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PSYCHODRAMATIC DIMENSION OF DAVID LYNCH'S SMALL-TOWN COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

The notion of the city in David Lynch's film productions quite evidently belongs to a group of the most complex and multi-layered themes comprising the director's concept of personal metaphysics within his films. The multifarious structure of Lynch's urban images can be best exemplified with his latest production *Inland Empire*, where the external rawness of Hollywood's depiction parallels its internal, hermetic world of distorted identities set within the equally distorted time frame defining the nature of the film.

In its structure *Inland Empire* corresponds to a large extent to Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, characterised by a vaguely similar plot structure, the shared theme being "a woman in trouble." In the case of *Inland Empire* the female character called Nikki unravels the story by allowing the audience into her digital world of consciousness, her own inland empire. Challenging the audience with the constantly recurring question of identity, as in *Mulholland Drive*, she defines the subject matter of the film. At this point it becomes quite clear how Lynch's perception of the city coincides with the role playing motifs within the film's plot and internal structure.

Inland Empire deals primarily with actors and their multi-layered performances viewed by their observers (the audience) who find themselves in the actors' position remaining part of the audience at the same time. Interchangeability of actors – spectators' roles constitutes the core of all Lynch's productions classified as psyche and subconscious-oriented. Images of big cities like Hollywood (in *Inland Empire* and *Mulholland Drive*) are purposely symbolised by Lynch with his home digital video camera as muddy, vague and unstable, being the main source of human psychological distortion. Paradoxically, this big glamorous city is defined by its anonymous and sinister character, which gives raise to Lynch's multiple hermetic worlds. Lynch's characters' paths cross permanently with each other constituting

hermetic formations. Those formations then evolve into small communities that find their equivalent in Lynch's small-town community structure where characters mirror each other in their quest for their true identities. This urban setting and the role playing model incorporated into it are the starting point for an analysis of David Lynch's film esthetics. It is, therefore, of paramount importance to pay heed to Lynch's reference to the concept of psychodrama and its relationship with his small-town community structure.

David Lynch undoubtedly belongs to the group of the most psycho-oriented artists within the last decades. Unorthodox in the method of transmitting his values to the audience, he sets his works within an aura frequently classified by critics as bordering on the bizarre and subconscious (Le Blanc 7). The unconventional feel of the surrounding reality, combined with an unlimited imagination enable the director to reconstruct his audiences' perception of reality into his authorized view of it. It is also thanks to the Lynchian construction of personal metaphysics that the audience acquire a chance of noticing an astounding similarity between their private experiences and what is depicted on the screen. Such a peculiar, yet overwhelming feeling of being exposed to a filmic self-reflection results in releasing the contents of our subconsciousness, spurring our imagination to reach beyond the material and the visible.

The same technique of delving into the human mind can be traced in dr Moreno's psychodrama therapy. Designed for a collective projection of the subconscious, psychodrama was a medical procedure involved in treating mental illness, which consisted of communal reenactment of a given situation in order to understand one's *true* emotions. This method, based on role playing, provided patients with an opportunity to re-identify themselves with different characters within the same circumstance, thus increasing their chances of an eventual proper diagnosis of their own behavioural tendencies. The essential part of the therapy consisted of the final stage of self-evaluation and the collective catharsis, where patients for the first time faced an opportunity to forgive themselves for their mistakes of the past. The process of this role playing therapy revolved around individuals' acquiring several identities, which allowed them to realize which of the numerous identities played was closest to their own true identity. Hence, this one was their genuine self, which, over the course of time, could be reconstructed into their natural, *true* identity.

Psychodrama defined the function of the role as a means to "enter the unconscious from the social world and bring shape and order into it" (Moreno 130). The basic assumption of Moreno was that every individual is subjected to a role-playing model of existence on different levels of consciousness. According to him, the act is the beginning of every existence:

The relationship of roles to the situations in which the individual operates (status) and the relation of role as significantly related to ego has been emphasized by myself. [...] Role is the unit of culture; ego and role are in continuous interaction.

(Moreno 134)

Analogically, ego and role are one, and create a united organism. The theory also undertakes the enactment of personal life dramas with fellow patients taking on the roles of auxiliary egos, who, by recreating certain past situations, enable the patient to vocalize and correct their previous mistakes. The final effect of the therapy brings about the desired clarification on the part of the patient, producing an automatic catharsis and bringing back the lacking confidence, self-awareness and self-forgiveness for the mistakes of the past.

It [psychodrama] produces a healing effect – not in the spectator (secondary catharsis) but in the producer-actors who produce the drama and, at the same time, liberate themselves from it.

(Moreno 139)

Since the method of psychodrama is as complex as it is fascinating, it became a great source of inspiration, primarily for artists. It most definitely inspired Lynch, as it is in this director's filmic community structure where we can detect considerable signs of Moreno's influence. In his film productions, David Lynch consequently succeeded and continues to succeed in providing his audience with a skillful vivisection of human mind, turning Moreno's technique of psychodrama into his authorized concept of the psychodrama of the ordinary.

The director's assumption of the required unlimited open-mindedness on the part of the audience and its susceptibility to the visual provided, is followed by the subsequent revelation of Lynch's characters defined frequently as members of hermetic small-town communities. A noticeable progression of the confinement imposed on the characters' mentality as well as the space they are set in clearly marks the model of the director's sociological depiction. A peculiar sense of omnipresent secrecy (like in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks's* confined, seemingly unified society) and isolation (like in the recent *Inland Empire*, where the characters' secluded existence comprises their perception of the world as being here and now, cut from any trace of "the outside") defines the pattern of the characters' construction. This effect is achieved by a combination of the already mentioned rawness of the visual and minimal dialogue.

Another factor contributing to the remoteness of the societies depicted is space enclosure. The evident spatial isolation of the communities has the prime goal of narrowing the observer's scope to the specific. In Lynch's

case, the audience are given insight into internal co-existences, mechanisms and proceedings within environments by voyeuristic incentives such as peeping through the keyholes of the closed doors into the rooms framing the characters' living space.

In Lynch's productions the notion of confinement relates more to the small-town area (*Twin Peaks*, *Fire Walk with Me*, *Blue Velvet*). Lynch goes even further in his idea of spatial limitation, since his characters tend to openly rebel and escape from the prison of their captivity (*Wild at Heart*, *Lost Highway*). Still, wherever they go they carry the burden of mental and spatial boundaries. Their limited perception of the world turns their escapes into futile attempts of separating themselves from a self-inflicted psychological enclosure, indifferently making them come back to the well-known enclosed space they are subconsciously addicted to.

An umbilical cord unifying the characters with their familiar space gives them an illusory sense of security and shelter from the fears of their past. Nevertheless, those shelters are never permanent and the characters are always tracked down by whom they are hiding from, the "outsiders," who are reminiscence of their nightmarish past, co-victims of their painful existence or incarnations of their inevitable destination.

The artistic concept of David Lynch's personal metaphysics shows the interest of the director in appealing to and exploring human subconsciousness. Hence, the notion of psychodrama emerges, which seems to be directly related to his style of conducting dialogue with a viewer and which provides the link between the fiction presented and the audience.

Following the objectives and executive procedures involved in the therapy, it becomes quite clear that Moreno's idea of getting into the subconscious by means of conjoining several alter egos in the process of role playing, as well as the sole procedure of communal interaction the concept of psychodrama is based upon, reflect to a large extent the model of the small-town community structure presented by Lynch. Basically, he pursues the same principle of the characters' multiple role playing. The characters reflect each other (Nikki and Susan in *Inland Empire* or Betty and Diane in *Mulholland Drive*), reflect desires (Bob in *Twin Peaks*) or acquire numerous personalities losing their true identity (Laura Palmer in *Twin Peaks*). They all subject themselves to judgmental perception of others, since they think they exist only when they are perceived. None of them feel free to act independently and speak their minds. Members of these Lynchian small-town communities look for the reflection of their genuine selves in the surrounding of "others." It is thanks to those "others" – communities (*Twin Peaks*), families (*Wild at Heart*) or companions (*Inland Empire*, *Mulholland Drive*) that they regain their lost identities and redefine themselves. The theme of rediscovering oneself in Lynchian works is very often followed by a phase of liberation

from all the unwanted artificial roles imposed on the characters due to circumstances. Lynch quite clearly relates to psychodrama of the ordinary set in the small-town communities he shows in their rawness and depth. The media he uses to support the motif of psychodrama in his films vary considerably. One of the most prevailing themes is by far the one that refers to his search of truth and establishing of moral standards, the prerequisite of exploring beneath the surface.

Voyeurism, role playing, physical violence or self-inflicted guilt are those of Lynchian motifs that prevail in his depiction of small-town communities allowing the viewers to identify themselves with such seemingly familiar environments. We look at what we are and we watch the events we have witnessed before. Such settings are familiar to the audience as Lynch refers to the audience's life experiences connected with what he depicts on the screen. We can observe this in *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*, where the sickly erotic and divided character of the communities surfaces, once more uncovering the dark side of human nature in all its rawness and textual explicitness. The misleading titles have their accurate counterparts in Lynch's *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*, where the soothingly sounding titles cover literally (*Blue Velvet*) and figuratively (*Twin Peaks*) the sources of those small-town communities' corruption.

Lynch's films have many levels, and all take a look below the surface of what is depicted as normal, to explore the hidden darkness. The societies in his films, from Victorian London to *Twin Peaks*, appear superficially wholesome but all have some form of danger within. In many ways, this sickness beneath the surface defines the narrative drive in all of his works.

(Le Blanc 9)

It is due to a sense of detachment we regularly experience, that the activity of watching a film instills in us a feeling of relief and emotional comfort, as being humans, gregarious by nature, we find safety in numbers. The very same psychological maneuver is exercised by Lynch on his audience. The enclosed communities of *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet* experience the seeming touch of consolation and psychological security, as these are the best grounds to build suspense upon. Hence, the director presents his audience with a build-up of atmosphere depicted in his pictures, where the idyllic existence of superficial American towns is overshadowed by the dark side of human nature and corruption it breeds. Here, the happy ending is never achieved, since the instances of *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* show that evil occupies a permanent place in every community and, thus, will always remain an integral part of human existence.

The menace of the ordinary reflects the artificial atmosphere of calm, law and justice, of what ordered societies like to think as their home

environment. This aura of distress in Lynch's works is an ongoing process based on a sense of grotesque familiarities shown from the perspective of the author and his personal perception of reality depicted in his small-town community structure.

Through this complimentary breakdown of aspects involving the works of Lynch we can assimilate more easily the abstract and figurative content of what can only be described as an authorized depiction of human existence paralleled with its theatrical dimension. This is clearly connected within the role playing structure of the film and finds its parallel in Lynch's depiction of small-town communities. Regardless of where the action takes place: in big sinister Hollywood (like in *Inland Empire* and *Mulholland Drive*) or in a small town (like *Twin Peaks*), Lynch's settings always boil down to a small-town community structure within which his authorized concept of psychodrama of the ordinary comes about. The question of identity within those small-town communities is emphasized in all of the director's works, which allows the audience to appreciate the gap that has been bridged by Lynch's realization that the audience have an automatic appreciation of what they are seeing due to the mirror process of reality versus its filmic representation. Hence, following Lynch's logic, if to exist means to be perceived, it is the continuous process of the external and internal self-reflection that constitutes the essence of human existence and elucidates our *true* identities.

Works Cited

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Films

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Fire Walk With Me. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Kyle MacLachlan, Sheryl Lee, Ray Wise and Chris Isaak. Francis Bouygues with a CiBy Picture, 1992.
Inland Empire. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Laura Dern, Jeremy Irons, Justin Theroux and Harry Dean. Magnolia Pictures, 2006.
Lost Highway. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Bill Pullman, Patricia Arquette, Balthazar Getty and Robert Loggia. Asymmetrical Productions with a CiBy Picture, 1997.
Mulholland Drive. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Laura Harring, Naomi Watts, Justin Theroux and Robert Forster. A Picture Factory Production with Imagine Television and Touchstone Television, 1999.

Twin Peaks. Dir. David Lynch (pilot, episodes 2, 8, 9, 14 and 29). Perf. David Lynch, Kyle MacLachlan, Michael Ontkean and Kenneth Welsh. A Lynch – Frost / Propaganda Films Production with Worldvision Enterprises Inc., 1990–1991.

Wild at Heart. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Nicholas Cage, Laura Dern, Willem Dafoe and Diane Ladd. A Propaganda Films Production with Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 1990.

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Psychodramatyczny wymiar struktury małych wspólnot ludzkich w twórczości Davida Lyncha

Autorka przedstawia koncepcję *psychodramy codzienności* jako autoryzowaną wersję psychologicznego terminu psychodramy zaadoptowanej na potrzeby kina przez Davida Lyncha. Sama psychodrama jest procedurą medyczną zapoczątkowaną przez doktora J. L. Moreno jako technika psychologiczna pomagająca w leczeniu szeroko rozumianych schorzeń psychicznych pacjentów, polegająca na grupowym odgrywaniu konkretnych sytuacji z przeszłości pacjenta, która w rezultacie pozwala mu na zrozumienie własnych emocji i, docelowo, zdefiniowanie swojej tożsamości. W artykule nawiązano do niekonwencjonalnych zabiegów reżyserskich Davida Lyncha, oscylujących wokół rekonstrukcji poczucia rzeczywistości u publiczności oraz nakierowaniu jej, poprzez techniki pochodne psychodramie, na percepcję świata otaczającego samego reżysera. Wizja rzeczywistości Lyncha, oparta na hermetycznej koegzystencji małych wspólnot ludzkich, pokazuje adaptację psychodramy jako środka wyrazu w filmie. Artykuł skupia się na analizie paraleli powstałej pomiędzy strukturą małych wspólnot jako reprezentanta otaczającej nas rzeczywistości a modelem odgrywania roli definiującym koncepcję psychodramy jako techniki sterowanej wiwisekcji ludzkiego umysłu zgłębianych przez Lyncha w filmie. Motywem przewodnim artykułu jest więc problem definicji ludzkiej tożsamości opartej na użyciu przez reżysera autoryzowanej wersji technik psychodramy.

