

FILM ANALYSIS

David Lynch's "Mulholland Drive"

Creation and Destruction of Perception

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05.03.2012



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1. Preface

I never thought it could be possible that I could become obsessed with a movie, but “Mulholland Drive” caused a change in my usual behavior as a film consumer. I feel relieved about not being the only one, as the recognized German film critic SeeBlen says, “It is not too difficult to get addicted to David Lynch-movies...”¹

Only rarely has a movie interfered with my thoughts and my existence as a human being to such an extent. The combination of profound, complicated and intriguing storytelling, a brilliant visual style and themes that rarely touch the surface of mainstream Hollywood cinema have inspired me in many ways. Lynch’s examinations of the dark and multi-layered character traits and the illumination of the hidden decay of contemporary American society, which course through his cinematic and artistic work, fascinate me.

After watching “Mulholland Drive” I enjoyed many of Lynch’s movies, being haunted by the characters, conflicts, urban worlds and burdensome stories he creates. His style is so unique that his microcosms and filmic spheres became known as “Lynchtown”² or “Lynchville”³ by many critics and cineastes.

Still, after watching many of his other works, I kept returning to “Mulholland Drive” as it beset my mind with questions about its mysterious twists and confusions. In this term paper I intend analyze integral of the movie in order to fulfill a psychological purgation of this disturbing film and investigate my own and other experiences, interpretations and impressions of this milestone in film history.

2. Introduction

David Lynch’s “Mulholland Drive” (2001) is a haunting movie and affects its viewer with a disturbing and mystical experience in both images and story line. It destroys the conventions of Hollywood cinema in its style, themes, narrative structure, story and music. However, at the same time, Lynch creates a pulsating, disturbing and deeply

¹ cf. SeeBlen, Georg (2007): David Lynch und seine Filme. p. 211: „Es ist nicht allzu schwer, süchtig nach David Lynch-Filmen zu werden...”

² cf. Fischer, Robert (1997): David Lynch – Die dunkle Seite der Seele p.149

³ cf. SeeBlen, Georg (2007): David Lynch und seine Filme. p.10

affecting film experience that depicts the subjective process of movie production in an ambiguous industry, as well as identity crises and the exceeding forces of composed hope and destruction as its themes.

The main concept and idea of "Mulholland Drive" is that everything that is constructed, built, raised and created in the movie and in the perception of the viewer is destroyed by the force of delusion. The more knowledge the viewer gets, the more subjective becomes his own interpretation of this motion picture. Recurring places, characters (or actors), themes, music, camera movements and objects are the elements that create the experience of motion pictures. In "Mulholland Drive" all these pieces fall apart and reconcile again, but in a different order that disturbs the conventional idea of the viewer's logic.

The purpose of this term paper is to examine Lynch's approach to content and the filmic devices he uses to create the impression of total desolation and destruction of the cinematic perception of "Mulholland Drive".

The first part of the analysis focuses on the content, production history and the interpretation of the movie based on the opening sequence of "Mulholland Drive".

The second part of the analysis explores the cinematic devices such as the cinematography (the use of camera work to present the visuals in the movie), the sound, music and editing (the building structure of the movie that will be contemplated in micro- and macro patterns). The intention of this analysis is to investigate how the different filmic devices correspond to the movies' content and how they affect the viewer's comprehension of the movie (this point is further compounded by critiques of the movie). Most of the filmic instruments are explained on the basis of various scenes and sequences that explain and back up the analysis. The conclusion of the analysis provides an insight into how the different devices used in the film contribute to the creation and destruction of the viewer's cinematic perception.

3. Content

3.1. Plot Synopsis

On Mulholland Drive – a street along the heights of Los Angeles – an attractive, brunette woman (Laura Harring) survives her own murder, following a sudden car accident. Confused, halting and tired by her amnesia caused by the accident, the

woman hides in an apartment. She is discovered by Betty (Naomi Watts), a blonde and optimistic actress, who has moved to L.A. "in search of stardom"⁴, simultaneously as she finds the mysterious woman who had an accident (who names herself Rita) in her apartment. Betty becomes intrigued by the search for the true identity of the mysterious woman, whilst preparing and performing her audition as an actress for a major film studio.

Meanwhile the young and determined movie director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux) is manipulated by dubious film executives while casting the female lead in his movie.

Betty and Rita develop closer feelings for each other and start a sexual relationship.

Because of Rita's desire to go somewhere at night, they visit a theatre called "Silencio", where metaphors for the discrepancy of illusionary perception and reality begin to destroy the dream Betty has had.

From this point on Diane Selwyn (Betty's counterpart) wakes up. She looks like Betty, but is a different person who is depressed, cynical and unsuccessful in her work as an actress. At a party at Adam's house she discovers that her lover Camilla (Rita's equivalent) is getting engaged to the aspiring director. As a result, the embittered Diane engages a killer to murder Camilla. After the assassination Diane becomes psychologically destroyed by her dreadful remorse, begins to hallucinate and gets herself into an extreme state of fear, which she escapes by shooting herself.

3.2. Production history

There are many approaches to finding the asymptote for the different interpretations and bewilderments that come to the viewer's mind after watching "Mulholland Drive".

The most pragmatic lies in its production history. Initially devised as a pilot for a television series for the television network ABC (hoping to profit from the success of Lynch's first television series *Twin Peaks*⁵), it was rejected by the television company due to its non-linear storyline and other conflicts which, it was thought, would confuse and frighten off a TV audience more accustomed to clichés and simplicity. Two years later David Lynch decided to transform the pilot into a feature film⁶. The rights went to the French company "Canal+" who provided finance as well as creative freedom and

⁴ cf. Lynch, David (2001) *Mulholland Drive Official Trailer #1*

⁵ cf. Donlon, Helen (2008): *David Lynch Talking*. p.45

⁶ cf. Wikipedia (2012): *Mulholland Drive (film)*

allowed Lynch to finish his movie⁷. To become a motion picture the first part of the story was restructured and an extra 26 minutes were shot and added to the original footage.

Certainly, the reconstructed ending lacks complete resolution, explanation and clarification, but also creates remarkable parallelisms of symbols, characters and story lines which explore a new dimension of understanding and interpretation, differing from viewer to viewer and providing subjective rather than absolute truths.

3.3. Themes and Allusions: The Jitterbug Scene

David Lynch produced a "List of 10 Clues to unlocking this thriller"⁸ in which the first one is: "Pay particular attention in the beginning of the film: At least two clues are revealed before the credits." The opening sequence of "Mulholland Drive" does not seem to have a specific, but an abstract and helpful connection to the themes and allusions of the film. In the opening scene⁹ three different couples are shown, dancing to swing music, in a place where the understanding of time, place, relationships and reality is shifted and distorted. This surrealistic scene is presented in one shot with dazzling light. The couples repeatedly disappear and reappear by means of sharp cuts or fade-ins (the technique of multiple cuts in one shot). They move around unrelated to each other and multiple versions of themselves, unable to perceive anyone else but themselves with their partner. The room appears to lack in dimensions because of the overlapping couples, who vary in size. Their outlines on a purple background may represent diverse layers of consciousness and perception. As a result of so much chaotic action, the viewer finds it difficult to focus on any particular detail of the dance. Instead he has to perceive the whole scene as a cubistic motion picture that mirrors the complex and dynamic interrelations of elements in the movie (for example the analogy between the main characters: Betty/Diane; Rita/Camilla). The music suggests a subconscious disturbance, beneath the surface of vibrant swing tunes and the clapping adds a competitive force to the atmosphere. In this scene the main conflicts, themes and contradictions of the movie are already revealed. The shifted identities are displayed by the overlapping, but unrelated multiple couples shown. The dance of two people together as couples depicts illusions of characters and the

⁷ cf. Lynch, David (2001): MSN Interview

⁸ cf. Lynch, David (2002) David Lynch's 10 Clues to Unlocking This Thriller

⁹ cf. Appendices: Illustrations 1, 2

beginnings and endings of relationships. The surrealist room represents the destruction of the conventional perception of reality in films.

As a transition from the first scene to the second one, a blurry spot appears and, on focusing, becomes Betty. This process represents the creation of her fictional existence. She appears with the old couple who will cause her destruction in the catastrophic closing scene. Her outward appearance, the light and her behavior present her as an idealized picture of a Hollywood star who has won a prize (there is the sound of people hooting and clapping). This picture is a dream projection of the unconscious desire for success Diane has. Again the picture is multiplied and repeated and the background changes from the dancing contest to a shaky point of view shot which explores an empty creased, red bedcover. It is the bed in Betty's apartment, where the mysterious blue box (the link to Betty's reality as Diane) is hidden and where Betty realises her desire and sexual attraction to Rita. It is a non-existent room, but combines reality with illusion by the sound of deep, nervous breaths from someone who has woken up from a nightmare. The bed in "Mulholland Drive" is a symbol for refuge, recovery and sensuality¹⁰, but at the same time for decomposition, death and destruction (Diane's' dead and rotten body is found by the dream characters Betty and Rita in the apartment).

4.1. Film Theory: Critical Reception

In a way, all of David Lynch's films, but especially "Mulholland Drive", differ greatly from the cinematic customs the average audience might know from commercial mainstream movies. Lynch's work does not easily lend itself to an analysis of classical patterns and systems of understanding, whose foundation is based on empirical observations.

The discrepancy and foundation for potential misunderstandings between accepted film conventions and David Lynch's cinematic construction is reflected by a movie critic:

*"Lynch cheats his audience, pulling the rug out from under us. He throws everything into the mix with the lone goal of confusing us. Nothing makes any sense because it's not supposed to make any sense. There's no purpose or logic to events."*¹¹ The critic is

¹⁰ Rita sleeps in the bed after taking refuge in the apartment. Also Betty and Rita have sex in that bed.

¹¹ cf. Berardinelli, James: Mulholland Drive Movie Review

skeptical about the coherence, loose parallel structures and missing conventional orientation.

In a way the structures of analysis are based on the experience of the collective consciousness or the subconscious of individual viewers and their awareness of similarities and differences between movies they have watched. Every new experience is sorted within a framework of meaning, which demands that information coming from the medium of film be understood in the mind of the viewer. Only by means of comparison to other works and the categorization and differentiation of certain phenomena that appear repetitively or reject classification, can an analysis paradigm be defined.

By motion picture standards "Mulholland Drive" has taken a journey to discontinuous grounds and, in doing so, it provokes a vast array of varying discourses and interpretations.

Many critics have acknowledged this innovative and groundbreaking use of cinematic devices that created a new dimension of film comprehension:

*"One of the very few movies in which the pieces not only add up to much more than the whole, but also supersede it with a series of (for the most part) fascinating fragments."*¹²

So according to film analysis techniques, the stylistic elements and devices of "Mulholland Drive" are in some measure incoherent, complex, unusual, absurd and anything but common. However, they can still be placed in the context and frame of a film analysis with distinct focus points.

4. Cinematic Craft

4.1. Cinematography

The camera work in "Mulholland Drive" is one of the most powerful instruments used to explore the complex world of dark and louche locations, the doppelganger dynamics between the characters and the parallel structures of disturbing incidents that happen in Mulholland Drive. We get the feeling that the camera is translating the action to the viewer by being a well-informed guide, inviting him to find out about the truth himself. But, as the viewer overcomes his suspense and anxiety about the truth with curiosity and thirst for knowledge, he finds that he is falling into a corrosive abyss. The surfaces

¹² cf. Sarris, Andrew: Mulholland Drive Movie Review

of expectations become dark holes of discovery of "lynchian"¹³ worlds of limited and incomprehensible truth. David Lynch bases this approach to his filmic code on his fascination of double-layered perception of mundane and everyday things and clichés: "What surfaces reveal is only a fragment of the truth. Underneath it lies what interests me about life: the darkness, the uncertain, the frightening, the illnesses."¹⁴ The camera in "Mulholland Drive" is stringently subjective, and is empathetic to its subjects¹⁵ and focus after all events and stories seem to become the outcome of Betty's subconscious. Conventional use of framing, movement and perspective are mixed with experimental and progressive cinematography.

4.1.1. Point-Of-View Shots: Deeply Internal

There is a conspicuous concentration of point-of-view shots within many different scenes and throughout many characters of the movie. This most personal and subjective technique of camera movement often appears when a character explores the entrance to an unknown location or on the way from one place to another. When Rita descends to L.A. after her car accident on Mulholland Drive, the point-of-view shot mirrors her confusion and the volition to escape from the site of the car crash. Both descending as a metaphor for experiencing the depths of unknown identity, and ascending to the "City of Dreams"¹⁶, a place of hope and optimistic expectations, illustrate but one example of the movie's themes of ambiguity and paradox. Close to the end of the movie the "accident", the abrupt stop of the car, is repeated, and this time Diane (Betty) is picked up by Camilla (Rita) to ascend the hill above Mulholland Drive. Whilst the ascent can be viewed as the creation of hope for Diane, by means of the relationship between her and Camilla, in fact their destination is the place where all hope is destroyed and ends in catastrophe as Camilla rejects Diane.

In another scene¹⁷ that takes place in the diner "Winkie's" a man named Dan tells his friend Herb about the dream of seeing a man in the "back of back of [the] place." and

¹³ cf. UrbanDictionary: *"The specific style that David Lynch, which is usually odd or weird, but original."*

¹⁴ cf. Fischer, Robert „David Lynch – Die dunkle Seite der Seele“ (1997), p.306 „Was die Oberflächen zeigen, ist nur ein Teil der Wahrheit. Darunter steckt das, was mich am Leben interessiert: die Dunkelheit, das Ungewisse, das Erschreckende, die Krankheiten.“

¹⁵ cf. Seeßlen, Georg (2007) p.209: "The camera in Lynch's movies does not want distance, it acts completely empathetically."

¹⁶ cf. Lynch, David: Mulholland Drive Official Trailer #1

¹⁷ cf. Appendices: Illustrations 3, 4

his vision of spotting him “through the wall”¹⁸. They decide to explore whether the dream is true. The camera depicts their way by flowing behind the wall to find a “bum-like”¹⁹ creature that makes Dan break down. In this particular case the discovery of the fusion between his dream and the cognition of reality causes his psychological and physical breakdown and destroys any differentiation of imaginary and actual knowledge of the world.

Often the personal and subjective point-of-view shots²⁰ lead through the rooms of apartments and other locations of the movie. Besides the obvious function of creating suspense, those tracking shots through rooms seem like a constructed, claustrophobic path for cinematic communication that prohibits any assumptions of what may come next and at the same time builds up expectations to find out about the unknown, dark and personal secrets. These paths are tunnels from the outward to the inward, from the surface to the inside, that lead from certainty to deep doubt.

4.1.2. Narratological Camerawork: Subversion of Expectations

The camera frequently has an important narrative and commentary function. As well as reflecting the narrative, symbolic and acoustic elements of the movie, it mirrors the themes of altering identities and shifts in reality and dreams. The cinematography erupts into these subjects and intensifies them.

An example of cinematographic storytelling takes place when Betty’s aunt Ruth leaves her apartment. A process of discoveries for Aunt Ruth and the viewer occurs, as she comes in before leaving – followed by a pan of the camera - and keeps looking for the keys (a recurring motif in the film) until she discovers them on the table. But the spectator finds out even more than her. The camera shifts under the table and reveals Rita hiding from her irrational fear and confusion. As the turning off of the light indicates the exit of the Aunt, Rita falls asleep in her safe, dark hideout. At all points of the movie the camera makes clear that the dream world in “Mulholland Drive” is not what it seems and that confusion is omnipresent, not only in the psyche of the characters, but also in the minds of the audience. And with each fragment of knowledge gained, the consciousness of illusion and delusion is enhanced.

This technique becomes more and more significant in the course of the movie. The

¹⁸ cf. Lynch, David (1999): *Mulholland Drive Pilot – The Screenplay*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ cf. Appendices: Illustration 5

clearest indication of that comes about in the scene²¹, where Betty rehearses her acting audition with Rita. We see Betty and Rita having an argument. The viewer takes the argument for real, since he has no reason²² to doubt it. After Betty “angrily” exclaims “nobody wants you here!”²³, the camera moves away from her, revealing that it is only an artificial conflict appearing on another level of Betty’s constructed reality. The conflict represented by Betty’s angry face dissolves into her laughter, which illustrates the definite ending of the sub-reality. In scenes like this,²⁴ the discrepancy between the perception of film reality and its different artificial layers is clarified.

4.1.3. Close-Ups: Isolation of the Subject

The adjacency to the characters and the outward outcome of their psychological activity is another important technique of the film that is implemented by the limited framing of the takes. Especially in scenes where important thought processes happen inside and outside the characters²⁵, close-ups of their faces or other bodily parts are used. Those close-ups seem to suggest that although every character interferes with the others, they always stay in their own sphere of subjectivity and inner conflicts. This personal isolation makes verbal communication become insignificant, whereas the emotional reactions in various situations seem to play a more important role. Often the closeness and low aperture of the camera is an indicator for the psychological and deluding content of a scene. Before the final scene of Diane’s mental and physical destruction, we see her disturbed and conscience-stricken about her arrangement of Camilla’s (Rita’s) murder. The take shows an extreme close-up of her eyes²⁶ before she is haunted, chased and overpowered by her hallucination²⁷ of the old couple (growing from miniature to life size) that promised her hope and success in the dream about her ideal life as Betty in Los Angeles at the beginning of the movie.

²¹ cf. Appendices: Illustrations 6-9

²² cf. Monaco, James (2000) *Film verstehen*. p.165: The Index is a qualitative measure for a function or relation of an object to a situation, since it has an inherent correlation based on conventional experience of the spectator with it.

²³ cf. Lynch, David (1999): *Mulholland Drive Pilot – The Screenplay*

²⁴ Another example of this disclosing camera movement occurs during Adam Keshner’s audition as the different playback singers sing from a room with a neatly and old-fashioned wall, but as the camera shifts away the viewer distinguishes that the singers are only standing in a small artificial sound-box within a large and busy film-studio. By this withdrawal from the subjects the prominence they have had in the beginning of the take decreases more and more in the chaos of the film world within the film. (1:22:15-1:23:15)

²⁵ cf. Appendices: Illustrations 10, 11

²⁶ cf. Appendices: Illustration 12

²⁷ cf. Appendices: Illustration 13

4.1.4. Contrast of Focal Points: Defining the Disruptive Truth

Also an almost vanguard camera method²⁸ is employed in the takes that were shot a year after the production of the TV-pilot. In the second act²⁹, the prelude³⁰ and postlude of the movie there is a cinematographic device that cannot be found in other parts of the movie. The shots begin with an undefined, blurred and shaky camera focus which is underlined by muted sounds, until they suddenly turn into a pulsating sharpness which lends an almost hyper-realistic feel to the setting and the percipience. As in many other cinematic approaches in this movie, that contrasting use of depth-of-field can be seen as a metaphor for the sudden contrast between the deep, surreal and romantic atmosphere of Diane's dream and the abrupt and horrifying return to the destructive reality that leads to death. The message of this process is explicit: epiphany leads to total devastation.

4.2. Sound

4.2.1. The Meaning of Tone

Sound is an important component of "Mulholland Drive" that is very significant for the subtle communication by means of film language. Lynch himself stated that: "A motion picture with the right sound and what it causes with its interplay – that is the being of cinema. [...] If you see a picture and hear a tone to it, then this thing becomes alive, gets an atmosphere that you want and it affects people. Therefore it is so important."³¹

The prior function of the auditory devices of the motion pictures is to add an acoustic mirror to the visual objects, happenings and dialogue.³² Since the visual perception of the movie is controlled by the viewer's advertence, the omnipresent tone in the movie has a much more subliminal impact on him and is tended to be underestimated.³³

²⁸ cf. Appendices: Illustrations 14, 15

²⁹ The point from when Diane's (Betty's) dream begins to fall apart and dissolve in rough reality.

³⁰ cf. 2.3 Themes and Allusions: The Jitterbug Scene

³¹ cf. Rodley, Chris (2002): Lynch über Lynch, pp.312 f.: "Ein Bild mit dem richtigen Ton und was das zusammen bewirkt – das ist das Wesen des Kinos. [...], „Wenn du ein Bild hast und einen Klang dazu hörst, dann wird das Ding lebendig, bekommt Stimmung, die du willst, und es wirkt auf die Leute. Deshalb ist es so wichtig. "

³² That means for instance that when a cup falls on the ground and breaks there is a cracking and clanging sound: cf. Mulholland Drive (2001) 2:16:05

³³ cf. Monaco, James (2000): Film verstehen. p.215

4.2.1. Meta-Levels of Sound

Lynch uses this gap in the viewer's consciousness to manipulate him in a pathetic and disturbing way. To increase the dramaturgical tension, deep sounds that cause feelings of anxiety and disturbance can be heard whenever moments of irrationality, mystery and the search of identity occur.³⁴

For instance on the way to and in the Silencio Theatre, where Betty begins to comprehend that her dream is starting to subvert, those deep-pitched sounds are subtly audible.³⁵

They are intensified by the epistemological themes that Lynch utilizes through the magician, the musician and the singer in the theatre³⁶. Illuminated by a visionary blue light, he tells the filmic and the real audience that everything they see and seem to hear is an illusion, a tape recording.³⁷ This assertion is a direct comment on the preconception biases and the knowledge based on experience that the viewer (and therefore Betty and Rita as well) seem to have. The cinematic and pragmatic experience of automatically connecting acoustic with visual impulses is a custom to the audience. Still they do not have to comply with each other. In that particular scene a trumpet player is seen playing his instrument, then he takes it away from his mouth, but the music continues to play. Then a singer starts to perform the Spanish song "Llorando" about crying over someone the speaker has loved and lost³⁸. The moment when the singer faints and falls down on the stage while the voice continues to sing is the most obvious metaphor of the destruction of Diane's dream of herself as Betty and her fictitious existence. Betty and Rita become witnesses of their own disillusionment. The theatre scene also awakens the consciousness of the distortion of the spectator's perception³⁹. The theatre's name "Silencio" is a clue to the clouding of all perception and cognition at the end of the movie that is incarnated by the death of both women.

³⁴ cf. Stern.de (2003): Sind Geister nur tiefe Töne? In the article is described how British scientists found that low-pitched sounds have an oppressing effect on listeners.

³⁵ Mulholland Drive (2001) 1:43:50

³⁶ cf. Appendices: Illustrations 16-19

³⁷ Mulholland Drive (2001): "No hay banda! There is no band! Il N'est pas de orquesta! This is all a tape-recording. No hay banda! And yet we hear a band! [...] It is an illusion."

³⁸ The song „Llorando“ that is performed is actually a cover of Roy Orbison's popular song "Crying"

³⁹ Other echoes of this metaphysical idea are found in the dream when the singers at Adam's audition perform playback songs in a sound-box and also in the scene where Betty calls her real alter ego Diane Selwyn and listening to her answering machine.

4.3. Music

The soundtrack of the movie can be divided into three different genres from which each exploits a different intention. All of them represent different elements and have different functions and impacts in "Mulholland Drive".

4.3.1. Badalamenti's Orchestral Pathos

The majority of the music was composed by Angelo Badalamenti. A music critic describes his deep experience with Badalamenti's orchestral score as following: "the music veers from nearly motionless string dread to noir jazz and audio feedback, the rhythms building to an explosion of infinite darkness."⁴⁰ Most of his score is only used in scenes with Betty and Rita. In fact, Lynch uses Badalamenti's music in emotional, dramatic and suspense moments of the movie as a dramaturgical effect and to reflect many of the narrative and visual themes (isolation, identity crisis, darkness) with a sweetly apocalyptic atmosphere.

4.3.2. Rock Music as Freedom

Other tracks of the movie have their roots in the composition of Lynch and John Neff. They represent another genre of music and another atmosphere in comparison to Badalamenti's tracks. Mostly they are linked to the character Adam Kesher, the young and stubborn movie director. The guitar-driven contemporary rock music represents much more Kesher's spirit and striving for personal (in his relationship) and commercial (in his function as a movie director) freedom, which fails within the dream, but is achieved in Diane's reality.

4.3.3. References to 60s Popular-Culture

The third kind of music that appears in the film is pop music from the 60s⁴¹. Similar to that some characters and clothes in "Mulholland Drive" seem to come from this period time⁴². Betty's behavior and characteristics are more akin to a stereotypical character from a 60s melodrama than to a contemporary filmic character. The 60s tunes in the film echo the shifts in time and space in Diane's dream and mirror her desire to be the idealized version of herself which is embodied in Betty Elms.

⁴⁰ cf. Schweiger, Daniel (2001): *The Madman and his Muse*

⁴¹ cf. Scott, Linda (1961) "I've told every little star"; Stevens, Connie (1960) "16 reasons why I love you"; Orbison, Roy (1961) "Crying"; Dixon, Willie (1963) "Bring it on, Willie"

⁴² cf. Appendices: Illustration 20

4.3.4. Composition of the Music

The movie is not loaded with musical sequences, but they are carefully chosen, so the tensioning and pathetic effect of important and unraveling scenes is not lost. The contrast between the eerie scenes that are carried by uncomfortable visuals and scenes that are supported by sound and music is balanced, so that the viewer can develop a persistent appreciation and differentiation between the dark and the light elements and motifs of the movie.

4.4 Editing

4.4.1 Apprehension of Different Approaches

There is a tremendous difference between David Lynch's editing in scenes and how the different scenes compile to a complex narrative and correlating arrangement. Viewers and fans of the movie fight about the interpretations and different ways to understand the movie. The destruction of perception starts where the opinion about a unified understanding of "Mulholland Drive" dissolves into many different voices which claim to have identified the truth about the movie, but at the same time have found their own subjective understanding of it. The montage in Lynch's movie allows extending the natural scope of perception, since it combines things and events that could not be connected to coherent and closed storylines⁴³. Because of the division into two acts (the first one contains the dream, the second one comprehends the cinematic reality outside the dream) there is no need for the viewer to completely understand the storylines that open in the dream and symbolically dissolve in the second act⁴⁴.

In the scenes that take place in Diane's dream the cutting usually provides the viewer with the adequate amount of conventional montage codes of continuity such as "shot reverse shots" in dialogues and logically comprehensible cuts. But when it comes to the prologue, the epilogue and Diane's real life, confusing, incoherent editing structures and codes are employed which create logic within themselves, yet correlate to the dream. Certainly, the viewer does not achieve a completely satisfactory feeling about the narrative structure. Many of the opening storylines degenerate because all of the elements in Diane's dream reoccur on a meta-level in the second act.

⁴³ cf. Mikos, Lothar (2008): Film- und Fernsehanalyse. p.215

⁴⁴ For instance in the dream the cowboy character threatens Adam Kesher about his movie: "Now, you will see me one more time if you do good. You will see me two more times if you do bad." (Lynch, David: Mulholland Drive Pilot – The Screenplay) and then reappears twice in Diane's reality as an indicator of the tragic ending and the wrong actions Diane has done conferring to her engagement of murder.

4.4.2. Recreation of Logic

The montage structures in the second act neglect a chronological flow. The different scenes are often connected by hard cuts, illogical transitions and random jumps in time and space, although the connecting link is always Diane. The loose editing structure echoes her psychological confusion and pessimism about reality. Therefore, the dream in "Mulholland Drive" seems to have a stronger orientating function. It creates a secure and consequential pattern, whereas reality seems to be illogical, deeply internal and a series of hallucinations which portray human madness and distress.

The different scenes in the second act are connected by the continuity of places and the repetitive occurrence of coffee, but not through the consistency of characters, emotions and situations. The sixth clue on Lynch's list to understand "Mulholland Drive"⁴⁵ advises: "Notice the robe, the ashtray, the coffee cup." In the scene after the neighbor has left the apartment with her things, Diane goes to the window and realizes with joy and suffering that Camilla is standing next to her. In the next cut it is Diane herself who is standing in Camilla's position in the room. Another cut shows Diane making coffee and walking to the couch. She climbs over the couch and puts a glass of alcohol, instead of coffee on the table⁴⁶. Also the ashtray the neighbor had got a few cuts before is seen on the table (so this part becomes a "coherent flashback"). Diane is not wearing her bath robe anymore, but a pair of cut-off short-jeans. At that point the half-naked Camilla appears lying on the couch and Diane tries to have sex with her, but is rejected by Camilla and becomes desperate. Though there is spatial consistency, shifts in time, relationships and Diane's mood and state of being contribute to the viewer being unsure as to what to take for real and what to take for a hallucination. All the three objects (robe, coffee, and ashtray) are hints to understand the relationship of the different takes. They become logical if the viewer accepts this montage code. In comparison to the conventional and chronological nature of other films, the indicator of the comprehension code is the arrangement of objects and not a certain cause-and-effect order.

⁴⁵ cf. Lynch, David (2002): David Lynch's 10 Clues to Unlocking This Thriller

⁴⁶ cf. Appendices: Illustration 21

5. Conclusion: Creation and Destruction

“Mulholland Drive “certainly is a unique phenomenon in motion picture history. The abstract structure Lynch uses in his takes, scenes, sequences and acts in order to distort and reject the viewers’ perception follow the same concept that includes a certain process of creation and corrosion. This approach can be found in micro- and macro-patterns in the movie and is transported by all different and thematized cinematic devices (such as visuals, audio and editing). At first a certain expectation is built, an enigmatic situation occurs, limited amount of knowledge is provided, but the other part of it is concealed and therefore tension is built up. During the second stage, the other half of the knowledge is unveiled, but contrasts with the expectation in a way that destroys it from the inside. Therefore it brings the viewer to a decline in evaluating the credibility of his perception in order to decode and understand the movie.

By this means, Lynch’s vision of the world is reflected in the depicted execution of the movie: “As soon as you have finished something it begins to degenerate. Instantly. [...] And this decay proceeds faster than the reconstruction. Just as our bodies: they grow, and then at some point the reversed process employs. And strange things happen.”⁴⁷ The exposure to reason, language, perception and emotion – all the main sources for human knowledge – has to be relearned in “Mulholland Drive”. The application of conventional comprehension structures in order to understand the movie fail just as the creation of everything promising in Diane’s dream of Betty fails to come true when it is exposed to rough reality. Because of the open structure of the movie, it can be re-watched many times without becoming more manifest and comprehensible to the viewer. In fact, as “Mulholland” Drive becomes a destructor of the conventional understanding and predetermined codes to perceive the world, a maze to the subjective persona of the viewer is opened and invites him to find out more about himself by emerging into the intriguing parallel world of Mulholland Drive.

⁴⁷ cf. Fischer, Robert (1997) p.313: “Sobald man etwas beendet hat, beginnt es zu verfallen Augenblicklich. [...] Und der Verfall schreitet schneller voran als der Wiederaufbau. Genauso unsere Körper: Sie wachen, und dann setzt irgendwann der Umkehrprozess ein. Und seltsame Dinge passieren.”

6. Illustrations



Illustration 1 (00:00:28): Mulholland Drive opens with a puzzling dance scene.



Illustration 2 (00:01:30): In the surrealistic dancing place Betty is introduced an optimistic and acclaimed winner.



Illustration 3 (00:15:50): Dan wants to find out, if his vision in the dream corresponds to reality.



Illustration 4 (00:16:19): When the flooding point-of-view take passes by the wall, his subjective suspicion and vision becomes tangible in form of the bum-face. The man faints overwhelmed by this horrifying experience.



Illustration 5 (00:41:28): The point-of-view shot follows Betty through the apartment until she finds Rita being awake.



Illustration 6 (01:09:24): Betty seems to ask Rita what she is still doing at her place.



Illustration 7 (1:09:26): Rita appears to be unsure what to say until...



Illustration 8 (1:09:40): ...the camera movement reveals that they are only rehearsing for Betty's audition.



Illustration 9 (01:10:26): Although the constructed conflict dissolves in abandon there are multi-layered undertones that disclose the women's relationship.



Illustration 10 (00:24:03): The close-up of Rita in the shower illustrates her subjective isolation and perplexity due to her loss of memory.



Illustration 11 (01:51:06): In the moment when Betty and Rita come closest (at the end of the dream), they start to realize that their existence is about to implode.



Illustration 12 (02:20:01): The extreme close-up of Diane's eyes before the catastrophe takes the spectator to the closest level of Diane's subjectivity: he becomes witness of her desolation, madness and death.



Illustration 13 (02:20:40): The hallucination of the couple from her dream haunts her conscience and drives her to a mental state of desperation that ends in death.

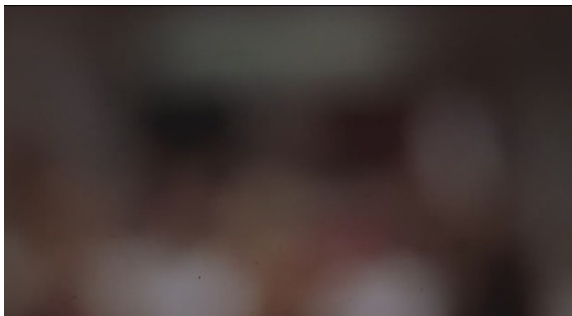


Illustration 14 (2:12:20): The blurry picture emphasizes the disorientation and the infirmness of Diane to deal with her bitterness and jealousy.



Illustration 2 (2:12:27): The sudden focus of the image refers to the process of waking up from a visionary and surreal world and has a confronting effect on the viewer.



Illustration 16 (01:45:08): Already by entering the theater Betty and Rita seem to feel cautious and uncomfortable.



Illustration 17 (01:46:26): Metaphors of delusion and the perceptual fraud are omnipresent in the "Silencio" theater. The trumpet music recording continues to play, although the musician stops playing the instrument.



Illustration 18 (01:51:34): The collapsing singer is a metaphor for the degradation of the dream. Her song about unfulfilled love continues playing.



Illustration 19 (2:22:12): The blue-haired lady from the balcony in the theater enunciates the last word in the film: "Silencio". The expression can be understood as an appeal to accept the mystery without trying to express it.



Illustration 20 (01:22:36): The imitation of clothes, music and characters from the 60s popular-culture is a reoccurring motif in the movie.



Illustration 21 (02:01:38): The ashtray returns, the bath robe becomes nudity, the coffee cup an alcoholic drink. Though the cuts in the different scenes provide continuity, the altering objects indicate the shifts and the jumps in time layers.