography does not need to be so elaborate, and Lynch shot it all in his home where he was able to control extraneous noises.

Here, Lynch had to employ different tactics with the digital sound recording. The central scene of Nikki/Susan speaking to Mr K was the first scene shot in the film (aside from the web content) around which the rest of the narrative was to anchor itself. In this scene, where Nikki/Susan shouts, the shout is recorded in a conventional manner but a sound effect is added to heighten the impact of the 'VAAAMM!' Nikki/Susan says, 'I've seen what this fucker was up to. VAAAMM! I kick him in the nuts so hard that they go crawling inside his brain for refuge.' The 'VAAAMM!' refers to the kick she gives the man. She uses cartoon dialogue to describe the kick, but then this dialogue is further supported through the layering of an actual sound effect to create a heavy impact. By adding a sound effect to the shouted dialogue a more effective sound is created to represent Nikki/Susan, and the violence of the action. The 'VAAAMM!' sounds like it is a forceful hit/strike, which is layered from multiple sources. The original source of the sound is unidentifiable, which is important, as it is meant to add to the shout and not take away from it by offering up its own identity (Murch 1994: xxiii).

Nikki/Susan is visibly very angry at this point, outlining in great detail her method of revenge on her assailant. Dern's performance is critical here. Shot in close-up, her tortured face and Southern drawl illustrate her character. Her eyes are steely as she tells her story to Mr K. This must have been a very different performance for Dern, as at this point in the film it is far from clear which character (either Nikki/Susan) is actually trapped in this nightmare world. Dern noted, 'I thought of it as playing a broken or dismantled person, with these other people leaking out of her brain' (Lim 2006). She went on to suggest that Lynch's digital process aided her performance: 'It's unbelievably freeing. You're not sure where you're going or even where you've come from. You can only be in the moment' (Lim 2006).

Lynch has altered his technique in order to utilise digital technology, but more significantly, it is with the freedom that digital technology brings

to the production process that has turned Lynch away from his former practice. He cannot see himself shooting on film again, with large film crews and budgets, when he can make the type of film he wants with more control, for less money, with fine performances, on his own terms.

Lynch had previously performed a number of roles on his feature films, notably as director, writer, actor and later also has been credited as sound designer (from *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (Lynch 1992) onwards). He had enjoyed a significant collaboration with sound designer Splet from *The Grandmother* (Lynch 1970) up to and including *Blue Velvet*, but has been unable to achieve such a fruitful collaboration with other sound designers since then. In my interview with Lynch, I asked him about his role as sound designer and whether he would ever give that responsibility to somebody else on future projects. He responded after a significant pause:

> I work with people but it's not like I would turn it over to somebody, you know it has to marry to the idea and so it's very, very specific. A lot of times people could build incredible things and people do. They go in, they may not go in where they think they will go in or they may be altered, it's a great combo of things, and that's all really, really good. But it's got to marry to the idea.
>
> (Greene 2007)

In answering this question on collaboration Lynch is suggesting that the sound designer needs to fully understand how the sound integrates into the overall film. It is not enough for Lynch that somebody can create all sorts of interesting soundscapes: the sound needs to correspond to the world he has envisioned. With the convergence of technologies, and particularly with digital sound, it has become possible for one person to be responsible for the overall sound design of a film. Murch has noted of such digital cinematic practices:

> There will be collaboration in motion pictures, grudging or not, for many years to come. But it seems that if we are searching for the darker shadow that digital technologies might cast, we should look in the direction of anything that encourages a solitary monolithic vision and discourages developed complexity, both at the beginning, in the production of film, and at the end, in its theatrical enjoyment.
>
> (Murch 2002: 199–200)

Murch sees the development towards individual films as a step backwards for a collaborative cinematic practice. Although the technology allows for fewer people to be involved in the process, he suggests that this is not to the benefit of cinema:

> And collaboration may be the very thing, if properly encouraged, that allows the work to speak in the most developed way to the largest number of people. Every person who works on a film brings his or

> her own perspective to bear on the subject, and if these perspectives are properly orchestrated by the director, the result will be a multi-faceted and yet integrated complexity that will have the greatest chance of catching and sustaining the interest of the audience, which is itself a multifaceted entity in search of integration.
>
> (Murch 2002: 199)

Murch's concern for the future development of the cinema may be borne out in film mavericks such as Lynch, who has struggled to get his films financed in the USA. But for Lynch it is more a return to his earlier practice as an art student.

Lynch wanted to make *Inland Empire* in a radically different manner to his recent productions. Indeed, Mary Sweeney, Lynch's previous editor, producer and ex-partner, suggests that Lynch wanted to get back to his earliest methods of filmmaking. Sweeney notes: 'David got very excited about the ways the new technology could liberate him . . . I think it took him back to a pure and fearless way of working' (Lim 2006). Although Lynch was embracing a new technology he was in fact returning to his earliest form of film production, as with the short film *The Grandmother* and on *Eraserhead*. On both films he worked with a small crew and participated in nearly every aspect of the production process. Although he was working with a significantly larger crew on *Inland Empire*, Lynch is also credited as director, writer, producer, camera operator, sound designer, sound re-recording mixer, construction team (Art Department) and with writing and performing some of the music tracks. He is also un-credited for the cinematography, editing and, as previously mentioned, his vocal performance as the gaffer in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*.

The variety of digital source material that went into *Inland Empire*, made up of smaller independent projects of a disparate nature, has left the film somewhat disjointed. However, narrative cohesiveness has never been one of Lynch's priorities. He has consistently challenged film's three-act structure. Moreover, this film goes a step further in bringing together various plot lines that are difficult to comprehend within an overall narrative. The web platform, which allowed Lynch to utilise new digital technologies, has played a significant role in shaping his process for this feature-length film. The platform and technology used here have had an impact on how the film has been formulated.

Furthermore, Nicholas Rombes notes, '[t]he "technical" aspects of digital cinema are, always, ideological' (Rombes 2009: 38). *Inland Empire* is a film that is concerned with the nature of film aesthetics, production, technique, technology and dissemination. The film went on to win the Future Film Festival Digital Award at the Venice Film Festival where it premiered. Lynch received a lifetime achievement award at the festival and the film also picked up another prize in 2007 for Best Experimental Film from the National Society of Film Critics Awards, USA. These awards and the recognition Lynch gained in crossing over to digital cinematic practice have placed him aesthetically at the avant-garde of an industry in transition.

In an interesting contrast to the promotion circuit evidenced on the *Marilyn Levens' Starlight Celebrity Show*, Lynch refused to engage in these 'banal questions' for the promotion of *Inland Empire* (Clarke 2007: 16). Instead, he took to the streets of Los Angeles with a cow to promote Dern's performance in the film. His stunt was an attempt to garner enough publicity to get Dern nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Actress category. He had a banner beside the cow with the slogan, 'For your consideration, Laura Dern'. However, he failed to get Dern nominated, not having the financial capital to take out the costly trade advertisements required for such a campaign. Instead, he relied on this innovative technique to gain further press coverage for Dern and the film. Was parading a cow in downtown Los Angeles a venerable sign for Dern's performance, a sacred cow to be worshipped, or merely a further critique of the Hollywood star system, highlighting the cash cow of the studio system whose milk has long run dry? Lynch typically gives a surreal explanation for his use of the cow with his accompanying banner, 'Without cheese there wouldn't be an *Inland Empire*'. He went on by saying, 'I ate a lot of cheese during the making of *Inland Empire*' (Variety.com 2006).

By utilising new media outlets to promote his film, through the web and his cow stunt that drew significant web coverage, Lynch has kept pace with the changing media markets. His knowledge and handling of digital technology allows him as an artist to be at the cutting edge of various platforms and technologies. Both production and promotion have been informed by this new engagement. There has been more attention paid to how Lynch has utilised the digital technology (almost exclusively in relation to the image) than to his broader practice, which necessitates an engagement with promotion and self-promotion. Lynch ended up re-negotiating his distribution deal with Canal Plus and distributed the film himself in the USA. He has discussed his use of new digital technologies and suggested that he would never go back to shooting on film again. In an interview in the *New York Times*, Lynch noted:

> When you don't have to stop and spend two hours relighting, you're just able to boogie together … the sky's the limit with digital … Film is like a dinosaur in a tar pit. People might be sick to hear that because they love film, just like they loved magnetic tape. And I love film. I love it!
>
> (Lim 2006)

Lynch's move away from film to a digital practice has brought its own aesthetics to this project and has developed and expanded his audio-visual language.

Amy Taubin noted that, 'The visuals in *Inland Empire* look as if they're decomposing before our eyes' (Taubin 2007: 57). The quality of the visual image in *Inland Empire* has drawn much attention from critics (see for example (Lim 2006), (Clarke 2007), (Schaffner 2009) and (Jodi Brooks 2011). However, the impact of digital technologies on sound has not been analysed in any great detail. I would contend that the soundscape is being

composed all around us through the inclusion of noise in order to dirty the clarity of digital technology, and break down the barriers between digital and the older analogue recording format. The visuals and audio here are both carefully composed in order to appear as if they are decomposing. The digital technology does not take away from Lynch's audio-visual aesthetic; it re-formats it, to present a dark and sinister nightmare world. *Inland Empire* captures an industry and society that is breaking down in front of our eyes and ears. As dark and bleak as *Eraserhead*, Lynch pushes the digital medium further with this film.

Manohla Dargis described *Mulholland Drive* as 'a dispatch from that smog-choked boulevard of broken dreams called Hollywood' (Dargis 2006). In *Inland Empire,* Lynch returns to the boulevard of broken dreams, but this time it is a more desperate space, where prostitutes are trapped in nightmares and actresses spit up blood on the star symbol. Schaffner has noted that this Hollywood star is placed under a sign that says 'market', making a clear link between Hollywood, the star system and the marketplace (Schaffner 2009: 285). Of course, with Lynch there is a twist: it really was shot on Hollywood Boulevard, but made to look like it is a studio lot in Los Angeles substituting for the real Los Angeles streets, for the film within a film, *On High in Blue Tomorrows*.

SOURCES

Benjamin, Walter (1936/1992), 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 4th Edition, Leo Baudry, Gerald Mast & Marshall Cohen (eds), New York & London: Oxford University Press, pp. 665–681.

blackANDwhite (2007), *Lynch (One)*, film, USA: Absurda, Hideout Films, Oneblackarm Films.

Brooks, Jodi (2011), 'Cinema, Disappearance and Scale in David Lynch's *Inland Empire*', in *Screening the Past*, Issue 31, available at www.screeningthepast.com/2011/07/cinema-disappearance-and-scale-in-david-lynch%E2%80%99s-inland-empire-2/, accessed 8 December 2011.

Chion, Michel (2003), 'The Silence of the Loudspeaker', in *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998–2001*, Larry Sider, Diane Freeman and Jerry Sider (eds), London and New York: Wallflower Press, pp. 150–154.

Clarke, Roger (2007), 'Daydream Believer: David Lynch', *Sight and Sound*, March, pp. 16–18.

Constantini, Gustavo (2007), 'No hay Banda!', *The Soundtrack*, 1.1, pp. 71–72.

Dargis, Manohla (2006), 'The Trippy Dream Factory of David Lynch', *New York Times*, 6 December 2006, available at: http://movies.nytimes.com/2006/12/06/movies/06empi.html, accessed on the 8th January 2009.

Greene, Liz (2007), Interview with David Lynch, Europa Hotel, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 22 October 2007.

Greene, Liz (2009), 'Speaking, Singing, Screaming: Controlling the Female Voice in American Cinema', *The Soundtrack*, 2.1, pp. 63–76.
Lynch, David (1970), *The Grandmother*, film, USA: American Film Institute.
Lynch, David (1977), *Eraserhead*, film, USA: American Film Institute/ Libra Films.
Lynch, David (1986), *Blue Velvet*, film, USA: De Laurentiis Entertainment Group.
Lynch, David (1992), *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, film, USA: Newline Cinema/CiBy 2000.
Lynch, David (1999), *The Straight Story*, film, USA: Asymmetrical Productions/Canal PlusS.
Lynch, David (2001), *Mulholland Drive*, film, USA: Les Films Alain Sarde/Asymmetrical Productions.
Lynch, David (2006a), *Inland Empire*, film, USA/France/Poland: Studio Canal/Fundacja Kultury.
Lynch, David (2006b), *Dynamic:01: The Best of DAVIDLYNCH.COM*, film, USA: David Lynch Project/Subversive Cinema.
Lynch, David (2006c), *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness and Creativity*, New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.
Jordan, Randolph (2003), 'Starting from Scratch: Turntables, Auditory Representation, and the Structure of the Known Universe in the Films of David Lynch', MA Thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, unpublished.
Lim, Dennis (2006), 'David Lynch Returns: Expect Moody Conditions, With Surreal Gusts', *New York Times*, 1 October 2006, available at: www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/movies/01lim.html, accessed on the 20th December 2008.
McKibbin, Tony (2007), 'Listening to Lynch', *Film Ireland*, March/April, pp. 32–34.
Murch, Walter (1994), 'Forward', in Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. vii–xxiv.
Murch, Walter (2002), ' "A Company of Ghosts, Playing to Spectral Music": *Gesamtkunstkino* and the Future of Digital Cinema', in Patricia McDonnell (ed), *On The Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theatre And Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, pp. 189–201.
Power, Dominic (2007), 'This is a story that happened yesterday but I know it's tomorrow'; David Lynch's *Inland Empire*', *The Soundtrack*, 1.1, pp. 53–55.
Rombes, Nicholas (2009), *Cinema in the Digital Age*, London: Wallflower Press.
Schaffner, Anna Katharina (2009), 'Fantasmatic splitterings and destructive desires: *Lynch's Lost Highway, Mulholland Drive and Inland Empire*', *Modern Language Studies*, 45.3, pp. 270–291.
Schafer, R. Murray (1977), *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Vermont: Destiny Books.

Stern, Lesley (1993), 'The Oblivious Transfer: Analysing *Blue Velvet*', *Camera Obscura*, May, pp. 76–91.
Taubin, Amy (2007), '*Inland Empire and Southland Tales*: David Lynch, Richard Kelly, and the shape of cinema to come', *Film Comment*, Jan/Feb, pp. 54–59.
Totaro, Donato, Peter Rist and Randolph Jordan (2009), 'Roundtable on David Lynch's *Inland Empire*', *Offscreen*, available at www.offscreen.com/index.php/pages/essays/roundtable_inland_empire/, accessed 8 December 2011.
Variety.com (2006), VStory, posted 15 November 2006, 4.31pm PT, www.variety.com/vstory/VR1117954009.html?categoryId=38&cs=1, accessed 14 December 2009.
Žižek, Slavoj (2002), *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway*, Seattle, Washington: The Walter Chopin Simpson Centre for the Humanities.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Liz Greene is a lecturer in film studies at Queen's University Belfast. Her main research interest is in the theory and practice of film sound. Her PhD thesis considered the design of sound effects and their meaning in cinema, focusing specifically on the work of Alan Splet.

Contact: School of Creative Arts, Queen's University Belfast
l.greene@qub.ac.uk
www.lizgreenesound.com