

**Transcendent voices: Heteroglossia and the Power of Female Identity in  
Three Films by David Lynch**

by

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I perform a feminist-semiotic analysis of three of David Lynch's movies—*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*. I use Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia as the tool for my examination, focusing on how the lead female characters in these films assert their voices against the other conflicting elements within the text. This thesis situates Lynch's films within feminist film scholarship due to his strong female characters who function as active subjects of the narrative, furthering the action, in opposition with Laura Mulvey's image of the passive woman. I argue that Lynch's non-coherent narrative form is particularly useful for feminism because it reveals new representations for women and new ways for them to assert their agency.

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## Introduction

A solitary woman, Nikki Grace (Laura Dern), stands in the middle of a stage, bathed in blue iridescent light, as the Lost Girl (Karolina Gruszka), trapped in her hotel room, watches on a television screen. As the girl continues to watch, the image on the television screen transforms to that of her confined space, and the girl now sees herself reflected in the monitor. Nikki enters the room and the girl slowly stands. The two kiss and embrace in an expression without words, and Nikki fades away. The girl is momentarily motionless, with a look of wonderment on her face, and then runs through the open doorway, leaving her confinement behind.

This is part of the concluding sequence of David Lynch's most recent movie, *Inland Empire* (2006), and it depicts a moment of pure female transcendence. The moment is made possible by Nikki's narrative subjectivity and acts of agency on her journey to successfully discover herself outside of the male voices and conflict that have formed an important part of the narrative. No male voices are present because Nikki has silenced them through her navigation of the film's non-coherent narrative structure. She has overcome the conflicts by asserting her voice and has found the opening to liberate both herself and the Lost Girl, who is now able to leave the room she has been limited to while under the control of a malevolent male force who also threatened Nikki. While the setting of the hotel room was previously a place of male violence and the suppression of a woman's voice, it is now solely a female space. This place where the narratives coalesce was not available to Nikki until she maneuvered through the intermingling spaces and storylines of the film and discovered her identity. Once this occurred, however, she found her way to the other side, to the Lost Girl, a Polish prostitute under the control of the Phantom, an evil entity permeating all the film's narratives.

Nikki's embrace with the Lost Girl is a representation of the merging of their identities. She disappears afterwards, as they have become one. This merging is a symbol of Nikki's attainment of complete inner harmony, a unity reinforced in the subsequent scene, in Nikki's home. Like the hotel room, it has become a space dominated by the female voice, free of past patriarchal influences. Previously, Nikki's husband had ruled the space, controlling Nikki's freedom, watching over her from

atop the grand stairwell. Now, he is nowhere to be seen. This unity is reinforced by the lack of traditional discourse, or spoken words in the scene. After Nikki transcends the multitude of voices, she no longer needs to speak. Only Chrysta Bell's poignant "Polish Poem" is heard, as she sings about something coming true. Something coming true is an answer to Bell's question of whether a mystery is unfolding. The mystery of Nikki's identity has been solved, as she reaches the end of her journey and discovers her true self. With this resolution, something has, indeed, come true. The female voice has become the dominant one in the narrative.

This scene is a significant illustration of why Lynch's work is a valuable avenue for feminist readings. The signature surreal style, narrative ambiguity and open-ended quality of his films offer new possibilities for viewing women as active agents in cinema. His non-coherent narrative form supports strong, radical representations of women by presenting opportunities for female discourse that more traditional film structures may not. In fact, the further Lynch strays from narrative logic, the stronger his female characters become by creating space for the female voice against the more narrow, linear narrative spaces traditionally dominated by men. This is meaningful for feminism because it offers a new method for viewing women in cinema that is based on how the female voice interacts with the other voices within a text. These voices include not only the spoken words by characters, but also the film's narrative modes, aspects of style and thematic elements. The various interactions and contradictions among these voices reflect cinema's heteroglossic nature, where individual textual and stylistic components are understood as parts of a larger whole and all meanings are in constant interaction. On a broader level, this scene illuminates the possibilities for the female voice in film because it portrays a woman who has rejected a traditional, passive position of object and has instead actively furthered the narrative, successfully asserting her voice among the numerous conflicting elements, including the male voices.

## Literature Review and Methodology

The lead female characters in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006) defy the passive image of the female by asserting their agency in face of the intermingling discourses present in Lynch's films and thereby transcending the multitude of conflicting voices within the narratives. In this thesis, I will examine these three women through a feminist-semiotic framework and demonstrate how such an analysis can provide feminist film scholarship new space for studying women.

Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts) and Nikki Grace overcome the conflicting textual and stylistic elements of these films, including the components of masculine discourse, through their positions as active subjects who further the storylines and attempt to achieve their desires. Heteroglossia is a concept introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin in a compilation of four essays in 1941, concerning language and the novel. These essays make up *The Dialogic Imagination*, translated by Michael Holquist in 1981. According to Bakhtin, all languages can be described as stratified by the varying individual voices that exist among them in specific historical moments. These levels reflect the languages of different age groups or genders and social dialects, for instance. The novel is a powerful literary style precisely because of the diverse assortment of speech forms that exist, conflict and merge within it. No word is neutral because it reflects the context it is spoken in, and it interacts with the other words already spoken about that subject. Heteroglossia opposes a unitary language, or language as a world view, infused with ideology. As I will demonstrate through a more extensive discussion of heteroglossia below, it can be usefully applied not only to the novel, but also to film, which makes it a significant concept for cinema studies.

Heteroglossia is a particularly valuable tool for a feminist analysis because it offers an empowering way to consider how characters assert their agency, which in turn provides new possibilities for viewing women onscreen. Heteroglossia as a feminist analytical tool reveals more than just female representations in cinema. It presents a way to differentiate the female voice among the many within a film, thereby uncovering the value of feminine discourse and how the female characters use this discourse

to establish their agency. As the novel consists of a variety of linguistic elements, so does cinema. The voices of the characters, the authorial voice, visual aspects and stylistic choices can all be considered linguistic elements in film. In this sense, female agency involves women navigating through the contradictory voices present in a narrative and finding ways to infuse their words with their own intentions in order to successfully assert themselves. Voice, as theorized by Bakhtin, does not refer solely to spoken words, but also to themes and styles, which makes his concept especially relevant for film studies. Lynch's work is particularly fitting for such a semiotic analysis.

David Lynch began making short films in the 1960s, and he started gaining prominence after the release of his first feature-length film, *Eraserhead* (1977), which garnered a cult following. He has since become known for the unique, indistinct cinematic style that inhibits a single right or wrong understanding of his movies. Although Lynch works on the borders of convention, he can still be considered a mainstream director because he has produced and distributed his films through major international media companies. Furthermore, several of his films, including *The Elephant Man* (1980) and *Blue Velvet* (1986) have been nominated for Academy and Golden Globe Awards, and Lynch won the Golden Palm for *Wild at Heart* (1990), as well as best director for *Mulholland Drive* at the Cannes Film Festival. The beginning of Lynch's career coincides with the development of feminist film theory in the early 1970s. The release of *Eraserhead* occurred around the same time that some of the first feminist film criticism, such as those by Molly Haskell, Marjorie Rosen and Claire Johnston, were published. As feminist film theory has progressed in its examinations of female representations in cinema, Lynch's films have advanced towards richer, more complex female characters. Moreover, as his career has continued, Lynch has gradually moved from a logical narrative form, to narratives of non-coherence. The intrinsic ambiguity that is part of his work makes it a valuable avenue for a feminist analysis. Although any film has numerous potential readings, Lynch's films do more than simply present this alternative. They encourage differing interpretations through their open-ended quality. Furthermore, human nature, desire and sexuality are prevalent elements in Lynch's work, and they are often explored in relation to women, so his female characters warrant special attention. This makes his movies beneficial for a

feminist examination because his work and the subjects of that work already stand in opposition to a unitary world view, which encompasses traditional views of gendered depictions. Similarly to the way Lynch challenges traditional narrative modes, the female characters in his movies challenge the representations of women in traditional cinema. They interact with the spaces within the films, navigating them and managing them to their own benefit. These spaces, which include interrelated storylines, merging realities and locales with shifting connotations, would not be available to them in more coherent movies. The fact that Lynch's work supports varying interpretations and defies logic then, advances feminist readings of his characters.

The following review of the scholarship on feminist film theory, semiotic film theory and Lynch presents the context for my analysis, illustrating the concerns of feminist film criticism thus far, the history of semiotic theory and its application to film, and the directorial work of Lynch. A thorough exploration of this scholarship will allow me to demonstrate its evolution, its relationship with film criticism and unexplored avenues for study. Furthermore, a solid understanding of the literature on Lynch illuminates, first, how his work fits within the context of feminist film theory, and second, why a feminist-semiotic analysis is a meaningful method for reading his films.

Initially, feminist thought concerned itself mainly with explorations of how meaning is created through film texts and not just transmitted by them; these studies focused primarily on the representations of women in cinema. These critiques have drawn upon the areas of semiotics, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism in their examinations of sexual difference and the ideological constructions present in films. Annette Kuhn's *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (1982) provides an important historical base for feminist film scholarship. After detailing the dominant characteristics and past female representations within mainstream cinema, Kuhn examines the overarching objects of feminist film analysis: to reveal the sexist assumptions and limited representational patterns available in patriarchal society. The main focus of this concern has been the roles of women as passive objects within cinema and the exclusion of their voice from narrative agency. The concerns with female representations in film focus not only on their presence and how they are portrayed, but also on their absence and how they are not



illustrated. These questions of representation address issues such as the functions the female character has or doesn't have within a film, how she is visually portrayed and how are female images constructed within the narrative. Such depictions, or lack of depictions, are many times unnoticed by ordinary spectators because of the sexism present in society. Due to this inherent gendered societal view, the task for feminist film analysis is to make visible the invisible (Kuhn, 1982).

According to Kuhn (1982), feminist critiques can be broken down into two types of analyses. The first strategy for a feminist textual analysis is to reveal the ideological operations of a dominant patriarchal cinema, while the second strategy focuses on films that internally critique the patriarchal ideology in order to provide alternate readings of those films. Much of the past and present feminist film criticism has followed the first approach of exposing gendered cinematic ideologies, especially regarding the punishment of women, the dichotomies between male and female desire, the male subject and female object, the powerful, voyeuristic male and the passive female, as well as the stereotypical roles available for female actors.

In her influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey (1975) situates the image of the passive female as essential to dominant patriarchal ideology. She uses psychoanalytic theory, specifically Lacan and the mirror phase, to examine the ways in which patriarchal society has constructed film form. Mulvey begins by claiming that women symbolize the threat of castration, a symbolization they are unable to overcome. Cinema encourages scopophilia, a term identified by Freud as a characteristic of sexuality, in which people are seen as objects and viewed through a controlling gaze. Scopophilia, at its most excessive, materializes in voyeurism, when someone can achieve sexual satisfaction only through an active, controlling and objectifying viewing of another. Mulvey argues that the cinema facilitates scopophilic fantasies because film itself is screened to be viewed by spectators, and through the contrast between the light of the screen and the dark of the theater. It lets spectators view for pleasure and receive enjoyment from watching women be controlled. She goes further to state that this viewing pleasure is divided between the active male and the passive female, in that the male actively projects his fantasies onto the passive female. The woman in traditional cinema serves two purposes. She

either functions as the erotic object for characters within the narrative, or she becomes the erotic object for the spectators in the theater. The woman's presence hinders the story, while the male character actively furthers it, thereby becoming the powerful representation. The female is subverted to this male power, becoming not only his property, but also that of the cinematic viewer. Since woman evokes male fear of castration, men deal with this fear in two ways. They either discredit her through punishing or saving her, or they transform her into a fixation, which renders her harmless (Mulvey, 1975).

Mary Ann Doane (1981) also focuses on issues of female representation and spectatorship in her essay "*Caught and Rebecca: The Inscription of Femininity as Absence.*" She examines women's films, which assume the presence of a female spectator. Doane considers these films valuable for a feminist reading because of the ways in which they outline female desire and subjectivity, elements that are lacking from traditional Hollywood cinema. Doane argues that female spectators do not have the same access to cinematic differentiation between object and subject that men do. Instead, women can either accept the image, or reject it, while conversely, male spectators do not have to make such a choice. Women lack the distance that separates spectators from the image. Both films that Doane examines have scenes in which female subjectivity is absent from the narrative. She states that in these instances, the camera accomplishes a double negation of the feminine, through the woman's absence and through the displacement of her desire. These scenes are the most problematic for Doane because she claims that these absences define an impossibility of female spectatorship (Doane, 1981).

Jacquelyn Suter (1979) discusses the question of feminine discourse and the difficulty of its expression in her analysis of Dorothy Arzner's *Christopher Strong* (1933). She observes that while a feminine discourse does exist within the film, it is situated within a larger patriarchal discourse, which is inherent in the movie's narrative structure. This patriarchal discourse can be found in all areas of the cinematic text; all the relationships in the narrative gravitate towards monogamy and the hindrance of feminine desire. Suter states that the feminine voice present in the text questions the traditional ideas of patriarchy, such as the need for a male to protect the women in his charge, but never actually challenges patriarchal authority. Monica, a character in the film, writes a suicide note accusing her father of this.

The feminine voice is in opposition to the masculine because the female voice is not expected to vocalize itself. However, it is not able to challenge patriarchal authority because once the possibility of an actual confrontation with her father arises, Monica's voice becomes incoherent. Furthermore, Suter argues, feminine desire is suppressed. Cynthia, the film's central female character who is having an affair with Monica's married father, is not the subject of desire but rather its object because her action resolves the narrative in line with patriarchy. Cynthia's sexual union with her married partner positions her as the object of his desire, not the subject of her own. Moreover, Cynthia's threat is negated as she becomes fetishized through her death. Female desire then, is not actually women's desire, but a desire for the film's resolution. (Suter, 1979).

Linda Williams (1984) investigates the woman's ability or inability to look in cinema. Williams equates sight with desire, problematizing Mulvey's concept of the cinematic female as a passive object to be looked at. Looking specifically at the horror genre, Williams argues that the female look recognizes that the horror of the monster is similar to her own difference; in effect, the image of the monster functions as a mirror held up to women by patriarchy. The female characters in horror films are permitted to display their sexuality, which corresponds to their acts of looking, but they are also punished for these expressions. The women in many horror films, according to Williams, function as fantasies that demonstrate the threat of female desire (Williams, 1984).

The analyses above are situated within the first approach described by Kuhn (1982). However, other theorists like Johnston (1975) and Cook (1975) have provided scholarship in the context of the second strategy, leading to the possibility of a feminist counter-cinema, which Mulvey attempted to put into practice with her 1977 film, *Riddles of the Sphinx*. This second approach relies on Comolli and Narboni's (1971) examination of the connection between ideology and cinema. In order to examine this relationship, they split films into seven categories, based on their interaction with ideology. Comolli and Narboni pose the question of which films (or other cultural texts) allow ideology to serve as their language and which make it visible by either exposing or impeding its devices (Comolli and Narboni, 1971).

Johnston and Cook were the first to use this “alternate reading” strategy when they performed feminist readings of Dorothy Arzner’s work. They examined a selection of Arzner’s films and focused on how the films present female discourse as a contradiction to the patriarchal discourse prevalent in mainstream Hollywood cinema. Johnston (1975) argues that through their desires in opposition to patriarchy and through their search for their identity outside of male discourse, the female characters in Arzner’s films disrupt the films’ narratives. Cook (1975), meanwhile, suggests that ideological workings become visible in Arzner’s work through textual disruptions—instances when image and narrative contradict one another and therefore cause ruptures within a film. Ruptures can occur when narratives and the cinematic images within them contradict each other. For instance, Cook examines the representation of Mamie in *The Revolt of Mamie Stover* (1956) and how the threat posed by her success and independence in the narrative is broken down by her fetishization at the level of image. These disruptions break down audience identification with what they see on screen, thereby challenging the narrative unity.

Since the 1970s, other scholars have offered re-readings and proposed feminist frameworks for cinema as well. In her essay on Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, Tania Modleski (1988) contradicts Mulvey’s assertion that classic narrative film’s exclusion of the female point of view forces spectators to identify with the male protagonist. She does so through an analysis of the characters in *Rear Window*, in which the male character, Jeff, is helpless and confined to a wheelchair, while the female character, Lisa, is a powerful presence, able to move around freely, which is in direct opposition to Mulvey’s classification of the woman as passive. Moreover, Modleski draws parallels between Lisa and Thorwald and Jeff and Thorwald’s dead wife. The film offers both a male and female point of view instead of negating the woman’s view, and in the scene when Lisa is caught in Thorwald’s apartment, spectators are forced to identify with Lisa instead of the male character because they see the episode through Jeff’s point of view. By the end of the film, Jeff becomes the object of male violence, not Lisa, and he becomes more helpless than he was at the beginning. Furthermore, sexual difference is negated through Lisa’s depiction in masculine clothing. She is given the last look in the film as Jeff sleeps, which suggests that women are not passively confined by male views (Modleski, 1988).

In her examination of the horror genre, Cynthia Freeland (1996) argues that existing research is limited because feminist theorists do not understand the complex historical background of horror, or take into account the various subgenres that exist within it. Freeland then proposes a new feminist framework for reading horror films, one that begins to fill in the gaps of previous research. She does so by breaking the roles of feminism within film studies into extra-filmic and intra-filmic roles. Extra-filmic roles refer to feminist examinations from a sociological, anthropological, or historical perspective, which focus on specific subjects regarding women's experiences producing and watching horror films. Freeland is more interested in intra-filmic roles, however, which focus on how horror films represent sexuality, gender and power, based on cinematic elements, such as characters, points of view and plot. She proposes a feminist ideological critique that would investigate a film's depiction of gender. This type of feminist reading looks not just at the superficial representations of gender, but it also pays attention to things that may be left out of these representations. Freeland states that such a critical feminist framework provides a more fruitful way of reading horror films than the psychodynamic feminist strategies of the past (Freeland, 1996).

In her essay "Is the gaze male?" E. Ann Kaplan (1983) focuses on questions regarding the look—the camera's look through the way events are filmed and the active gaze of the characters—in cinema. She first provides a brief overview of the background of feminist film theory and then addresses recent issues women have expressed with the existing theoretical work being conducted. Several feminist film critics have found it problematic that their field has been using frameworks (like psychoanalytic theory) created by men, which therefore use a traditionally masculine discourse. While she recognizes the significance of these objections, Kaplan claims that psychoanalysis is a necessary tool for feminism, specifically regarding the question of women's pleasure at being objectified. Even though there are films in which the woman is the bearer of the gaze and makes the male the object instead of the other way around, in these cases that female character loses traditionally feminine characteristics and must become masculine. Kaplan also examines the issue of motherhood within psychoanalysis. She claims that Hollywood films mirror the patriarchal unconscious, the fear of patriarchy. Everything, then, centers on

the idea of pleasure. Men objectify women, while women have begun to relate their sexuality to the male gaze. These inflexible sex roles have functioned to erase the memory of the mutual pleasure that both men and women received during bonding with their mothers. According to Kaplan, we have to find a way to overcome these divisions. In order to truly understand the ways women have been structured in language, it is significant to find a way to change discourse because this, in turn, would affect the way women are constructed. Some feminist film critics have suggested that asking questions may be the first step to establishing a female discourse. This could be the start to answering Kaplan's question of whether it's possible for there to be a female voice, or discourse (Kaplan, 1983).

The aforementioned scholarship provides an enlightening account of the issues feminist film criticism has been concerned with, the questions it has sought answers to and the types of examinations that have been conducted. It illuminates the relationship between feminist theory and cinema. Semiotics is also a crucial element of film theory, and has been applied to the study of film by multiple theorists in the past, including a number of feminist theorists, who have used semiotics as the framework for their analyses of cinema. Their explorations establish a connection among these fields of study, detailing how semiotics can inform feminist film studies. Before looking at how semiotics has been utilized by feminist film criticism, however, it is first important to understand the broader association between semiotics and film theory.

Christian Metz, in *Film Language: A Semiotics of a Cinema* (1968), argues that cinema, specifically narrative feature films, can be studied using linguistic methods. While cinema is not a language system, it can be considered a language through its use of signifying elements to create meaning. Language is the universal system of signs, while cinema is a sign system, organized similarly to language. A cinematographic language involves the elements of plot, as well as the aesthetic elements of a film, and it is possible to ask similar questions of both language and film. How language indicates certain occurrences or events is a comparable question to how narrative film presents its plot. Denotation, which Metz considers most significant for study, involves the basic materials within a film, or the images and sounds that make up the plot, while connotation relates to the film's narrative elements, how the

movie's messages are presented and what is signified by those messages, which includes aspects like style and genre (Metz, 1968).

Pier Paolo Pasolini discusses the differences between cinematic language and literary language in "The Cinema of Poetry" (1965). Literary language is rational, with a limited lexicon, while cinematic language is irrational, with an infinite lexicon, which gives it a dreamlike quality. In literary language, the lin-sign, or language sign, is the word that a writer uses to communicate to the audience. The cinematic equivalent is the im-sign, which is a signifying image, or the physical object utilized by the filmmaker to communicate to the audience. Moreover, cinematic language communicates through stylistic relationships as opposed to syntagmatic ones, meaning that cinema will never attain a real set of grammatical rules. According to Pasolini, both cinematic language and literary language possess a double nature of objectivity and subjectivity because they use both images of memories and dreams, as well as images from observed reality, which are contradictory. Memories and dreams are considered subjective, while observed reality is regarded as objective. The difference lies in the fact that this objectivity and subjectivity cannot be separated in cinematic language, though it can in literary language. Pasolini therefore concludes that cinematic language is essentially a language of poetry (Pasolini, 1965).

Pasolini continues his examination of cinematic language in his 1966 essay "The Written Language of Reality." He claims that reality is cinema in nature and that human action in reality—the events that a film captures—is the first of human languages. According to Pasolini, the most basic units of film language are the objects or acts of reality that compose a shot. Generally speaking, language is composed of two elements—oral language and written language, and cinema has a similar dichotomy. Pasolini states that life and its actions are a natural film, thereby making it the linguistic equivalent of oral language, while the reproduction of the language of action through performance in the medium of cinema can be considered written language. Pasolini then lays out an outline for the grammar of cinema. He separates the grammar of film into four phases: modes of reproduction, modes of creating substantives, modes of qualification and modes of verbalization, or syntax. Modes of reproduction refer to the technical means for the reproduction of reality. Modes of creating substantives make a connection between

cinematic shots and the relative clause in written-spoken language. All cinematic shots have to represent something that exists, which create the material of a film. Modes of qualification are broken down into profilmic qualification, which focuses on the stylistics of film, and filmic qualification, which centers on the technical choices of shooting a film (types of shots, camera distances, etc.) Modes of verbalization are also broken down into two segments. Denotative editing positions two shots in an oppositional relationship, allowing for the creation of a series of clauses. Connotative editing coincides with denotative editing, but it adds the length of editing as a qualification. With this grammatical outline of cinema, Pasolini makes the point that a grammatical analysis can describe two different types of cinematic sequences using identical terms, while a stylistic discourse would have to rely on different definitions (Pasolini, 1966).

Teresa de Lauretis, in her book *Alice Doesn't* (1984), examines the relationship between feminism, semiotics and cinema by looking at the representations of women in both language and film. She argues that historically, both semiotic theory and cinema have disallowed women the position of subject, placing them as objects in relation to male subjects. Cinematic discourse then, positions woman as non-subject, but at the same time, this position of non-subject supports the idea of subject. She is both present and absent at the same time, and the only way for her to alter her representations is to transgress them. According to de Lauretis, questioning female representations in language and cinema is in itself a representation of their contradiction in discourse because the place for women in discourse and cinema is problematic. They find themselves between the masculine representation of the camera and the feminine image on the screen and have no access to the codes that represent them. A feminist reading, however, can change this representation through the establishment of an understanding of the female contradiction. By producing woman as image or text, women actively resist identifying with that image (de Lauretis, 1984).

Kaja Silverman (1988) also connects semiotic theory to feminist film criticism in her book *The Acoustic Mirror*, in which she details mainstream cinema's treatment of sound and voice. Silverman argues that Hollywood deals with the female voice similarly to the way it presents the female body—an



object of obsession. By doing so, it exposes it as something that is lacking in order to protect males from the knowledge that women have opportunities for linguistic representation that are not available to males. Similarly, the female voice is separated from any appearance of productivity, so it is not allowed an active position of power. Instead, the female voice is identified with spectacle. Mainstream cinema does so by closely associating the female voice with the body, while disembodying the male voice. Silverman discusses the argument made in favor of the power of female speech if it is synchronized with the body, or if it is heard onscreen in conjunction with the image. She then examines the problems with the claim that the female voice can be powerful even if tied to the body, before turning to the concept of femininity and several films that demonstrate the power of an unsynchronized female voice, a voice that does not match up with the female body, but is heard apart from it. Although an individual's connection to her body is lived out through the negotiation of discourse, that body is still affected by its cultural context, and therefore, it is not possible to claim an authentic female body. Silverman believes that the concept of femininity should be based on a feminization of the male subject in cinema, not the masculinization of the female subject. Additionally, she relates femininity to the girl's negative Oedipus complex, which is her desire for and identification with her mother. By situating femininity in such a way, Silverman positions herself in opposition to Freud's idea that desire for one parent assumes identification with the other. Silverman argues that it is necessary to differentiate between the castration complex and symbolic castration. Symbolic castration occurs through separation from the mother; the castration complex diminishes the mother's significance and persuades a girl to transfer her desire to the father, while she simultaneously feels cultural pressure to keep identifying with the mother. A girl is thus unable to enter into the negative type of the Oedipus complex, in which identification with the mother is partially identification with activity, through Freud's castration complex because the purpose of this sexually distinguishing castration is to displace the girl's desire from the mother to the father. Therefore, the girl's only identification with the mother would be based on lack. Silverman agrees with other theorists who state that women have always been speaking subjects even if they have not been allowed specific discursive positions and adds that woman is also the subject of speech (Silverman, 1988).

Within classic cinema, it is the male voice that holds authoritative knowledge. This authority is intensified in those instances when the male voice is separated from the body, as in a voice-over. On the contrary, the female subject does not have access to positions of discursive power, but is restricted to positions in the narrative that are within the scope of male sight and hearing. Since woman is placed in classic film as a body, allowing her voice to be heard without being seen would liberate her from the male gaze. This is the reason that the female voice is typically connected to the body, synchronized with the image. Several feminist filmmakers, whose films Silverman discusses, have experimented with different ways of separating the female voice from the body in their work. By using voice-overs, disengaging the female voice from the diegesis, allocating the female voice an invisible location within the story, or mismatching voices in order to blur their physical origin, they have abandoned symmetry and concurrent action. *Film about a Woman Who...* (Yvonne Rainer, 1974) and *Kristina Talking Pictures* (Yvonne Rainer, 1976) use the lack of voice, or silence, to emphasize their message. *Empty Suitcases* (Bette Gordon, 1980), on the other hand, utilizes an array of female discourses and locations in order to in order to render identities ambiguous, as well as a form of ironic synchronization in which a woman lip-synchs to a song, but remains unaffected by the music and lyrics. This scene presents the female spectator with a look at the classic Hollywood construction of woman, which is the semiotics that makes the female voice signify the female body, which signifies lack. *Sifted Evidence* (Patricia Gruben, 1981) also uses synchronization to depict female restriction, this time to demonstrate how it functions to diminish female credibility and authority through what Silverman calls “vocal striptease,” or returning a previously unknown voice to its body, followed immediately by a close-up. In *Journeys from Berlin/71* (Yvonne Rainer, 1979) and *The Gold Diggers* (Sally Potter, 1984), the directors’ voices actually play a part in their films. In the latter movie, there are instances when a character becomes both the spectator and the spectacle simultaneously, obscuring the lines between spectacle and gaze, synchronized voice and voice-off. Silverman states that these films exemplify the discursive potential for the female voice if liberated from the confines of the body (Silverman, 1988).

Stephen Prince, in “The Discourse of Pictures: Iconicity and Film Studies” (1993), questions the appropriateness of linguistic models to understanding how cinematic images communicate. The assumption that film analysis has to follow cultural conditioning is problematic for Prince. Instead, he argues that a spectator’s comprehension of cinematic images has to do with recognition, not translation. Viewers do not need to develop the skills to identify moving pictures the same way they must acquire linguistic skills. Instead, viewers recognize film images because they correspond with images they see in real life. Furthermore, Prince questions whether cinematic discourse is comparable to oral or written language because cinematic discourse lacks some of the capabilities that language possesses, such as the ability to express negatives and the capacity to establish significance that refers to a space and time beyond the current communicational setting. Prince claims that viewers do not understand film through visual codes, but through the movie’s narrative context—its overarching story—which makes the meaning clear. Therefore, Prince states that the narrative context can link images to meaning. Because cinematic images are similar to real-world experiences, while words do not have any inherent relationship to the objects they refer to and thus are not always adequate substitutes for images, Prince argues for a shift away away from linguistics-based film theories towards models that are rooted in the observable experiences of real viewers (Prince, 1993).

The relationship between language and cinema has also been usefully examined by theorists such as Paul Messaris (1994), Peter Wollen (1976) and Stephen Heath (1981), and while the literature on feminist film criticism and semiotic theory sets up the context for my feminist-semiotic analysis of Lynch’s work, the existing research on Lynch’s films significantly illuminates the visual, stylistic and thematic elements found in many of his films. Moreover, as the following review will show, both feminist and semiotic frameworks have been previously applied to Lynch’s movies. However, as will become clear, questions about the female voice remain unaddressed.

In her essay “Forever, in my dreams: Generic conventions and the subversive imagination in *Blue Velvet*,” Betsy Berry (1988) examines predominant themes used by Lynch, many of which appear in his later films as well. Berry argues that the impossibility of definitively separating the tangible real world

and the violent dream world in *Blue Velvet* is the film's most significant contribution to American cinema. She loosely positions *Blue Velvet* as a detective movie, while acknowledging that its scope extends beyond one such genre. Although it contains several elements of a detective story, including a crime, a hero who wants to solve the crime, an obstacle and a temporary solution, the movie and its characters are not so clear cut. The film's duality is expressed from the exaggerated and ironic representation of a dream-like reality at the beginning, to the deliberately artificial and ironic ending. The characters also all have a dual nature that Lynch expresses through contradictions and cannot be comfortably placed in one role. Berry points to Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) and Sandy Williams (Laura Dern) as an example, who take on the roles of femme fatale and innocent girl next door, respectively. However, Dorothy is also the helpless female in need of rescue, while Sandy is not as passive as a film noir girlfriend, accompanying Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) on his quest to solve the mystery, despite her misgivings. Berry also links Jeffrey and Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) based on their perverted nature, exemplified in the scene when Jeffrey gives in to Dorothy's demands and hits her, as Frank did. Through his detection of the dual nature of his reality, Jeffrey also discovers the two contradicting natures within himself. The film's happy conclusion, according to Berry (1988), provides only a superficial sense of closure, as it is meant to be ironic, a restoration of normalcy to something that was never normal to begin with.

David Copenhafer (2008) looks not at the visual, but the auditory style of *Blue Velvet*, arguing that much of the film's impact comes from the sound and music and the juxtaposition of sound and image, such as the sound of Frank's inhaler and the sound of the scissors during his violence against Dorothy. The music in film can either work to reinforce the image by coinciding with the scene's emotion, or it can function indifferently from the image, having no direct relation to it. Copenhafer is concerned specifically with the songs "Blue Velvet" and "In Dreams" and how their combination with the filmic images creates an unstable logic of gender and sexuality within the film. The first time "Blue Velvet" is heard it is at the film's beginning as non-diegetic sound, performed by the original artist, Bobby Vinton, but the second time it is when Dorothy performs it at the club and we, as spectators, watch

the film's characters watching a performance. Copenhafer argues that as they watch her, Jeffrey and Frank have to put themselves in the position of performer and make Dorothy the object of the song in order for it to make sense to them logically because the lyrics, which are about a woman, should be performed by a man. If taken literally, Dorothy is singing about a female lover. Because of this, confusion exists between the visible and audible in the scene, with the person portrayed serving as a substitute for the real person desired. When Frank sits in the audience, Dorothy focuses her attention on him and not Jeffrey as she sings about lost love. Frank watches her while holding a piece of blue velvet, which recalls his earlier abuse. According to Copenhafer, Frank wants to return to a childlike state in which there is no differentiation between the male and female body, which is why we never hear or see him take his clothes off to rape Dorothy. He attempts to make her body more like a man's to dispel his anxiety over his possible homosexual desires. He is not able to do so during Ben's performance of "In Dreams," which is why he becomes angry and turns the song off. Before he does so, however, the performance can be viewed as a duet between Ben and Frank, and not just a solo by Ben for the group, exposing hidden homosexual desire. The second instance "In Dreams" appears in the film, it is performed by Frank on the side of the road and directed at Jeffrey. Frank, who has put garish lipstick on, kisses, then punches Jeffrey in a representation of the irony that homosexuality is only possible in dreams for him. Frank is not able to combat music the way he is his tangible enemies, for it is an all-encompassing force that brings latent thoughts to the surface (Copenhafer, 2008).

Cindy Hendershot (1995) examines *Wild at Heart* as a postmodern allegory and discusses personification, reification and typology in the film. Hendershot claims that the characters in the film can be personified by their names. Lula Pace Fortune (Laura Dern), for instance, is personified as rich and spoiled through "Fortune," while Sailor Ripley is personified as a sexualized drifter through his first name. Reification is a form of allegory that gives concrete shapes to abstract clichés, and it occurs through Marietta's (Diane Ladd) transition from metaphorical demon to literal demonic image when she paints her face red with her lipstick. Typology can be described as a story reading another story, and it is present in the film through Lula's *Wizard of Oz* interpretations and Sailor's (Nicolas Cage) Elvis

interpretations. Hendershot argues that through the use of irony, Lynch reveals the irrationality of people who establish their lives around pop culture, thereby diminishing their experience to cinematic text (Hendershot, 1995).

Todd McGowan (2004) explores the roles of desire and fantasy in Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* by splitting the film into two sections and examining them based on Lynch's use of editing and manipulation of temporality. The first section of the film depicts a world of fantasy, while the second section portrays the real world of desire. The fantastical world conforms to a traditional Hollywood style with its well-lit scenes, smooth editing and chronological, cause-and-effect temporality, while the world of desire is darkly lit and does not proceed according to traditional time constraints. Instead of moving forward, it repeats. The contrast between the two parts is evident, but the world of desire provides the world of fantasy with its structure, therein emphasizing the link between the two. In the first section of the film viewers are led to believe that Rita (Laura Elena Herring) is the desiring subject and that Betty Elms (Watts) is the fulfillment of this desire because Betty is helping Rita find her identity, thereby resolving Rita's uncertainty about herself and becoming her fantasy object. However, once the shift from fantasy to desire occurs, it becomes evident that Betty only functioned as Diane's ideal ego, while Betty's relationship with Rita represented Diane's desire for a relationship with Camilla Rhodes (Herring). The reason for this is to depict the extent to which fantasy can control experiences. The main theme in the film is a failed sexual relationship, similar to that in Lynch's *Lost Highway*, in which Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) constructs a fantasy world in order to attempt to fulfill the sexual relationship he is unable to achieve in the real world. The difference between the two films, according to McGowan, lies in the difference between male and female fantasy. Male fantasies fall short (Pete's failure with Alice), while female fantasies go too far (Rita and Betty make love). However, Lynch demonstrates the interconnection between the world of fantasy and the world of desire, as Diane's fantasy begins to infringe on her real world, causing her to find escape from the very thing she escaped to in the beginning (McGowan, 2004).

Jennifer Hudson (2004), Katherine Hayles and Nicholas Gessler (2004) and Michael Dunne (1995) apply semiotic theory to their studies of Lynch's work. Hudson examines *Mulholland Drive* using

a poststructuralist framework in order to focus on Lynch's reversal of coherence and use of non-logical discourse, specifically in relation to the character of Rita and the Club Silencio scene. According to Hudson, Lynch foregoes traditional discourse for the discourse of non-logic, using intuition and emotional perception to make sense of the truths about the film's realities. Because she has amnesia and therefore no identification, Rita indicates a return to what Hudson, invoking Julia Kristeva, calls the semiotic chora, a place experienced as desire. Rita's position is similar to what Lacan terms the Imaginary, because she responds solely to emotions and intuition, not logic.<sup>1</sup> Hudson argues that Rita defies either-or logic through the lack of conceptual borders around her identity, boundaries that Lynch blurs through his surrealist style. Rita's identity is lost in a place without form because she has no memory, and it is our memory that provides us with a sense of self. This place without form allows Rita's identity to exist outside of time and fixed meaning, as at the semiotic chora. Rita relies on Betty in her attempt to recreate her identity, but the borders between the self and the two women become blurred as Betty turns Rita into a mirror image of herself and the two women make love. Rita's intuitive knowledge makes her appear to be the most real character in the film. Though there is no logical explanation for it, she is apprehensive about visiting Diane's apartment and experiences a fear more intense than does Betty when they find the corpse. This intuition leads Rita and Betty to Club Silencio, which is the best example of the reversal of coherence in the film. The scene is not only situated between the worlds of fantasy and reality, but it is also a place where things both are and are not at the same time. There is nothing, and yet we hear something. Here, emotional discourse is the form of expression instead of traditional discourse, for it can express what words cannot, like the tears of Betty and Rita. Crying becomes a language, as their tears provide meaning that words would not express. Through his use of non-logical discourse in the place of traditional discourse, Lynch reverses the coherence in *Mulholland Drive* (Hudson, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> According to Lacan, the process of becoming a self is deceptive because the elements of the unconscious are all signifiers, but with no signifieds, symbols with no specific real-world referents. Since no signifieds exist, the signifiers are always shifting. Lacan's Imaginary is the sole place that a sense of self exists, but the sense of self exists through a problematic identification with the mother. It relates to the mirror stage—when an infant identifies with his image and recognizes himself as "I"—and within the Imaginary, the individual constructs a fantasy image of both his object of desire and himself in order to make up for the feeling of loss once it realizes that its body is separate from that of the mother.

Hayles and Gessler (2004) look at the unstable ontologies and semiotic markers of three films (*The Thirteenth Floor* [1999], *Dark City* [1998], *Mulholland Drive*) that they argue mix reality in a way that the worlds they represent cannot be clearly defined as either science fiction or actuality. They argue that *Mulholland Drive* is created according to a semiotic of reality markers that do not become apparent until someone has watched the film. These reality markers have to do with the movie's sequencing. They are scenes and contexts from reality that are in place throughout the movie, but that do not make sense until the viewer has finished the entire film. Hayles and Gessler focus on Diane's "dream," and they perceive of her mind as a virtual-reality machine. They look at how Diane uses the people from her real life and incorporates them into her fantasy, but assigns them different roles. As spectators, we do not get the back story of these characters, or any aspect of Diane's real life, until they are presented as flashbacks in the second half of the story. It is only then, that all the information necessary to construct a coherent account becomes available. The film's fragmented and nonlinear narrative furthers the idea that the prevalence of various forms of virtual reality in our culture influence how films are made, even if they are not physically present (Hayles and Gessler, 2004).

Dunne (1995) applies Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia to *Wild at Heart*, focusing on how the film's stylistic elements function as forms of language. Dunne argues that Lynch's use of heteroglossia becomes especially evident in *Wild at Heart* because heteroglossia is part of original novel's style by Barry Gifford as well. Lynch, however, adds elements, like obscene dialogue and contrasting acting styles, which were not in Gifford's novel. The use of intense profanity, for example, works as a shock factor, making viewers unable to suspend their disbelief. Furthermore, the *Wizard of Oz* allusions and Elvis Presley references are forms of heteroglossia within the film, as is the temporal and spatial ambiguity. Lynch repeatedly merges the romantic and revolting in the film. Dunne claims that the final scene with Lula and Sailor reuniting is filled with rhetorical conflict because the tone shifts back and forth from realism to musical comedy. Dunne argues these elements mean that *Wild at Heart* should be understood as Bakhtinian discourse and not a natural representation of life (Dunne, 1995).



Semiotic readings of *Mulholland Drive* and *Wild at Heart* demonstrate the possibility of placing Lynch's work within a semiotic framework, while the existing research conducted from a feminist perspective demonstrates the common concerns of Lynch and feminist film theorists, further emphasizing the relationship between the academic areas. Some critics and theorists, including Jane Shattuc and Laura Plummer, however, have argued against the possibility of a feminist reading of Lynch's films. Instead, they have labeled him misogynist and situated his female characters as passive objects within his narratives.

Shattuc (1992) places *Blue Velvet* within postmodern commercial patriarchy because of its unexpected commercial success and defines the film as misogynist. She argues that despite feminism's claim to being a postmodern theory, it is based on the real, lived history of male oppression of women. Because of feminism's foundation in real history, history needs to be returned to postmodernism. Shattuc argues that a postmodern feminist reading of *Blue Velvet* is not possible because while postmodern feminism celebrates difference, *Blue Velvet* does not, and this lack is explicated through its multiple portrayals of the effects of male violence. Moreover, a significant problem is the lack of explanation for this male violence, or Frank's obsession, despite its possible Freudian origins, as well as the overall ambiguity in film style. The Oedipal structure, provided via detective story, is one of the few recognizable structures in the film, through which Jeffrey is not only attempting to solve the mystery of the ear, but come to terms with the mystery of his sexuality as well. Shattuc argues that the film is misogynistic in its use of the male gaze and visual depiction of women throughout, using the scene of Dorothy's rape as an example, during which Jeffrey hides in the closet and watches Dorothy's abuse unfold without attempting to help her. This, according to Shattuc, encourages a passive viewing, and because the film accustoms viewers to the violence against Dorothy, they feel both pleasure and guilt as they continue to watch. The abstract depiction of violence increases viewer pleasure instead of diminishing it. Furthermore, even when Dorothy seemingly has the power, as when she holds the knife against Jeffrey during their sexual activity, it actually functions as submission because it increases Jeffrey's arousal and mimics Frank's violence. Also, the male objectification applies not only to Dorothy, but Sandy as well, as spectators

consistently see her from Jeffrey's point of view. The female characters in the film are depicted as ridiculous stereotypes (prostitutes), the objects of violence (Dorothy), or the feminine ideal (Sandy), while male vulnerability is concealed. The men are associated with action and reasoning, while the women are associated with passivity and trivial emotion. Shattuc argues that postmodern representation is its own moral source, and since we don't understand the cinematic violence against women, it allows us to blame them despite their victimization. *Blue Velvet* as a postmodern text has no direct reference to the "real," so spectators are not able to clearly judge the morality of the violence, or the logic in the film, thereby rendering it morally ambiguous (Shattuc, 1992).

Plummer (1997) examines both the television series *Twin Peaks* and the film *Fire Walk with Me* in "I'm not Laura Palmer." She describes the show as a detective story, in which the mystery of Laura Palmer's murder has to be solved, while positioning the feature film as a "fractured fairy tale," in which Lynch allows viewers access to Laura Palmer alive, rather than dead, as the show begins with her body being found. Plummer argues that the narrative is not just about the mystery of Laura's murder, but also about the mystery of Laura. She claims that the investigations into Laura and her secrets make her a criminal as well as a victim. Plummer draws on Ann-Louise Shapiro's (1991) essay "Love stories: Female crimes of passion in Fin-de-siècle Paris" to make this argument, so a brief synopsis is warranted. Shapiro examines the criminal woman during this time period, focusing on societal explanations and perceptions of her behavior. Crimes of passion were typically committed by either men who wanted to defend their honor, or women who felt victimized and wanted to correct a wrong done to them. These feelings were usually tied to betrayed or unrequited love, and the crimes were therefore seen as a quintessentially female act regardless of the sex of the criminal, according to Shapiro. The image of love that allowed for such crimes also differentiated between the sexes, as well as between what was seen as a normal and abnormal woman. Shapiro argues that the discourse on love served to construct appropriate gender relations within social order, which is why female crimes of passion were seen as more natural if driven by maternal concerns, as opposed to those driven by sexual desires, which were seen as unnatural.

By labeling crimes of passion as characteristically feminine, male writers of the time could place the concept of dangerous love outside of themselves (Shapiro, 1991).

Plummer uses Shapiro's work to situate Laura as a female criminal because she becomes the object of male violence after her abnormal sexuality and drug use, or her transgression against societal norms, is exposed. Laura is punished because her sexuality is differentiated from normal, and her murder serves to protect traditional family values. Moreover, her behavior outside of societal norms stems from the male abuse she is subjected to at home. According to Plummer, this is proof that Laura has no agency because she is reacting to Leland's abuse and is punished for these reactions. She functions as a passive representation of male desire and violence, always the sexual object and never the subject. Plummer posits that the point of Lynch's film is to celebrate the female as an object of violence because the only way to view the females in his film is through the traditional objectifying gaze Mulvey discusses. She not only points to narrative aspects of the film like Laura's deviant behavior to back up her claims, but also briefly mentions the visual elements in the film. Plummer asserts that Lynch's examination of sexuality manifests in scenes with predictable images, such as the scene in *One-eyed Jack's in Canada*, which features superfluous nudity, music and flashing colored lights. Overall, she believes that Lynch supports the misogynist hegemony of American cinema. (Plummer, 1997).

While Shattuc (1992) and Plummer (1997) problematize Lynch's films and the female representations within them, other theorists have more positive things to say. Lynne Layton (1994) examines *Blue Velvet* not from a feminist perspective per se, but with a focus on male trouble, which has to do with elements of male development that dispute the Phallus and the masculine and feminine positions it imposes. *Blue Velvet* posits that the mother's look incites reminders of dependency and the mother's agency. Layton references Linda Bundtzen, who argues that *Blue Velvet* presents a waking dream of possession of the mother. This dream must strip woman of her ability to desire. This reveals a contradiction, however, because Frank wants a woman who desires only him. If she does not desire him, his fears of abandonment will be exposed. In order to conceal this male dependency on the female, dependency is projected onto her, and she is stripped of desire. Man without the female though, is

impotent and violent, which is why *Blue Velvet* is a parable of male development. It is not just the villains, but the ordinary citizens who are portrayed as impotent, as Detective Williams is not able to solve the mystery of the severed ear, Jeffrey does not receive help from the men in Lumberton and he becomes impotent as well by the film's conclusion. The object of Dorothy's desire is her son, and she achieves this desire at the end of the film, making her possibly the only character that is part of both the world of innocence and horror. Layton claims that the film has to be examined as rage against Dorothy's agency, not as a rage against her lack. This is significant, however, because it is one of the few occasions of feminist scholarship on Lynch that recognizes the agency of his female characters (Layton, 1994).

In their essay "The knowing spectator of *Twin Peaks*: Culture, feminism, and family violence," Randi Davenport and Hobart Smith (1993) suggest that *Twin Peaks* is informed by feminist discussions of sexual violence. While their examination is concerned with the television series *Twin Peaks*, it can, in its entirety, also be applied to *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*. They argue that the reason for spectatorial difficulty in relation to the show lay in its implication that while sexual violence is unnatural, it does commonly occur, and it is practiced by outwardly average men. It does more than make viewers understand the existence of violence against women. It challenges traditional understandings of incest by disposing of the "seductive daughter" image, taking the blame off the assault victim. The series correlates with feminist texts in its disruption of traditional beliefs that claim it is the female who forces her father into a sexual relationship, making herself the seductress and the father the victim. Rather, *Twin Peaks* holds the father responsible for his criminal actions and situates the daughter as the victim of her father's criminality, thereby condemning sexual violence against women, not excusing it. On the surface level, the series is about uncovering the secret of Laura's murder, but Davenport and Smith suggest that it is also about the secret link between culture and self that allows men to abuse women (Davenport and Smith, 1993).

Kelly McDowell (2005) uses a psychoanalytic framework to examine what she calls a journey through Diane's unconscious in *Mulholland Drive* and to explore new methods for reading portrayals of female sexuality. McDowell states that this film provides a place for female subjectivity within the terms

of the Oedipus complex, which in turn can disrupt traditional male conceptions of sexuality. The blue box in the film represents Diane's unconscious, while Rita represents the mother figure that Diane lacks in her reality. The scene in which Rita puts on the blonde wig and stands in front of the bedroom mirror with Betty is an inversion of Lacan's mirror phase. Instead of the child becoming independent from the mother, Betty becomes one with Rita, her mother figure. This is a fulfillment of Diane's Oedipal wish because in the world of desire, Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux), who represents the father figure, threatens the stability of Diane's relationship with Camilla. In Diane's fantasy, Adam is rendered powerless through Diane's refusal to assume a passive role and submit to the father's authority, which would normally resolve the Oedipus complex. Diane channels the resulting non-resolution into her relationship with Camilla through sadomasochistic behavior, and when the relationship fails, into her dream-fantasy, within which she attempts to achieve her oedipal wish of a successful relationship with Camilla and the riddance of Adam. Diane's sexuality is what furthers the narrative, which contrasts with Mulvey's theory that it is the male who actively moves the story forward. In contrast, Adam has little to no agency not only in Diane's fantasy world where his professional life is essentially taken from him, but also in the real world, where his wife actually does cheat on him. Although McDowell does acknowledge that female sexuality, particularly lesbian sexuality, in the film is depicted as dangerous and in this way could affirm a misogynist view of women as objects, she argues that it does the opposite because women cannot unproblematically occupy a position of lack anymore, but are now allowed the position of subject. It is the female characters that hold the power in the film (although the possession of power alternates between them), and therefore male spectators are not able to identify with a male protagonist in an unproblematic manner. Instead, they must identify with one of the female characters, and this has the power to destabilize the male gaze (McDowell, 2005).

Anna Katharina Schaffner (2009) provides a more comprehensive feminist examination of *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*. She, like McDowell, posits that Lynch works to deconstruct the male gaze. Instead of limiting her analysis to one film though, Schaffner looks at the common themes in Lynch's films and argues that Lynch questions the binary representations of women

through his form and content. Before shifting her focus to the three films at hand, Schaffner touches on the shift in outlook that has occurred in Lynch's work, beginning with *Eraserhead*, which illustrates male fear, and ending with *Inland Empire*, which illustrates female success. According to Schaffner, Lynch perceives a problem with the ideological implications of the splitting male gaze. This male gaze is present in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, as Laura represents both innocence and sexuality, which is the personification of male desire. Laura is killed as a result of this binary persona, which Lynch problematizes by turning Laura into the object of question as he tells her story. Lynch balances form and content in his work, so that spectators are both distant from the narrative, but involved at the same time (Schaffner, 2009).

After her overview of outlooks and techniques in Lynch's films, Schaffner turns to her first focus, *Lost Highway*. She states that the boundaries between the manifest and latent content in the films are blurred or sometimes not present at all, so that the difference between the realm of dream and reality is no longer clear. *Lost Highway* is broken down into fantasy and desire, and the fantasy provides what reality cannot. In this case, Fred Madison's fantasy provides him with the alternate character of Pete Dayton, as well as with Alice (Patricia Arquette), who exists as the object of desire in replacement of his wife, Renee (Arquette). This fantasy is a contradiction, as the object of Pete's desire, Alice, is everything Fred feared Renee to be—unfaithful, promiscuous and dangerous. Alice and Renee is, in essence, the same person, like Laura, embodying the dichotomy of innocence and dangerous sexuality, which is deconstructed. The film critiques the male binaries Fred uses to make sense of his reality/fantasy. *Mulholland Drive* follows a similar split between the world of fantasy and desire, but from a female perspective and uses similar editing techniques to separate the two. The movie is another case of splitting, as Diane's fantasy also provides her with an alter-ego, Betty, as well as a substitute for Camilla. Schaffner describes *Inland Empire* as Lynch's most feminist film. She establishes the common theme of Hollywood and dreams between it and *Mulholland Drive*. All three films involve an ambiguity among the events that occur, their reality and their relationships to one another. This is most pronounced in *Inland Empire*, during which film spectators and film characters share the same confusion. Lynch deconstructs the binary of Nikki

Grace's starting role as ideal social representation and Susan Blue's position as male object of fear, as Susan dies and negates her role, so Nikki can transcend hers (Schaffner, 2009).

The idea of splitting is crucial to Martha Nochimson (2007) as well, who presents a reading of *Inland Empire* in which she argues that the film is about Nikki Grace's journey to find her creative character through the interconnected narratives. Nikki's success lies in her final unification of the split elements of her personality in order to find herself and realize inner peace. Moreover, a male-free narrative becomes equally important, for Nikki must overcome male discourse and assert her voice as dominant by the conclusion in her defiance of patriarchal ideology (Nochimson, 2007).

Nochimson not only examines *Inland Empire* as an individual film, but she also provides an inclusive look at Lynch's films from *Eraserhead* to *Fire Walk with Me* in her 1997 book, *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood*. She argues that Lynch subverts traditional gender roles, contradicting claims that he's misogynist. In Lynch's eyes, a hero becomes successful by unlearning cultural lessons, and it is typically the male characters in his films that end up destructive through their excessive belief in logic. His female characters oppose the stereotypical representations usually afforded by classic cinema. Instead, the positive protagonists of his films are those either associated with, or embodied by women (Nochimson, 1997).

I previously mentioned that the concept of heteroglossia has been applied to cinema, specifically *Wild at Heart*, but it has not previously been used as a tool for a feminist analysis. Bakhtin's (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination* centers on language in the novel, but like Dunne, I argue that his philosophy of language can also be applied to cinematic texts. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, specifically, is a useful tool for feminist criticism, with the power to provide new ways of considering cinema and reading female representations. In a heteroglossic text, everything is understood as part of a larger whole. Meanings are in constant interaction with one another, and they all have the ability to affect others. How these meanings shape one another and to what extent they do so is revealed in the moment of utterance. The utterance, according to Bakhtin, is a word or expression within an exchange. It is the basic unit of meaning, formed through the speaker's relationship to the culture in which and people to whom he or she

speaks. Heteroglossia in the novel involves a variety of speech types and individual voices. This can encompass the author's speech, the narrator's speech, the speech of the characters, as well as the characteristics of the genre or genres the novel reflects. These genres can include anything from short stories, personal correspondence like letters and diaries, poems and confessions. Included genres are separate from the narrative, but still give audiences information that either merges with or contradicts the other voices in the text. Heteroglossia is in direct opposition with a unitary language, which is the ideological language, or language as a world view. A unitary language is a system of linguistic norms that opposes heteroglossia by either attempting to create a linguistic center of a familiar literary language, or by preserving an already existing language.

An utterance is found within both a unitary language and heteroglossia. Any object that an utterance is directed at is infused with already existing meanings, qualifications and values. It is represented through the other utterances that have already spoken about, so the new utterance interacts with the previous ones. The word has to determine its own meaning through an environment filled with social opinions and strange words. It does so by merging with some of these words and opinions and conflicting with others, and by doing so, it creates its own stylistic profile. Bakhtin states that the significance of an utterance's meaning is understood against the background of language and the other utterances related to the same theme. This background involves contrasting points of view, opinions and value judgments. Since language consists of stratifying forces, none of the words or forms can be neutral. A word only becomes someone's own word when that person infuses it with his or her intentions. An author can do this by positioning linguistic elements at varying distances, depending on his or her purpose. A writer can use linguistic elements to directly express intentions, to refract intentions, or deny intentions. The author is not directly expressed in these linguistic elements, but the elements are instead emphasized in different ways. The dialogic tension that exists between two belief systems or languages within a story has the potential to express the author's intentions in a way that permeates the entire work. This can happen through the speech of the characters, or the incorporated genres. At other times, the author merges his or her view with the common view and articulates intentions in this manner. Once



introduced into the novel, Bakhtin argues, authorial intentions become dialogized. They present not only the author's view, but also the views of the speaking characters (Bakhtin, 1981).

As this literature review demonstrates, connections already exist between feminist film theory and Lynch's body of work. Furthermore, semiotic theory has provided a useful avenue for the work of feminist film criticism, at times in relation to Lynch's films. The scholarship above details how semiotic theory offers a method for studying cinema. Although Prince (1993) does not advocate the study of cinema as a language, both Metz (1965) and Pasolini (1968) detail the possibilities for conceiving of cinematic images similarly to linguistic elements and for thinking of cinema as a language. Lynch's films can particularly be conceived of linguistically because they do not clearly fit within Prince's claim that viewers recognize cinematic images without having to translate them. Due to their noncoherent structure, the narrative context—which Prince argues allows viewers to understand cinema as language—is not necessarily enough to comprehending Lynch's films. Translation, not just recognition is required, making them especially open to a linguistic study. More importantly, the aforementioned scholarship also shows ways that semiotics can be used to inform feminist film criticism through the possibilities of performing linguistic analyses on films in order to examine the female voice, or lack thereof.

Heteroglossia can usefully inform feminist film criticism through its application to cinema, specifically to the texts of Lynch, by offering a way to reconceptualize the ways women are viewed in films and the ways they assert their agency. Cinema, like the novel, is heteroglossic. It is composed of a multitude of voices, such as speech forms, points of view and value judgments that consistently interact with one another. These voices refer not only to spoken words, but the stylistic elements found in film as well, including narrative structure, lighting, diegetic/nondiegetic sounds and the physical spaces. All of these elements within film can be considered aspects of cinematic language that merge or conflict with each other, demonstrating that cinema is a communicative medium. Using heteroglossia to perform a feminist reading can reveal how the female characters in cinema infuse their words with intentions in order to give them meaning and how they navigate through a narrative, fighting against the conflicting linguistic elements present in order to assert their voice as dominant over the others. Within a

heteroglossic text, women can possess discursive authority through the successful assertion of their voice, which allows them to overcome Mulvey's (1975) image of the passive female.

Lynch's films are particularly valuable for a feminist analysis using heteroglossia as its framework because of the inverse correlation over the span of his career between the narrative coherence of his films, and the representation of his female characters. The further Lynch moves from narrative logic to a more non-coherent form, the stronger and more complex his female characters become. The non-coherent structure of his films, in turn, makes them more compatible with heteroglossia because the less logical they are, the more language styles they encompass and the more they oppose a unitary language. The more his films shift away from the straightforward, the more freedom the women in them have to actively try to express themselves and to make the feminine discourse the dominant one within the narrative.

Heteroglossia is a particularly useful method for examining these films because although all texts can be considered heteroglossic, it emphasizes the interrelated meanings, the emotional discourses, indistinct temporality and ambiguous storylines that structure the Lynchian narrative style. Furthermore, a heteroglossic examination will reveal how the feminine voice succeeds within a narrative filled with discord, including the masculine voices of patriarchy. I will apply the concept of heteroglossia to these cinematic texts by first identifying the various conflicting voices present in the films and examining the myriad ways they interact with one another. Through this examination, I will illuminate which voices interact through contradictions, and which interact through mutual support. By looking at these interactions, I will illustrate which elements of cinematic style work to try to negate the women's voices, and which ones emphasize them in order to help them express themselves. Secondly, I will be able to differentiate the female voice from the other conflicting voices within the narrative and detail how the female character uses her voice in order to assert herself as subject of the narrative and transcend the opposing viewpoints.

Therefore, I employ heteroglossia as a way to individuate the diversity of voices within the narrative so that the possibility of a strong feminine discourse becomes clear. In the context of cinema, I

use voice to signify everything from the various discourses of the characters and their body language to stylistic aspects in films, such as the cinematography, narrative modes, genre references, lighting and music. I view all of these components as instances of cinematic communication at all levels, both textual and narrative. Moreover, the use of heteroglossia as an analytical tool draws important connections among the three examined here by revealing the similarities that exist among the conflicts and how the female characters overcome those conflicts. Furthermore, the application of heteroglossia will help me analyze the escalating number of conflicting voices and their rising importance in the non-coherent narrative form that Lynch has increasingly shifted towards from *Fire Walk with Me* to *Inland Empire*. This will demonstrate how the mounting conflict adds to the narrative ambiguity of the films, enhancing their interpretive openness and thus the possibilities for feminist readings.

## Female Characters in Lynch's Films

Since he began his career as a filmmaker in the early 1970s, David Lynch has retained an unapologetic dedication to his artistic vision, despite the controversy that has followed many of his films. His concept of life and its intricacy is exemplified in the visual and auditory elements used in his films, as well as in the themes present in them, which have repeatedly delved into questions about the complexity of human nature and desire. Lynch's movies are infused with a surreal style, seldom follow the traditional rules of temporality and often favor ambiguous storylines lacking narrative coherence. These distinctive "Lynchian" qualities, as they have come to be known, differentiate his work within mainstream cinema. They blur the lines among reality, fantasy and dream, deliberately challenging the audience's ability to unproblematically distinguish them. Instead, form and content work together to create a text without a single clearly discernible meaning. Since openness is an inherent part of his cinematic style, Lynch's work provides the opportunity for alternate readings and multiple interpretations, revealing endless possibilities for the realm of film studies. His films do not tell people what to believe, but encourage them to find their own meaning. As Lynch said in a 1997 interview in *Psychology Today*, "Films that allow you to dream or to have different interpretations are, for me, what it's about. The power of cinema is that it can show abstractions and things that exist down inside of us."

Lynch's characters cannot be unproblematically categorized into cut-and-dried roles, though a thematic progression in character development can be found in Lynch's work as his career advances. His earliest films, *Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man* and *Dune* (1984), focus on male characters. *Eraserhead* tells the story of Henry Spencer (Jack Nance), whose girlfriend gives birth to a deformed baby and leaves him to care for it shortly thereafter. His only reprieves from a seemingly inescapable situation are his neighbor across the hall, with whom he has a romantic encounter, and the fantasy woman he sees in his radiator. *The Elephant Man* centers on the life of Joseph Merrick (John Hurt), a deformed man living in London, forced to be part of a freak show until a doctor finds him and takes him to his hospital for observation, where Merrick eventually reveals his intelligence. *Dune* is a science fiction film whose male protagonist has prophetic abilities and embarks on a mission to save a desert planet.

In his next film, however, Lynch begins to shift his focus from male trouble to female trouble, making a woman a centerpiece of his narrative, though she is still not the subject. *Blue Velvet* is the story of Dorothy Vallens. Set in the town of Lumberton, it provides a look at the hidden dark side of suburban America. It can be loosely classified as a crime movie, but the hero and victim are as complex as the excessive villain. Dorothy is subjected to sexual and emotional abuse from Frank Booth, who is holding her husband and son hostage, threatening to kill them if she does not comply. Although much of the narrative is about her, she does not actively further the action of the film. She is an object of sexual violence who only reacts to everything that happens to her. Dorothy is not only the object of Frank's desire, but she also becomes the object of Jeffrey Beaumont's, as well. Her victimization distorts the nature of sex in her mind, causing her to equate it with aggression and degradation. This surfaces first when she holds Jeff at knife point, then when she tells him to hit her during their sexual encounter and finally when she winds up naked on his lawn, telling him, "He put his disease in me." She is reunited with her son by the end of the film, but it is an ironic conclusion. Her character's only concern is with her role as wife and mother, and no other aspects of her personality are developed.

Lula Pace Fortune, in Lynch's next film, *Wild at Heart*, is the first of his female characters to be clearly positioned as a central, driving force of the narrative, a visible contradiction to Dorothy. Although she is still portrayed as overly sexualized, Lula asserts her voice and establishes agency against other characters in the film, achieving her desire in a way that Dorothy did not. Lula cannot unproblematically be placed in either role of passive, innocent girlfriend or dangerous, sexualized woman because she is an amalgam of both. She participates in the traditionally male world of violence, not as the conniving femme fatale, but as Sailor Ripley's significant other. Lula's agency manifests itself through her continuous action in direct opposition to her mother's authority. She disobeys Marietta's order to not see Sailor anymore, picking him up at the correctional facility on the day of his release and traveling with him to California. Lula is also aware of what actions others might take to keep her and Sailor apart. She foresees her mother's plan to have them followed by a private detective, and doesn't trust Bobby Peru (Willem Dafoe), a thug Marietta has hired to kill Sailor. Through her awareness of Marietta's machinations, Lula

asserts her agency as a capable, insightful woman. This agency remains constant even when Lula mistakenly believes that all hope is lost, after Sailor winds up in prison once again. She chooses to keep Sailor's baby and continues to correspond with him during his time in prison. Lula's ultimate act of defiance, however, comes the day of Sailor's second release from prison when Marietta calls her to ensure she isn't going to meet him. She does more than ignore her mother's voice now; she shouts it down, yelling into the phone, "Momma if you get in the way of me and Sailor's happiness, I'll fucking pull your arms out by the roots." She then tosses her drink on a picture of Marietta, causing the image disappear for good. By literally removing her mother from the picture, Lula achieves her desire of a stable union with Sailor.

In contrast to Dorothy, Lula overcomes her sexual objectification instead of succumbing to it. Despite the fact that she was sexually assaulted as a teenager, Lula is able to enjoy a healthy sexual relationship with Sailor. Their lovemaking is a significant part of their relationship, a consistent positive in the film. However, Lula is Sailor's object of desire. Although she is not a passive object in the relationship because she objectifies him too, Lula is depicted as extremely sexualized throughout the narrative. She becomes aroused by Sailor's story of a sexual encounter he had with a prostitute while they are in New Orleans. "Baby. You better run me back to the hotel. You got me hotter than Georgia asphalt," she tells him once he finishes the story. Moreover, Lula's attire and makeup is blatantly provocative; for the majority of the film, she dresses in black leather and lace, paired with red nail polish and lipstick. Furthermore, she loses her agency while in Big Tuna, the town Sailor decides to stop at for a few days, and she briefly becomes the passive object of Bobby Peru. When Sailor is absent from the hotel room, Peru threatens her with sexual assault. He grabs her by the hair and tells her, "Say fuck me, and I'll leave." In this moment of complete vulnerability and submission, Lula whispers, "Fuck me." This scene conflicts with the agency Lula shows during other parts of the narrative, making her character problematic for a strong feminist reading. In the face of Peru, Lula transforms from an active woman of agency to a passive female. Mulvey's image of the passive female functions as the erotic object for the characters within the narrative, or viewers in the audience. She only hinders the narrative, while it is the male who

furthering it. Therefore, Lula's transformation from active woman to passive female in Peru's presence also limits her function to solely being the sexual object of Peru's desire. Furthermore, he has all the control in the scene. She reacts to everything he does. She is no longer both subject and object as she is with Sailor, but only the object.

*Lost Highway* (1997) presents a temporary break in Lynch's progression towards films that involve stronger, more complex central female characters. The movie shares Lynch's recurring themes of human nature, desire and sexuality, but it returns its focus to a male protagonist, and the female characters are weak compared to the women Lynch's other work. Fred Madison, a saxophone player, kills his adulterous wife, Renee, then creates an alternate reality with a new identity in order to deny his guilt. However, in both realities, Fred is manipulated by women. Even in the alternate reality he creates for himself as Pete Dayton, the woman he falls in love with, Alice Wakefield, is able to manipulate him. The women in both realities are highly sexualized, but Alice has the agency denied to Pete/Fred when she walks away from him and says, "You will never have me." Before he returns his attention to a female-centered narrative, Lynch creates *The Straight Story* (1999), which does not deal with his usual subject matter, or incorporate his customary stylistic devices.

Lynch revisits female subjectivity in *Mulholland Drive*, which is an entirely female-centered narrative. It is Diane Selwyn's story, and Lynch tells it from her point of view, in both her fantasy and in the real world. Her complexity is revealed through the elaborate fantasy she constructs for herself to escape her guilt. *Inland Empire*, Lynch's most recent film, provides his richest female character, Nikki Grace. As Nikki journeys through multiple narratives to find herself, different levels of her personality are revealed and explored. She is the film's focus and by the conclusion, the main male characters are nowhere to be found. By the end of his career, the now familiar themes of sexuality, human complexity and desire remain, but as for Lynch's characters, they have done anything but stay the same.

*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* are especially significant within Lynch's work because they offer strong possibilities for a feminist reading. They all involve strong female characters who are not only the central focus of the narrative, but who further the narrative

through their actions and through the assertion of their voices. Laura, Diane and Nikki succeed in transcending the other conflicting voices within the narratives and making their own voice heard in ways that Lynch's previous characters are not able to do. The three women are united by their similar personal experiences and ways of responding to them. Although their specific circumstances differ, they are all involved in (whether intentionally or by force) some form of deviant sexual activity. They also all have a fractured identity and have to therefore go through an internal struggle in order to achieve peace and unity. Finally, and most importantly, all three women possess agency and assert it in order to attempt to overcome their respective situations, thereby defying the image of the passive female.

Conflict is a central element in all three of these films. They involve both external and internal discord among the main female characters, the various people they interact with, and with themselves. Furthermore, in addition to the assortment of discourses present, Lynch's employment of striking, if not disturbing, visual elements and non-coherent storylines add to the cacophony of cinematic voices, intensifying the tension, thereby making heteroglossia a constructive method for analyzing Lynch's work.

Heteroglossia offers a valuable way of understanding the relationship among these three films since its main concern is the role of conflict within language. In a heteroglossic analysis everything is understood as part of a larger whole and meanings are in constant interaction, either opposing or supporting one another. All three films, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*, contain multiple voices attempting to express themselves within their narratives. The characters' discourse, internal dialogue, the varying storylines and stylistic elements all interact within the films in order to create different meanings. Applying the concept of heteroglossia to these particular female-centered films can reveal the multiple conflicting points of view, value judgments and belief systems present in the narratives. An examination of the interrelationships among the cinematic elements is useful for a feminist analysis because it can reveal the female struggle to assert one's voice against the other narrative components fighting to express themselves and transcending those elements, thereby offering a different way to consider female characters asserting their agency. Laura, Diane and Nikki each succeed in overcoming the multiple other voices found in the background, expressing their voice and achieving



their desires. Their voices clash with not only those of the other characters in the films, but conflicts also exist between their external and internal expressions of those voices—how they speak to themselves. However, through their acts of agency, they push the narratives forward and succeed in achieving inner unity, while overcoming the external opposition they face.

However, a transcendent voice is not equivalent to a triumphant voice. Although all three women succeed in making their voice heard by transcending the other cinematic elements, Laura and Diane's assertions of agency do not end positively in the real, lived world. Laura is murdered by her father, while Diane commits suicide because she cannot handle the consequences of her actions. However, these characters are still valuable to a feminist reading because they are the central focus of their narratives, and they further the action within those narratives. As active subjects of the films, they defy the idea of the passive female, and even though they do not have a happy ending in the traditional sense, they reveal new possibilities for female expression.

The application of heteroglossia here does more than provide a unique way to read the relationship among Lynch's three films due to the commonalities present in them. It also presents a means for addressing the gaps within existing research regarding the female voice and how it can be used to transcend patriarchal discourse. My goal here is to examine *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* as heteroglossic texts and address the centrality of conflict in each in order to isolate the female voice within these discords. This will allow me not only to make connections among the lead women of these films, but also to trace the growing complexity of their characters in direct relation to the increasingly non-coherent narratives they participate in, thereby revealing the possibilities film form can have for character agency. Furthermore, such an investigation will position Lynch's female characters in opposition to Mulvey's (1975) image of the passive woman and open up new space for considering how women and their voices can be viewed in films. Synopses of these three films are provided in the appendix of this thesis for a clearer reference to textual elements.

### *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*

*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* follows the most temporally logical storyline of the three films. However, it exhibits a surrealism not present in *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart*, with stylistic and narrative elements that add to the film's contradictions and enhance its ambiguity. These aspects function as a part of the movie's language, as do both the spoken words of the characters and their alternative speech forms, such as Laura Palmer's written voice in her diary. All of these voices reflect different world views and belief systems and are in constant interaction during the length of the film, attempting to express their meanings by either conflicting or merging with one another.

The first voice heard in *Fire Walk with Me* is Teresa Banks (Pamela Gidley) yelling "No!" as she is killed, followed by an image of her body floating down the river. The last image seen is that of Laura, another woman murdered, but one who has actively chosen death in order to survive in a different realm. This is a striking contrast between two women slain—one who is silenced and one who asserts her voice even in death, thus transcending the conflicts in her life. As the active subject of *Fire Walk with Me*, Laura transcends the conflicting voices within the narrative, while her voice merges with the linguistic elements that support it. This examination of her assertions of agency take into account aspects of the film that Plummer (1997), who claims that Laura is a passive representation of male desire and violence, does not mention. While Laura is a sexual object for Leland (Ray Wise), Jacques Renault (Walter Olkewicz) and Leo Johnson (Eric DaRe), among others, she is also the subject who furthers the narrative, first through her actions to function in everyday life despite her abuse, and second through her struggle to reveal the identity of her abuser. For Plummer, Laura's murder is punishment for her deviant behavior. However, it is through her deviancy because of her father's actions that Laura is able to assert some semblance of control over her life. She has no influence over what happens in her bedroom at night, but she does when she leaves it. She is able to make her voice heard over the other discordant points of view and value judgments.

As active subject of the film, Laura subverts some of the conflicting elements, while others function to strengthen her voice and help her achieve her goals. She does not come into direct contact

with all of the interacting voices within the narrative, such as those of the detectives, but they nonetheless add to the conflict of the film by not only enhancing its ambiguity, but by providing Laura the means to assert her voice as the one dominant in the narrative. Laura's voice itself is a source of conflict because of its multifaceted nature. She infuses her language with contradictory intentions during the various interactions in her life, expressing herself differently when she is in the space of the home, around the various men she associates with, with her friend, Donna Hayward (Moira Kelly), or during her interaction with the people from the other reality. A contradiction also exists between Laura's internal dialogue and way of reading the world through angelic symbolism and her external expression consisting of deviant sexual behavior and drug use. Furthermore, the speech of characters that may not seem central to the narrative adds to the existing discord as well, such as that of Margaret Lanterman, the Log Lady (Catherine Coulson). Though she only appears and speaks once, her voice resonates across the film's entirety to interact with both Laura's beliefs and actions.

Detective Gordon Cole (David Lynch), Agent Chet Desmond (Chris Isaak) and Agent Sam Stanley (Kiefer Sutherland) appear in the early part of *Fire Walk with Me* to investigate the murder of Teresa Banks before there is any mention of Laura. They are thus initially positioned as the active subjects of the narrative, the male authority figures who will logically work to solve a mystery. These positions of power, however, are gradually subverted through their methods of investigation and its outcome. Their interactions conflict with logic and traditional discourse, beginning with Cole's first phone call informing Agent Desmond of the crime. Cole, who is hearing impaired, must yell to assert his voice, adding an immediate obstacle to communication between him and the agents. He therefore utilizes a form of nontraditional discourse to give Desmond and Stanley information about the case. Lil (Kimberly Ann Cole), whom Cole refers to as his "mother's sister's girl," emphasizing her femininity, uses silent language to convey her message through facial expressions and body movements, which the agents must interpret. This communication is the first instance of a transcendent female voice in the film, as Lil holds all the answers that the detectives lack. Beginning the murder investigation through nontraditional discourse is a source of conflict because while Lil provides the agents with useful

information about the circumstances surrounding the case, their interaction with her suggests that the rest of the investigation will continue to follow a pattern of illogic as well, increasing the challenges in the way of a resolution.

As Desmond and Stanley embark on what they term one of Cole's "blue rose cases," a reference to the blue rose pinned to Lil's jacket, the communication between them and the people they encounter enhances the situation's ambiguous air through the discursive illogic. This is due to the immediate conflict between them and the local law enforcement who do not want to cooperate, as well as the non-coherence of much of their dialogue, such as that which occurs in Teresa's home in Fat Trout Trailer Camp. The partners accept coffee from Carl (Harry Dean Stanton), the landlord, and the ensuing exchange conflicts with a traditional conversational pattern. Stanley takes a sip, and remarks, "We sure do need a good wake me up, don't we Agent Desmond?" Desmond, who has clearly heard the comment, gives Stanley an odd look and does not reply. Stanley repeats the sentence in order to elicit a response, with the same result. An elderly woman then appears in the doorway of the trailer, ignores Desmond's question about whether she knew Teresa and walks away. This prompts the now uneasy Carl to tell the detectives, "I've already gone places. I just want to stay where I am." The agents defy typical investigative behavior and don't question these occurrences, so they remain unexplained and have no clear logical ties to any other action or discourse within the narrative. Therefore, the agents' voices function as elements of conflict because they complicate the mystery instead of resolve it, as would be expected in a usual detective story. Furthermore, Agent Desmond vanishes after he returns to the trailer park and finds Teresa's ring, heightening the conflict because his disappearance ends the investigation. Not only are the male authority figures unable to solve the crime, but their voices are removed from the narrative completely. This marginalization allows Laura to become the true active subject. In contrast with the detectives, Laura furthers the narrative as she embarks on journey to find the truth and actually succeeds in her endeavor. She asserts her voice and asks the questions that need to be asked, and by doing so, uncovers the mystery of not only Teresa, but learns the truth about herself as well, making her voice dominant over that of the agents.

Furthermore, Laura also asserts her agency over Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan), the only other figure of positive male authority in the film, through her defiance of his words. Agent Cooper appears in the narrative after Desmond's unexplained disappearance, but he is not successful in uncovering the truth of what happened. Although he does correctly predict that Teresa's killer will strike again, he does not possess the power to do anything to prevent this from happening, while Laura does have the power to transcend her death. In relation to this, when Cooper appears in Laura's dream about the other reality, he tells her not to take the ring she sees. However, her decision to contradict this advice and put the ring on is what ultimately saves her, demonstrating successful female agency through the subversion of male words.

Laura's external expression, or her behavior and ways of asserting her voice in public, manifests in her sexual promiscuity, drug use and manipulation of the people she surrounds herself with, and it stems from her abusive familial situation. Where traditionally the home is supposed to be a place of security, Laura's house is precisely the opposite, as it is where she is regularly molested by her father, Leland. Her speech with her family is minimal, limited to brief, superficial answers about school and friends. Her silence expresses her feelings better than words would, as it depicts the invisible boundaries set by male dominance in her home. Laura's lack of traditional discourse contrasts with Leland's speech, through which he asserts his power over the household. No possibility for a strong female discourse, or any female discourse at all, exists in Leland's presence because he silences the women around him. Discord exists not only between Leland's voice and Laura's silence, but also within Leland, who exhibits dual voices. Before dinner one night, Leland accuses Laura of having filthy hands, and continues on a tirade about whether she got her necklace from a lover. This speech is a strong contradiction with Leland's language after dinner. As he sits in the living room, his entire demeanor changes. His face crumples, and he begins to cry. It's as if he knows the truth of his actions, but at the same time he is also aware that he has no power to stop himself from committing those same acts again. He therefore goes upstairs to see Laura and tell her how much he loves her, an assertion that may function not only as an expression of fatherly affection, but as an apology as well. This brief father-daughter interaction in

Laura's bedroom is in direct conflict with the episodes of abuse that occur in the same space. Leland's duality in these instances is a sign of the conflict between Leland and Bob (Frank Silva). Bob, a malevolent spirit from an alternate reality who collects pain from people by inhabiting their bodies, is one of the main sources of discord within the film. He possesses Leland's body and is the reason for the difference between Leland's words while Bob is in him (before dinner) and his words while he is solely himself (after dinner). The consequences of Bob's actions linger as Leland tries to connect with his daughter. Therefore, even in his attempt at kindness, when his voice is purely his own, Leland denies Laura her voice. She is uncertain as to Leland's sincerity, and once again, is unable to respond.

Another voice in Laura's home is one that is meaningfully lacking, the voice of Sarah (Grace Zabriskie), her mother. Although both women are silenced in Leland's presence, Sarah is a passive female, never asserting any agency or activity in the film. It is not made completely clear whether she knows that Leland is molesting Laura, but the implication is that she does. During the scene at the dinner table when Leland yells at Laura, at one point he grabs her cheek and shakes her as he continues his tirade. Sarah, who has been quiet so far, interferes, telling him, "Don't do that. She doesn't like that." Leland silences her by barking, "How do you know what she likes?" She allows Leland to dictate her actions, or lack thereof, reinforcing his patriarchal authority in the home. The night Leland goes to assault Laura, he gives Sarah a glass of milk with a sedative mixed in. She takes it and begins to drink without a word. When she tries to put it down, he pushes her hand back up to her mouth; she obeys, letting herself become ignorant of what is going on under her roof. Finally, the morning after Laura realizes that Leland is Bob, she leaves breakfast upset. Sarah moves to get up and go after her, but Leland stops her and goes to talk to Laura himself. Sarah lets him go and does nothing but light a cigarette, resigning herself to her position of passivity. Leland's articulation of his voice is directly tied to the lack of expression from Sarah. His voice signifies the power he has over the household, while Sarah's lack of voice represents the absence of her agency in Leland's presence. She remains passive and does nothing to attempt to change this dynamic even though it involves her daughter's security and well being, reinforcing the power he has over them.

The one way Laura attempts to express her voice within her home is through her diary—with the written, not spoken word. Since it is private, it reflects her inability to speak in her house. Her diary is where her unfiltered voice is able to come through, and therefore, it holds all the information about her personal life, including her abuse. This is why she is overcome with such terror when she discovers that some of its pages are missing. She immediately knows that someone has made a deliberate effort to search her room in order to find and read her most private thoughts. By tearing out the pages from her diary, Leland is, once again, attempting to assert his power and silence any form of Laura's speech within the home, highlighting the conflict between their voices, whatever the medium.

Laura is able to express herself outside of the confines of home in a way that is not possible for her while she is in her house, although her various communications are contradictory. Her speech is thus an example of heteroglossia within the text because she alternately uses her voice to manipulate those around her and to make her inner pain known. She acts sexually aggressive one moment, but displays feelings of depression the next. The struggle among her multiple voices is exhibited through her conflicting actions and articulations. The men who surround Laura function as one way for her to verbalize these inconsistencies. She asserts her voice in order to influence the men in her life and get what she wants, whether that is drugs, or simply to ignore a question directed at her. She reacts against her father's abuse through promiscuous behavior. She manipulates Bobby Briggs (Dana Ashbrook) so that he continues supplying her with cocaine, no matter how she treats him. In one particular scene, he follows her as she is leaving school with Donna. She initially acts annoyed with his very presence and tells him to get lost. To this he replies, "You'll be calling soon and maybe I won't be around." Laura then almost immediately alters her tactic, smiles at him and says, "Come on Bobby. Come on," deliberately changing her tone from aggravated to cajoling and flirtatious in order to make sure he doesn't follow through with his threat. After this shift, he relents and smiles back, completely in her control. This is demonstrated again the night of her death, when she goes to see him to get a fix. After Laura rejects his advances, he tells her that he knows that she only wants the drugs, not him, but gives them to her regardless. These instances depict the power that Laura has over Bobby through the assertion of her voice against his.

These communications not only demonstrate one of the ways in which Laura asserts her voice in order to achieve her goals, but they also usefully illuminate the difference in the strength of Laura's assertion of her voice outside the home and within. This contradiction complicates Laura's reaction to male voices. If Leland says something even remotely hostile, Laura's response is silence, often coupled with tears. However, when Bobby uses threatening language, she does not respond with fear. On the contrary, she asserts her voice against his instead of subduing it and is capable of influencing his actions, making her voice dominant over his. Not only does Laura persuade Bobby to continue supplying her with drugs despite his initial irritation with her, but she is also able to make him question himself, like when he shoots the drug dealer in the woods. Laura, who is drunk and high off coke, hysterically laughs at the situation, while Bobby repeatedly screams at her to shut up. Instead of backing down in the face of his panic and anger, she tells him that he has shot Mike. Although Bobby knows this to be false, he has a moment of misgiving at Laura's words. This instance portrays the power that Laura's voice has over Bobby because she is not only able to continue articulating it over his shouts without fear, but she also plants doubt into his mind when it previously did not exist.

Laura's interactions with another high school lover, James Hurley (James Marshall), are equally incongruous. At times she makes herself emotionally available to him. For example, she and James share a tender sexual encounter in the high school gym; she expresses a vulnerability with him that is not apparent with Bobby, Jacques or any of the other men that she spends time with. At other times, however, she acts standoffish towards him, as when he stops outside her house to ask her where she was the night before, and she adamantly refuses to reply. In this moment, Laura acts as though she is more annoyed by James's presence than anything else. She keeps her arms crossed, making herself seem unapproachable through her body language and silence. Moreover, at times when Laura says what she feels, her tone conflicts with her words. On the night of her death she tells James, "Open your eyes, James. You don't even know me," revealing not only the conflict between her words and actual thoughts, but also the conflict between James's impression of her and her own sense of self-worth. She vocalizes her negative opinion about herself using an antagonistic tone. By revealing her true thoughts she cries out for help, but



she simultaneously isolates herself by stating these feelings coldly and indifferently, as if she doesn't need anyone or want anyone around.

Laura's promiscuity involves lovers outside of high school. She regularly parties with older men. Although the men regularly objectify her, her at times aggressive behavior problematizes a simple reading of the relationships as exploitive. Instead, they offer a venue for the diverse articulation of her voice. Buck (Victor Rivers), one such sexual partner, lasciviously asks her, "You do go all the way, don't you little girl?" His tone and word choice are contradictory. Buck defines Laura as a sexually active woman, but belittles her at the same time. Laura switches the dynamic by contradicting his belittling words and seizing power by affirming the sexually active female role. She reverses the question and puts him in the vulnerable position. She grabs a hold of him suddenly and in a tone of power and defiance, asserts her voice: "Sooner or later. You willing to go all the way, huh? You gonna do it to me?" She affirms her dominance over Buck by positioning herself as the one with the power to ask the questions, making him vulnerable both physically and mentally.

The scene at the Canadian after-hours bar, however, after this interlude with Buck, is especially significant in demonstrating Laura's agency and success in asserting her voice. Plummer (1997) points to this scene as evidence of Lynch's misogyny because of the superfluous nudity and objectification it involves. However, the fact that this is the most stereotypical sexual representation in the film makes Laura's transcendence of the conflicting voices all the more powerful. The music is loud, making verbal expression nearly impossible for both male and female characters; indeed Lynch uses subtitles to make clear to the viewer what the characters are saying. Flashing red and blue lights merge with the heavy music and alternating camera angles to make the space even more disorienting. The camera circles around the club, mimicking a drugged Donna's visual perspective, thereby illustrating the chaos of the varying interactions. Yet Laura demonstrates her agency despite the diversity of language and despite the surrounding male objectification. Indeed, she is as active in her objectification of men as they are in their objectification of her—as she sits topless in a booth with Ronette Pulaski (Phoebe Augustine), Laura need only snap her fingers and point for Buck to get under the table and perform oral sex on her.

Her true transcendence of the conflicting voices, however, is revealed in her reaction to seeing a drugged Donna topless, kissing the other man they came with. Laura pushes the man off Donna, covers her up, and orders Jacques to help her get Donna home. A significant contradiction to note here is the lack of subtitles. While subtitles are used for the entire scene leading up to this point due to the difficulty in verbal expression, they are no longer present once Laura sees Donna and runs to her. This supports the strength of Laura's assertion. Her voice is so powerful and infused with such determination that it no longer requires written reinforcement. She is thus able to navigate a space where discourse is already challenging due to the conflicting music, lights and sexual objectification. Laura overcomes the voices within the club and asserts her own voice instead, regardless of her inebriation, in order to remove Donna from the position of sexual object. She is successful in making Jacques see her as subject, not object in this moment, despite her state of partial undress, as he follows her orders. By doing so, she negates Plummer's (1997) claim that the only way to view the women in *Fire Walk with Me* is through the traditional objectifying gaze. Laura not only moves beyond her own objectification through her actions as narrative subject, but also removes another female character from a position of male sexual objectification.

This act of agency relates to Laura's conflicting voices during her interactions with Donna, who is supposedly her best friend. The two friends have a complicated relationship. Laura rebuffs Donna's attempts to know more about her life, but Donna is also one of the only people that Laura expresses her innermost thoughts to on rare occasions. Although her speech is sardonic and dismissive towards Donna many times, in other instances she reveals her jaded opinions about life, allowing a glimpse into the views she normally keeps hidden. It is in regard to her promiscuous behavior that Laura takes up a flippant tone with Donna, like whenever Donna questions her about her nighttime activities. When Donna comes to Laura's house and asks her where she is going the night that she leaves for the Bang Bang Bar, Laura replies, "Nowhere fast. And you're not coming," deliberately excluding Donna from a significant part of her life. Yet the following morning—after Donna follows Laura to the Bang Bang Bar and they then go to a club in Canada—Laura tells her friend that she loves her. Laura's behavior in these two scenes is

contradictory, but her intent is not. Her objective is to protect Donna from the secret life of sex and drugs that she leads, a purpose she reveals in their interaction after Donna has seen this side of her. While it initially seems as though her intentions are inconsistent, it is in actuality her methods of articulating those intentions that are in conflict.

Laura also expresses some of her inner thoughts on one occasion after school, when Donna poses a question about whether a person would eventually slow down or speed up in space. Laura, who believes in the existence of spiritual entities, incorporates this faith into her answer when she says, “For a long time you wouldn’t feel anything. Then you’d burst into fire forever. And the angels wouldn’t help you because they’d all gone away,” revealing her sense of hopelessness and reliance on spiritual imagery to relate to the world. This expression illustrates the conflict between Laura’s internal beliefs and external actions. She believes that the angels watch over people, but that they only do so while they believe in their goodness. Once someone is beyond redemption, Laura thinks that the angels abandon that person. She is fearful that her angel will desert her because she thinks she has lost her innocence and is past the point of salvation, but she continues to engage in the actions that she feels will bring this rejection about, like her promiscuous behavior.

This belief system that Laura relies on and vocalizes in her conversation with Donna is further demonstrated when Leland comes to her bedroom to talk to her while unpossessed by Bob. Laura uses the angel on her wall as a point of guidance, asking “Is it true?” after Leland tells her he loves her. The angel is a figure that is repeatedly referenced in the film, as it is Laura’s way of reading the world. She turns to the spiritual figure when she is unsure of the events in her life, and she relies on it to watch over her. The angel is an integral part of Laura’s views because of the expectations she places on its presence and absence based on the choices she makes. In this moment, it is also an element of conflict through its representation. Laura expresses her doubts to the angel because it is a symbol of purity and innocence, an image she can trust, in opposition to the evil Bob signifies. She therefore asks the angel what she cannot ask her father, reinforcing the conflict between her voice and his, as well as positioning him in conflict with the symbol of goodness.

Laura's belief system conflicts with her actions, but it is supported by the words of a character Laura only interacts with once. Laura meets the Log Lady right before she enters the Bang Bang Bar, and Margaret's statement relates back to Laura's comment about bursting into flames, thereby merging with her way of reading the world. "When this kind of fire starts, it is very hard to put out. The tender bowels of innocence burn first, and the wind rises, and then all goodness is in jeopardy," she says. The connection between the Log Lady's assertion and Laura's previous declaration about fire and angels represents an instance of heteroglossic elements supporting one another instead of contradicting. Margaret's vocalization of her thoughts unites with Laura's inner voice by reinforcing the spiritual imagery that Laura relies on in a moment of female voices merging in shared meaning. She speaks from an inexplicable knowledge that Laura is troubled and are infused with a warning about what will happen if Laura continues on the path she is on. Similarly to Nikki's neighbor in *Inland Empire*, the Log Lady is a dominant voice within the narrative, and although she only has one thing to say, her meaning permeates the film. The fire symbolizes the loss of innocence, which Laura reads as the angel disappearing, leaving her alone, which occurs as the angel vanishes from the picture on Laura's bedroom wall just prior to her death.

Hanging next to the painting of the angel in Laura's room is a picture given to her by Mrs. Chalfont (Frances Bay) and her grandson, who are characters from the enigmatic other world, the place that Bob comes from as well. As Laura goes to sleep the night after she hangs the picture, she dreams that she enters the other reality through the painting. This piece of art, then, becomes the site where Laura's two worlds begin to overlap. It frees her from the oppressive space of her bedroom, and offers her the possibility of navigating the logic (or illogic) of both worlds in order to transcend her circumstances. Before Laura hangs the picture on her wall, she lacks the mobility that Bob has. Her bedroom is a closed space where she cannot escape Bob when he enters. She is now able to leave her bedroom and enter this new area through the artwork, which serves as the portal. The picture thus serves as a nexus for Laura to access and interact with the film's conflicting realities and the characters who inhabit them. It also

further her agency by providing the means for her to encounter Agent Cooper, who presents Laura with information that will lead to the discovery of who Leland really is.

The people from this other reality are a key component of the film's central, interconnected conflict, which involves not only Laura, but Leland as well. Bob belongs to the same alternate reality that the Chalfonts are from, as does Mike, the one-armed man (Al Strobel), and the Man from Another Place, also known as "the Arm" (Michael J. Anderson), who is apparently Mike's severed arm in human form. The conflict is initiated by "the Arm," who controls the search for garmonbozia, or pain and suffering. Garmonbozia is acquired through eliciting intense agony from someone, after which it is presented to "the Arm," who consumes it as creamed corn. It is Bob's responsibility to find and return garmonbozia by possessing someone's body and controlling them to commit evil acts. He infests Leland's body, causing Leland's inner conflict and destructive behavior. Bob is also in conflict with Laura as he causes her molestation and she attempts to learn his identity. The role of the Chalfonts is contradictory as well, as they provide Laura a way to learn the truth about Bob, even though they associate with "the Arm." Other characters, like the man in the mask who moans in the corner, are left unexplained and do not have a clear position in the narrative. Mike's voice is in opposition with both Bob's and Leland's, due to Bob's inhabitation of Leland's body. Mike, who once was Bob's partner, has attempted to separate himself from the evil that used to be part of him, which is why he cut off his arm. Mike is therefore in conflict with Bob and Leland, and he is also in conflict with "the Arm" because it used to be physically connected to him, and controlled him while he was Bob's accomplice. It is now a separate evil entity, controlling the search for garmonbozia. Mike's mission is to prevent Bob's manifestations of evil and thus hinder this search. In a striking example of the film's heteroglossic style, Mike chases Leland and Laura down as they are stopped at an intersection waiting for an elderly couple to cross the street. Mike accuses Bob of evil and warns Laura about Leland's identity. As Mike screams his warnings, Leland panics and tries to drown out his voice by continuously revving the car's engine. The sounds of the screeching tires, honking horns, overworked engines, Mike's shouted references to garmonbozia and Laura's screams come together to prevent the clear articulation of any unified message. During this inharmonious interaction of conflicting

elements, it is challenging to discern what it is exactly that Mike is accusing Leland of doing. At the film's climax, Mike follows Laura and Ronette's screams to the train car in order to try to impede Bob. In doing so, he provides Laura with her means of final transcendence, as we will see below.

The music in the film is another important stylistic avenue through which various voices within the film can be expressed. An important instance of this occurs when Laura walks into the Bang Bang Bar after her interaction with the Log Lady. She is dressed in all black, wearing red lipstick, drawing a visual connection between herself and the Lodge in the other world, which shares the same dominant colors. Laura's seductive attire contradicts her inner vulnerability. It is another way her external expression does not match with her inner feelings. She slowly walks to a table and sits down. On stage, bathed in blue light, Julee Cruise is performing the song "Questions in a World of Blue":

*How can a heart that's filled with love start to cry?  
When all the world seemed so right,  
How can love die?  
Was it me? Was it you?  
Questions in a world of blue*

The song's lyrics, written by Lynch, are a reflection of Laura's inner voice, a form of emotional discourse. As Hudson (2004) notes, this is Laura's Club Silencio, a key setting for non-traditional discourse in Lynch's later film, *Mulholland Drive*. Traditional discourse is unnecessary here because Laura's outward but unintentional emotional response reveals what she would or could not express with words. In this moment, the external world of the song touches Laura, and she begins to weep, mirroring the song's lyrics about a heart beginning to cry. Her reaction reflects an important part of her emotions that are otherwise not often seen. Lynch's lyrics pose questions that Laura is able to apply to her own life because they relate to her inner thoughts. The song ponders the death of love, a concern that weighs heavily on Laura; the song recalls an earlier scene in which Laura asks her angel whether her father still loves her after he leaves her room one night. Here, she is alone, not interacting with anyone, but allowing the song to wash over her. The merging of Laura's voice with the voice of the song parallels with the coalescence of Laura's voice with that of the Log Lady. Similarly to how the Log Lady vocalizes Laura's inner voice in her way of reading the world, the song represents Laura's thoughts and questions about her

personal life, verbally portraying what she does not actually say. For the duration of the song, her internal voice is supported by her external expression, her tears, which represent the hints of innocence still within her, not completely burned out. She does not begin to reconstruct her indifferent façade until the song ends and she lights a cigarette and eventually motions Jacques to send her two men for the night over to where she is sitting.

Most importantly, Laura asserts her agency in the narrative through her struggle to uncover Bob's identity. She possesses the knowledge of the truth, but it is hidden in her subconscious. After receiving a warning from the Chalfonts that her diary is being read, Laura immediately rushes home to see who it is, and encounters Bob in the corner of her room. She runs outside screaming, and as she hides in the shrubbery, sees her father leave their house. She realizes the truth at this point, but is not ready to consciously acknowledge it yet. Her next moment of insight occurs at the Canadian bar, talking to Jacques and Ronette about Teresa's murder. Ronette comments that she heard Teresa had been blackmailing someone. Jacques confirms this and says that Teresa called him and asked him what Laura's and Ronette's fathers looked like. However, it is after Mike accosts Laura and Leland while waiting at an intersection to try to warn her about Bob's presence, that Laura sees Teresa's ring on his finger and continues her pursuit of the truth. She asks her father whether he had gone home during the day the week before, when she saw him leave the house. At first he says no, but Laura pushes and insists that she thought she saw him. Leland then tells her that he did indeed stop by for some aspirin, bringing Laura that much closer to the truth about her abuser, as well as the truth about Teresa's murder. Her moment of breakthrough comes the next time Bob is in her bed. She keeps repeating "Who are you," until Bob's face transforms into Leland's. Once Laura has gained the concrete knowledge that Bob is Leland, she is finally able to clearly assert her voice against him within the space of the home. When he follows her after breakfast to ask her what's wrong, she orders him to "stay away from me." Laura overturns her previous silence in the house by rejecting Leland's authority and his power over her and introduces a new conflict between voices in the film. Through her discovery of the truth, Laura is able to express her voice where she was formerly unable to, and she takes the opportunity to make it clear that she will not remain in the

position of victim and sexual object any longer. She now speaks in the home, disrupting it as a place of unitary language.

Laura's final act of transcendence takes place right before her murder, an act made possible because of the understanding she gains through her personal journey to the truth. This truth is more than the exposure of Bob's identity. It is also a truth about herself and her way of viewing the world, a new knowledge that there exists the possibility of something beyond her everyday circumstances. Laura uses angelic symbolism to read her reality. She references angels during her conversation with Donna, connects the Log Lady's statement to the idea of angels and it is the angel in her picture that she asks whether it's true that her father loves her. Her constant fear is that her angel will abandon her, and she thinks it finally has when it disappears from her picture the night of her death. This belief is premature, however. When Leland takes Laura and Ronette to the train car, multiple conflicting voices converge towards the film's resolution. Laura is fighting both her father and Bob within her father, which is demonstrated through his continual transformations back and forth as he circles above her, while Mike rushes to the train, apparently hoping to stop Bob. Laura begins to see Bob's reflection in place of her own, and he tells her that he wants her. The voices of Bob, Leland, Laura and Ronette engage in a deafening cacophony. Then, the train car becomes silent. Laura's belief that the angel had permanently deserted her turns out to be false, and it appears above Ronette and frees her. This striking contrast reveals the conflict between the chaos of Laura's real life and the harmony she is struggling to reach. This moment of reprieve allows Mike to reach the train car and Ronette to open the door. Mike throws Teresa's missing ring into the car, which gives Laura a choice in her future. As pandemonium resumes, Laura, going against what Cooper told her in her dream and in a final exhibition of agency, puts the ring on and allows Leland to kill her, even as he screams, "Don't make me do this!" The ring prevents Bob from moving into Laura's body and allows her to die and leave the world, but continue living in the red room of the alternate reality. By making this decision, Laura consciously liberates herself from the oppressive space she was in, both the train car and her real life. Through this assertion of agency and belief that something exists beyond her current lived reality, Laura refuses to let Bob possess her, thus



displacing the power he had over her and finding the inner unity she has been searching for throughout the entirety of the narrative.

The final scene of *Fire Walk with Me* is a revelation of Laura's transcendence of the conflict-ridden real world. Here, in the red room, with the physical manifestation of her angel, she finds the inner peace that she couldn't attain in the real world. The lighting and the music harmonize in a reflection of Laura's inner voice. Once again, traditional discourse is superfluous as Laura sits beside Cooper, laughing and crying, evidently at peace. The bright, white, heavenly light, coupled with Angelo Badalamenti's song "The Voice of Love," support her expression. She has successfully found the truth she was searching for, overcome the male voices within the narrative through the articulation of her conflicting voices, unified her fractured identity and asserted her own voice as dominant among the various narrative conflicts. Some may question why this is indeed transcendent since Laura was murdered. However, death is not necessarily synonymous with lack of agency. Laura demonstrates her agency by actively furthering the narrative and choosing her fate instead of allowing it to be decided for her. Instead of passively waiting for Bob to inhabit her body like he wants to and succumbing to his control, Laura rejects Bob's power by her decision to put the ring on. Her choice allows her to move to a space outside of male dominance instead of becoming dominated by a male. It is an end to her everyday reality, but it is the attainment of liberation and peace that she sought throughout the entirety of the narrative and her life.

### *Mulholland Drive*

After the relative temporal linearity of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* is a step further from narrative coherence, increasing the ambiguity and thereby also elements of discord in the film. Significant similarities exist between the struggles of Laura Palmer and Diane Selwyn in navigating the heteroglossic text and asserting their own voice above the rest. Both characters are active subjects of the narrative, but have tragic ends. However, their methods for managing their respective situations, as well as the interaction of the diverse speech types differ.

The main discord in *Mulholland Drive* occurs in the dichotomy between fantasy and reality—and the lack of distinction between the two—and is manifest textually and stylistically. Within both the fantasy and reality narratives, Diane is the subject, furthering the story and transcending the conflicting voices as both Betty—her dream identity—and herself. She also possesses sexual agency, one that leaves no room for male objectification, allowing her to defy the traditional image of the passive female. As McDowell (2005) points out, this also forces male spectators to identify with one of the female characters in the film. Moreover, both sections of the film are seen from Diane's point of view, depicting both her perspective on her real life and her innermost desires, providing a richer, more complex characterization than exists in Lynch's prior films. The first segment of the film presents the fantasy that Diane has created as her coping mechanism, although it is not clearly defined as such. The latter part of the film suggests this possibility, but arguably never fully makes a distinction between the imaginary and the real. Betty Elms in the fantasy is in direct opposition to Diane in reality, while Rita is a direct contrast to Camilla Rhodes. Betty is everything Diane wishes she could be—innocent but assertive, and successful in both her personal and professional life. Rita is what Diane desired from Camilla—naïve, dependent on her and emotionally available.

Betty's naiveté is not only depicted through her outward appearance, but also through her speech, both of which conflict with that of Diane. Betty uses folksy phrases, such as “it was sure great to have you to talk to,” and “won't that be the day,” to express her elation over arriving in Los Angeles, a city where corruption is found aplenty and multitudes of dreams are ended. The city represents a locale of hope and

possibilities for dream fulfillment, even though it does not actually provide such accomplishment for everyone who goes there. It is therefore a setting of inherent conflict, allowing some to achieve their dreams and preventing this same achievement for others. Los Angeles is known for its glamour and affluence, but also for its violence and dishonesty. The superficial allure it expresses conflicts with its hidden underside. Betty then is not only in conflict with Diane, but with the city of Los Angeles as well, a location in direct opposition with her naïve personality, which consistently exudes hope and excitement. Both women shared the same aspirations upon arriving in California. What Betty wants more than anything in this world, as she tells Rita, is to be known as a great actress. To her, the fantasy Los Angeles symbolizes the opportunity to make her dream of becoming an actress come true. Betty's personality itself is a contradiction, however, as many of her actions defy her innocent demeanor. For example, she displays an intense sexuality during an audition, infusing an insipid script with carnality. Betty represents possibilities in the fantasy, while Diane embodies the loss of them in reality. Los Angeles once symbolized hope and possibilities for Diane as well when she first arrives after winning the jitterbug contest. But as Diane struggled in both her personal and professional relationships, Los Angeles becomes a symbol of failure and bitterness. Betty's positive viewpoint, then, conflicts with Diane's despair; this is exemplified when Diane tells the hit man that she wants Camilla's death "more than anything in this world,"—a perverted echo of her dream to be an actress. Betty seems to be on the verge of defeating Los Angeles, while Diane has clearly lost the battle, falling from an idealistic young actress to an embittered, suicidal bit player.

As with *Fire Walk with Me*, the inadequacy of male figures of authority is set up from the beginning of the film, when the Los Angeles Police Department detectives cannot solve the mystery. After Rita's car accident, two detectives examine the scene. While they do come to the conclusion that someone is missing, they are never able to figure out Rita's identity and thus solve the crime. In fact, they disappear from the film entirely. Their voices are thus marginalized, while Betty takes on the active role of investigator once she finds Rita in her aunt's (Maya Bond) apartment. It is Betty who calls the police to ask about the accident, who looks up Diane's phone number, goes to her apartment and climbs in through

the window, while Rita hesitates or resists before allowing Betty to make the decisions. It is through this passivity that Rita stands in opposition to not only Betty in the fantasy, but to her real-world counterpart, Camilla, who has all the power and influence over Diane.

The voices of the mob also function as elements of conflict within Diane's imagination, creating links between fantasy and reality, increasing the narrative ambiguity. The first instance of this occurs when the Castigliane brothers meet with Adam Keshner to demand that he recast the lead actress in his new film. They show him the photo resume of Camilla Rhodes and say, "This is the girl." At this moment, it seems as though this phrase means solely that this is the girl to cast as the lead in Keshner's film. However, the same words are infused with an entirely different meaning in the second part of the film when Diane uses them. She says "This is the girl" as she hands the hit man a photo resume of her ex-girlfriend Camilla, drawing a parallel between the two women. The dynamic between fantasy and reality is thus reversed, as in the dream, the criminals identify the girl, while in reality, Diane tells the criminal who the girl is. Adam is forced to cast the fantasy Camilla in his film, who thereby undermines Betty's chances at the role, while the real-world Camilla chooses Adam over Diane, thwarting Diane's opportunity for a continued relationship with her. Furthermore, after the meeting with Keshner, a series of phone calls takes place, beginning with Mr. Roque (Michael J. Anderson), who says only, "The girl is still missing," and ending with an unanswered red telephone. At this juncture, these communications would seem to refer to the missing Rita, and they function as elements of conflict by increasing the narrative tension. They depict the conflict between the powerful voice of the mafia searching for Rita, and Rita's lack of voice and knowledge of herself, adding to the mystery of her identity.

Adam's voice is another component of conflict in the narrative, demonstrating Betty's success at asserting her agency and transcending the conflicting elements, including the male voices. In her fantasy, Diane, as Betty, is able to subvert Adam's voice and remove any authority he may have in a way that is not possible in reality. In the real world, Adam chooses Camilla over Diane both personally and professionally, getting engaged to her and casting her as the lead in his film, while Camilla chooses Adam over Diane as well. In Diane's fantasy, however, Adam falls under the influence of the mob, taking away

any power that he has in his professional life, serving as the sole reason he chooses Camilla over Betty during his casting call. Production on Adam's film is shut down until he agrees to pick Camilla as "the girl." Moreover, he loses control of his personal life as well, as he discovers his wife Lorraine (Lori Heurig) in bed with the pool man. Not only is Lorraine not even close to contrite at being caught in bed with another man, she blames Adam for the situation and kicks him out of the house. Lorraine therefore has control over the house that is, in actuality, supposed to be Adam's space. The absurdity of what is happening to his life is visually reinforced by the bright pink paint splattered all over his black attire, which he does not change out of for the duration of the night. Forced to stay at a flop house, he learns from his assistant, Cynthia (Katharine Towne), that he is out of money. "But I'm not broke," he complains, confused; Cynthia replies, "I know, but you're broke," reiterating Adam's loss of control over his circumstances. Adam is also in conflict with the character of The Cowboy (Monty Montgomery), who acts as messenger to Adam in Diane's fantasy, giving him instructions on what he has to do if he wants to regain some semblance of control over his life—cast Camilla in his film. "Now, you will see me one more time if you do good. You will see me two more times if you do bad," he says. The Cowboy is next seen at the boundary of fantasy-reality breakdown, again providing instructions. "Hey pretty girl, time to wake up," he tells a sleeping Diane, signaling that her fantasy must now end and she must return to reality. He is indeed seen a second time, as warned, at Camilla and Adam's engagement party, implying that in her reality, Diane has done bad.<sup>2</sup> This role of messenger puts him in conflict with both Adam and Diane because he delivers information they do not want to hear. Adam has no choice but to follow his directions regarding his film even though he does not want to. Diane must wake up and face reality even though that is what she has been avoiding.

Furthermore, the actions of Joe (Mark Pellegrino), the hit man, add to the existing discord as well. Diane hires him to kill Camilla in the real world, but he also appears in the dream world as an example of

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<sup>2</sup> One could also argue that the Cowboy is only seen one more time. He has a total of three appearances: the meeting with Adam, the awakening of Diane and the brief glimpse at the dinner party. Chronologically, the dinner occurs first, before the meeting with Adam and the admonition that he will be seen twice more if Adam does bad. Therefore, chronologically, he is only seen once more, which means that Diane has done good.

inadequacy. The first time he appears in Diane's dream, he kills an acquaintance to acquire a black book of phone numbers. He fumbles his hit by killing three people instead of one, and is therefore unable to frame the incident as a suicide, as originally planned. This scene seemingly has no connection to the rest of the narrative within the fantasy, except to depict Joe's incompetence during that hit. It does have possible implications when Joe appears in reality, though, in order to accomplish what Diane tells him to do. His ineptitude in the fantasy minimizes the evil of what Diane has decided to do because of the dark humor used in his depiction. Other people and objects that Diane sees during her interaction with the hit man in reality appear in her fantasy as well. Because these characters are seen in her dream before in reality, their narrative function is unclear, at least initially. An example of this is the interaction that occurs between Dan (Patrick Fischler) and Herb (Michael Cooke) at Winkie's diner in the dream. Dan is explaining a nightmare that he has had about that particular Winkie's. He details how, in the dream, he sees Herb standing at the counter, and Dan is overcome by fear because of the man behind the dumpsters. After he finishes his story, the two men walk to the dumpsters to see the man, but at the sight of him, Dan panics and dies. This episode reflects the turmoil Diane feels during her conversation with the hit man. As she sits in the booth talking to him, she looks up and sees Dan at the check-out counter—the position that was a representation of dread in Dan's nightmare, drawing a connection between it and Diane's living nightmare. The man behind the dumpster exists in both the dream and reality. His reappearance towards the end of the film is a representation of Diane's mental state breaking down, as the nightmarish aspects of her dream intrude upon her waking world. This is demonstrated not only by the manifestation of the man behind the dumpsters, but also through the reappearance of the elderly couple from the dream who now taunt Diane.

Other secondary narrative characters also have roles in both Diane's fantasy and reality. Coco Lenoix (Ann Miller) is Betty's landlord in the fantasy segment, acting as a surrogate mother figure. In reality, she is Adam's domineering mother. Coco as Adam's mother is a stark contrast to Coco as Betty's landlord, and this character difference is made clear through her contradictory speech forms. As Adam's mother, she initially barely acknowledges Diane's presence at the dinner party. Once she does, she asks

Diane how she got her start in acting and how she became friends with Camilla. After hearing Diane's story of winning the jitterbug contest and using money her aunt left her to come to Hollywood, but not attaining a successful career, she silently pats her hand in condescension. Her silence here is in opposition to her garrulous wisdom in Diane's fantasy. As Betty's landlord, she asserts a powerful female voice by providing Betty with maternal warnings and advice and not allowing herself to be fooled. She establishes this during her conversation with Betty in the courtyard after she talks to Betty's Aunt Ruth on the phone and sees Rita sitting on the living room sofa. This interaction shows Coco's assertive voice and ability to read people, but it also reiterates Betty's innocence through her inability to lie well. Betty tries to explain away Rita's presence by telling Coco that the connection was bad when she talked to her aunt, leading to a misunderstanding about Rita staying at the apartment. Coco responds, "Honey, you're a good kid. But what you're telling me is a load of horse pucky, even though it comes from a good place." These statements demonstrate Coco's understanding of people, as well as the purity of Betty's character, traits notably lacking in their real world counterparts.

Louise Bonner (Lee Grant) appears only once in the narrative when she shows up at Betty's apartment door, looking for Aunt Ruth. She is an enigmatic woman who is aware of truths that are hidden to everyone else. Louise's sense of a woman in trouble and her communication of this mirrors the Log Lady's words to Laura about goodness being in jeopardy. When Betty tells Louise her name, Louise replies, "No it's not," hinting something is amiss with Betty's identity. She then claims that someone is in trouble and that something bad is happening. Taken exclusively in the fantasy, the person in trouble is Rita. Taken in the context of the overall story though, the real person in trouble is Diane, or Camilla. Coco refers to Louise's dire prediction when confronting Betty about Rita. "Don't make me out to be a sucker. Louise Bonner says there's trouble in there. You remember last night. Sometime's she's wrong, but if there is trouble, get rid of it." This emphasizes the idea that while Louise may seem unstable, she still possesses an unexplainable knowledge unavailable to the others in the narrative. Such an understanding positions her voice as a significant one within not only the fantasy, but reality as well because the trouble she senses in Rita refers back to Diane. Her knowledge also puts her in conflict with

certain male characters like the detectives and Adam because the detectives lack the information about Rita's whereabouts and Adam does not have an understanding of what is going on in his life, thereby making Louise's voice more powerful than theirs.

The elderly couple are other elements that appear in both segments of the film. The elderly man and woman exemplify the conflicting duality of human nature that exists in Diane/Betty and infuses *Mulholland Drive*. They appear to be pleasant and supportive travel partners to Betty at the beginning of the film, wishing her the best of luck. Once in the limousine, the couple's previously harmless countenances turn maniacal as they laugh absurdly for no apparent reason. These drastically conflicting representations are an indication of the inherent falsity of Diane's dream and the violence at the center of her reality. The couple's duality in the dream foreshadows their later role, when they appear as fantasy figures in Diane's reality, taunting her, causing her hysteria and ultimately leading to her suicide.

In addition to the fantasy-reality dichotomy and the characters' speech within it, non-traditional discourse, certain signifying objects, repeated dream references, and unique narrative techniques all function as conflicting elements of language as well. The interaction of these voices with the others already detailed above elevates the existing conflict and the surreal quality found in Lynch's film, thus increasing the challenges faced by both spectators and female characters in navigating a less-than-logical narrative.

*Mulholland Drive* includes types of non-logical discourse that add to the narrative incoherence, such as the Club Silencio scene, also examined by Hudson (2004). This setting itself is inherently a place of contradiction because it is a location where things exist, yet don't exist simultaneously. "No hay banda. There is no band. It is all an illusion," as the performer explains. Yet we hear the music and believe in the illusion nonetheless. Betty and Rita go to Club Silencio after they make love. They watch Rebekah del Rio's rendition of the song "Llorando" ("Crying"), and are themselves moved to tears. Like Laura when she is moved to tears by Julee Cruise at the Bang Bang Bar, Betty and Rita do not speak, only listen. "Your love has taken all my heart and left me crying, crying, crying for your love," del Rio sings in Spanish. Her voice continues on even after her body collapses and is pulled off the stage. Her words



reflect Betty and Rita's emotions, which is exemplified in their strong reaction to her song, although it is performed in a foreign language. Because of this mutual reflection, they do not need traditional discourse. The sound of heartache and intense feeling is apparent in the song, and Betty's and Rita's pain is shown through their tears. The song does not have to be in English for Betty and Rita to understand it. There are no spoken words, but we see their meaning nonetheless, passion after their lovemaking and pain as the fantasy begins to break down. This scene shows not only the possibilities for using non-conventional discursive elements, but also the transcendence of the female voice, which is dually expressed. A female entertainer asserts her voice, a voice that does not falter even after she is gone. The two female spectators emotionally react to the song, asserting their own voice through their tears. Moreover, Betty and Rita reflect the concurrent love and pain expressed by the song, and simultaneously, the song expresses their feelings of love and pain.

Beyond the nature of language, the club's intrinsic conflict is also present through its function as in-between locale. It is the setting for the complete disintegration of Diane's fantasy. This breakdown is visualized by the rapidly flashing blue lights that cause Betty to begin violently shaking, signaling the fragmentation of her character and the intrusion of reality. The blue box with the lock that matches a key Rita possesses materializes in Betty's purse at this point. The box signifies the link between illusion and reality, while the matching key has the power to reveal the truth concealed within. The appearance of the box solves the mystery of the key, which forces reality to overcome fantasy because the key's significance can no longer stay buried. Diane created a new, imaginary life for herself in order to escape her guilt over her actions, but the discourse of reality has won out. As is later revealed, Rita's purse with the money and key actually exists in place of Diane's purse with the hit money and the key the hit man gave to Diane to signify he carried out the contract. In Diane's fantasy, she positions the purse and its contents as unknown because she wants to block out their true meaning. The discovery of what it signifies negates everything the illusion stands for.

These objects add to the narrative ambiguity and conflict because although they appear in some shape or form throughout the entire story. In conjunction with the various contradictory assertions of

voice and recurring objects that make up *Mulholland Drive*, the creative portrayal of temporality through the use of flashbacks and the repeated allusions to dreams among various discourses—such as Dan describing his nightmare to Herb and Rita falling asleep repeatedly in various locations—intensify its surreal aura and thereby increase the complexity of conflict. They hint at an underlying theme present in the film and suggest that what may at first seem to be the real world is actually the world of the subconscious. The verbal references on this topic are supported by some of the stylistic elements of the film as well. The first point of view of a dream-world occurs at the very beginning of the film, as the overlapping images of jitterbug dancers fade into a close-up of a red pillow and deep breathing is heard. The camera guides viewers, as if it were directing them to the entrance of someone's unconscious, signaling a shift in narrative voice, from Diane's perspective to Betty's view. This possibility conflicts with the subsequent images, which depict Rita on her way up Mulholland Drive in the back of a limo. This seems to be the film's actual beginning, thereby hindering any clear conclusions about the nature of the narrative. From this point on, at least, the film appears to follow a straightforward, linear storyline, in opposition to the usual quality of dreams, which many times only make sense until a person awakens.

The first verbal comment on dreams occurs at the diner during the interaction between Dan and Herb, as Dan talks about his recurring nightmare. He tells Herb that he came to this Winkie's so he can get rid of the awful feeling he has. Similarly, Diane is trying to rid herself of her feelings, but they are not caused by nightmares. Instead, her reality is her nightmare, and she tries to rid herself of it through this dream she creates. Dreams are presented with a more positive connotation by Betty when she refers to Hollywood as a "dream place" while talking to Rita. Her meaning could be twofold. The phrase can be taken literally to mean that Betty is part of a dream and not reality. It also indicates Betty's views of Hollywood as the place of fulfillment of her hopes and dreams, dreams mirrored by Diane when she first arrived in California to pursue an acting career. This optimistic outlook is contradictory to Diane's current perspective. In the context of her comment, Betty is, as previously mentioned, the embodiment of the person Diane wishes she could be, but she also partially represents the person Diane was before her professional and personal disappointment. Furthermore, Rita's claims that all she needs to do is sleep and

everything will be better also further the idea of escape into dreams. Her hope is that when she awakens she will remember who she is, but this is not the case. Rita's wish for a memory of her identity is an inverse parallel to Diane's desire to forget who she is and become someone else. Diane and Rita's ideas of dreams then, conflict with one another, as they want sleep to provide opposing results.

While these voices provide subtle signals as to what might be occurring in the narrative, making it dreamlike, Lynch's expression of space and temporality opposes any concrete chronology, becoming especially obscure once Rita opens the blue box after returning from Silencio. The setting inexplicably shifts from Aunt Ruth's bedroom to Diane's, where viewers find Diane asleep in the same position Rita and Betty found her body in the dreamworld. Now back in the real world after the hit against Camilla has been carried out, scenes alternate among Diane's present, her flashbacks and her hallucinations. These narrative modes interact and conflict with each other in the context of the entire film, depicting Diane's true life and memories instead of her idealized version of events. They also conflict solely in the context of reality, portraying Diane's contradictory feelings of love and hate towards Camilla, as well as her initial resolution to kill her, followed by regret. The narrative non-coherence supports the complexity of reality, while it is in direct discord with the simplicity of fantasy.

Diane wakes up to knocking on her door, then hallucinates that Camilla is back with her in the kitchen, showing her wish to reverse her actions. "Camilla. You came back," she says, only to realize the truth as Camilla disappears. This scene fluidly flows into a flashback of Diane and Camilla's break up. The flashbacks are not in chronological order, however, as this first memory leads to an earlier one on a movie set, followed by one depicting Camilla trying to talk to Diane after their separation. The narrative then shows Diane trying to masturbate, though the time frame is unclear, and continues with Diane's flashback to the dinner party at Adam's home, immediately followed by her meeting with the hit man. The segment concludes with Diane's final hallucination of the elderly couple crawling under her door and chasing her through the apartment, and consequent suicide.

The multiple narrative modes blur into one another through their conflicts, providing an ambiguous temporal perspective. The second section of the film, which depicts Diane's reality, clouds the

clarity of the first part by placing doubt on whose story it was and how much of it was true or imaginary. The blurred identities at the heart of the narrative support the film's interpretive openness. The real-world section does illustrate the transference of the people in Diane's life to her fantasy world, thus linking the two, but the succession of events found in reality do not have clearly discernible boundaries to make it easy to differentiate among the real-life chronology. Moments of fantasy alternate with memories and with present events, without explanations of which is which. These techniques thereby work together in order to create conflict and advance the cinematic ambiguity.

Diane must navigate the various spaces of the narrative in order to successfully assert her voice among the myriad conflicting voices she encounters. Her initial struggle lies in her perception of reality and finding a way to overcome the conflicts it involves, the main issue being her unfulfilled desire for Camilla. Camilla holds the power in the relationship while they are together, speaking and acting in with contradictory ways to keep Diane off balance. In a moment of flashback to their breakup, Camilla tells Diane "You drive me wild," but almost immediately follows it up with "We shouldn't do this anymore." The night of Adam's dinner party, Camilla meets Diane and leads her up a hidden path to the house, walking with her hand in hand, deliberately allowing Diane to interpret this interaction as an act of romance. Upon their arrival, however, she distances herself, caressing Adam and kissing the blonde actress in front of Diane, signaling an entirely different meaning, a lack of any true affection for Diane. While shooting a film in which Camilla is the lead and Diane is an extra, Adam clears the set to demonstrate how he wants a romantic scene to be played. Camilla asks if Diane can stay to watch, which could be interpreted as a thoughtful gesture from a friend. However, in light of Camilla's separation from Diane, the act is clearly cruel. Diane can do nothing but watch in silence, her tears representing her pain, similarly to Betty's emotional discourse in Club Silencio right before the fantasy breaks down.

After the break up, the power shifts from Camilla to Diane, as she begins to assert her voice and agency. She refuses to listen to Camilla's explanations when she comes to her apartment. Instead, she shouts, "Oh sure. You want me to make this easy for you. No. No fucking way, it's not gonna be! It's not easy for me!" Diane reclaims power by not only silencing Camilla, but by directly opposing Camilla

through her words. By slamming the door in her face, Diane shuts out Camilla's voice, making her own dominant. She refuses to give Camilla what she wants, thereby taking a significant step towards ending Camilla's previous control over her. Diane's strongest, if horrifying, assertion of agency comes from her decision to have Camilla killed. She attempts to satisfy her unfulfilled desire by silencing Camilla's voice permanently. In doing so, she not only rids the narrative of Camilla, but also transcends the male voice that was standing in the way of her desire by subverting it. Diane ensures that if she did not end up with Camilla, Adam will not either, taking away his power. In doing so, Adam is subjected to a woman's choice for a second time, with no control over the situation. First, Lorraine cheated on him within Diane's fantasy, effectively terminating his marriage. Now, Diane ended his engagement.

Diane's other significant act of agency is the creation of her fantasy in order to escape the reality of her life and the consequences of her actions. She demonstrates the strength of her agency by transforming narratives to reflect her preferred version of events. The assertions of her voice, then, also extend to the alternate reality she constructs and she now has to navigate two conflicting spaces in order to further the narrative. As Betty, she transcends the other voices through her defiance of her aunt and Coco, her performance at the movie audition and her quest to solve the mystery of Rita's identity. After Aunt Ruth informs Betty that she doesn't know anyone named Rita and tells her they need to call the police, Betty rejects this thought process, telling her aunt that she is sure that a plausible explanation exists for Rita's presence. After she confronts Rita, she actively makes the decision to let her stay and help her figure out what happened. She stands by her decision even when Coco questions her and warns her to get rid of any trouble. Since Rita has no memory, she is in a passive position, and Betty is the one who actively furthers the narrative by searching for answers. She convinces Rita to open her purse to reveal its contents and she calls the police department to inquire about any car accidents on Mulholland Drive, despite Rita's misgivings. Betty also makes the decision to visit Diane's apartment after Rita remembers the name, and she knocks on the door even while Rita is telling her not to. She continues actively furthering the narrative by climbing in to Diane's apartment through one of the windows when they find the door locked with no answer.

Betty's assertion of her voice also manifests in her acting skills, which she demonstrates at her audition. She directly positions herself in opposition to the other women that Jimmy Katz (Chad Everett), the actor playing the scene with her, mentions. He says that they all recite the lines the same way, so he just plays off of them, but Betty contradicts these expectations he has of her. Her powerful performance conflicts with the clichéd script for a romantic melodrama, expressing a depth of emotion not anticipated in such a scene. Her acting during her audition also contradicts her practice session with Rita, in which Betty rehearses her lines with the predictable overdramatics of the role, and calls it a lame scene. Once at the try-out, however, she transforms her demeanor from innocent to seductive for the part, infusing the words of the script with sexuality and taking the control of the scene from Jimmy. A conflict exists here not only within the narrative of the film, but Lynch's reference to the genre of romantic melodrama directly interacts with *Mulholland Drive* as a romantic psychological thriller as well. The romantic conflict in Betty's scene is an exaggeration of the conflict in Diane's life, but with similar themes of detrimental love and retribution. While the character in the scene threatens to kill her father's best friend whom she has been having an affair with, Diane attempts to put an end to her situation by having her ex-girlfriend killed. Both stories disrupt traditional ideas of dealing with relationships. Betty's final condemning lines in the scene reflect Diane's feelings towards herself and Camilla, drawing a parallel between her character's exaggerated emotions and Diane's extreme actions across two distinct genres: "I hate you! I hate us both!"

After her successful performance, Betty walks over to Adam's sound stage with Linney James (Rita Taggart) and her assistant Nikki (Michele Hicks), who, significantly, are successful female casting agents, while the director, Wally Brown (James Karen), will probably not even have his film made. This is an instance of conflict between male and female agency and success in the film, demonstrating female power. The two women defy traditional occupational roles by being powerful female executives, while the male director fails. When the three women arrive on Adam's set, the fantasy Camilla (Melissa George) is beginning her audition. As she starts singing, Betty's eyes meet Adam's, who, in this moment, can't tell anyone anything he actually wants to say due to the subversion of his voice by the mob's

influence. He is quite powerless to say anything other than “this is the girl” if he wants his film to be made, although he locks eyes with Betty again after he has made the decision, suggesting that he would have chosen a different outcome if given the opportunity. This scene signals the fractures beginning to form in the fantasy that Diane created. The discourse of reality intrudes on the discourse of fantasy; despite the fact that the only reason Adam does not choose Betty for the role is his lack of control, it still prevents her from achieving her goal of becoming a successful actress. Betty leaves the set without meeting Adam because she promised Rita they would investigate Diane’s apartment. This act of agency allows her to walk away from the production and Adam and avoid his rejection, but it also pushes her closer to the truth, thereby breaking down Diane’s fantasy and ultimately undoing her agency.

Although Diane’s fantasy does not let Betty get the part in the film, it does allow for a successful sexual, though not romantic, relationship, which occurs that night. It is another scene where lack of words is more significant than words because it shows the imminent approach of the intrusion of reality. Up until this point, Betty’s agency has consistently furthered the narrative. She accomplishes everything she sets out to do, from investigating Rita’s accident, to ensuring that Rita can stay in her aunt’s apartment, to impressing the casting agents at her audition. During their lovemaking, however, Betty, for the first time, encounters an obstacle to her assertion of agency. Up until this point, Betty has told Rita what they should do, and Rita has followed, but as she asserts her voice this time, she is not successful in unifying Rita’s voice with her own. While the two women make love, Betty twice tells Rita that she’s in love with her, but Rita does not respond either time. Betty is thus able to achieve a sexual relationship, but not a romantic one. Betty’s failure shows the conflicting discourses of reality and fantasy, as reality once again intrudes. This transfers agency to Rita because she is now the one who has the power to determine how the narrative progresses, while Betty is in a position of uncertainty regarding Rita’s feelings. Betty therefore becomes the reactive one in the relationship, awaiting Rita’s next action or assertion of voice. This is in conflict with the original positions of the two women, when Rita occupied the place of uncertainty due to her lack of memory and Betty furthered the narrative.

More of Diane is beginning to surface in Betty, and more of Camilla is emerging in Rita, as the roles gradually shift and Diane's fantasy collapses. Diane's insecurity regarding her relationship with Camilla starts to appear in Betty, as she does not receive an affirmation of Rita's reciprocated feelings. She also becomes more passive, falling under Rita's control, as Diane is under Camilla's power. Conversely, Rita, mirroring Camilla, starts to assert herself over Betty, as when she insists that they go to Club Silencio in the middle of the night. These shifts in balance demonstrate the connections between the characters within fantasy, between the characters in reality, as well as the links among the characters across fantasy and reality, and the conflicts among them. This point of fantasy deconstruction shows that although the voices are in discord, they also overlap and merge in some aspects. Rita, whose character conflicts with that of Camilla, now exhibits some of Camilla's qualities. Betty, who is in conflict with Diane, begins to mirror elements of Diane's personality.

Once reality takes the place of fantasy, Diane is confined to, and must navigate, the space of her apartment which is permeated with the results of her actions. As her guilt threatens to consume her, a reverse fantasy effect occurs, as elements from her imagination infringe upon her real life. Such is what occurs when the elderly couple from the fantasy's beginning return, laughing maniacally. They materialize from the blue box, now held by the man behind the Winkie's dumpster, make their way under Diane's door, grow to full size and chase her through her apartment. She tries to get away from them, but has nowhere to go in the confines of her apartment and cannot run away from the guilt in her mind. The couple is a representation of Diane's fractured mental state, conflicting with her ability to repress her guilt and cope with reality. The man behind the dumpster also represents the conflicting discourses of fantasy and reality, as he crosses the border between the two worlds and signifies intense fear leading to death in both.

As a final act of agency, Diane shoots herself in the head, thereby freeing herself from not only the space of her apartment, but the space of reality. While suicide is by no means a positive act of agency, it is an act of agency nonetheless, through its demonstration of Diane's subjective position within the entire narrative. Diane's voice permeates both the fantasy section and reality of the film. Reality tells her



story from her perspective, while the fantasy is her personalized creation, in which she is also the active subject as Betty. As Betty she pursues not only the answer to the mystery of Rita's circumstances, but also the love that eluded her with Camilla in reality. As her reality is in direct conflict with her fantasy, Diane's feeling of confinement in her apartment conflicts with the freedom she possesses in her dream world. She desperately chooses the only option she sees left to escape the guilt of her reality and return to fantasy. In a traditional sense, Diane's suicide silences her voice. However, in this case, while her action does put an end to her voice in reality, it is the expression of her desperate desire to leave reality behind. Furthermore, Diane's act of killing herself relates back to her act of agency in constructing the fantasy world, the place where she is most able to express her voice the way she wants to. Through her suicide, Diane expresses her desire for the liberation of fantasy and makes certain that this time, no one will tell her that it is time to wake up and return her to reality. This desire is portrayed through the subsequent images in the film, which move from reality back into the realm of dreams, depicting Betty and Rita together. Furthermore, Diane's longing is reinforced through the final image of the film, which returns to Club Silencio, the ultimate setting of fantasy.

The form and content of *Mulholland Drive* support each other to create an ambiguous narrative of non-coherence through the interaction of illogical speech types, narrative elements and editing techniques. Diane, the active subject of the film, asserts her voice despite the movie structure's increased distance from logic, enhancing the difficulty of navigating the diverse elements of language. As Betty, she successfully transcends the voice of the main male character, holding the power that he lacks, as well as the other conflicting voices. Diane constitutes a strong female character who does not always necessarily make the right decision, but asserts her agency nonetheless in order to attempt to fulfill her desires. She exemplifies a more complicated individual than the characters in Lynch's previous films through the ways in which she asserts her voice and her dynamic personality, encompassing a multitude of characteristics that conflict within her. A direct correlation exists between Lynch's shift away from narrative logic and towards a richer, stronger, if still tragic, female character because the non-coherent form allows for new representations that can't be found in traditional narratives. This shift becomes even more pronounced

with Lynch's next, and last film to date, *Inland Empire*, in which the female character is not only successful, but is also no longer tragic.

## *Inland Empire*

*Inland Empire* presents the story of Nikki Grace, a complex female character possessing a strong voice within the film's temporal, spatial and overall narrative illogic. Nikki is the most complex and successful of Lynch's lead women. The increasing number of conflicting voices that non-coherence brings also results in new modes of expression. Nikki moves beyond the active subjectivity of her cinematic counterparts, Laura and Diane, because she not only successfully navigates the interconnected narratives, but she transcends the multitude of conflicting voices within all of them. Schaffner (2009) calls *Inland Empire* Lynch's "most explicitly feminist film yet," due to Nikki's discovery of her true identity among her inauthentic selves and her attainment of freedom from male influences. Indeed, while Laura, Diane and Nikki all assert their voices and exhibit agency through those assertions, only Nikki manages to achieve unity and happiness in the real world. Laura must choose death in order to find harmony, and Diane creates a fantasy world to achieve happiness and kills herself in an attempt to return to it. Nikki, however, finds happiness in life. Before this can happen, however, Nikki must decide that she wants to see her true self.

Due to the convoluted nature of *Inland Empire*, I will provide a brief overview of the various intersecting narratives in order to facilitate a stronger understanding of the film and my arguments. The main overarching narrative concerns the life of Nikki Grace, an actress who has just been cast in a new film. She lives with her powerful and oppressive husband, but begins an affair with her co-star in the film. Prior to starting to work on the film, Nikki is visited by her new neighbor, who tells her two variations of an old Polish tale to serve as warnings. The movie that Nikki is cast in, titled *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, becomes the second narrative. Nikki plays the part of a woman named Susan Blue, who engages in an affair with her married employer. As production commences on the film, Nikki's reality begins to merge with that of Susan, until her identity unites completely with that of her character. *On High in Blue Tomorrows* is a remake of *47*, a film that was based on a Polish folk tale (though not the same one told by Nikki's neighbor), but never finished because it was said to be cursed. This Polish tale is

the third storyline in *Inland Empire*, and the Lost Girl from the tale is the third important female character of the film. She has been trapped in a hotel room by the Phantom, a malevolent man who is able to traverse all three narratives; in the hotel room, the Lost Girl watches the other narratives unfold on a television screen. Nikki learns what happened in the Polish tale while her identity is one with Susan's. The two women remain separate individuals, however, as Susan possesses agency of her own within the narrative of *On High in Blue Tomorrows* and Nikki walks away from the film's set at its conclusion.

*Inland Empire* contains multiple narratives that interact, reinforce and subvert each other: Nikki's real life; the film within the film, *On High in Blue Tomorrows*; and the Polish folk tale on which *On High in Blue Tomorrows* is based. All three narratives share the same fundamental theme of forbidden desire and its consequences, and the cinematic language in each narrative reflect this discord. Nikki is in direct conflict with her co-star Devon Berk (Justin Theroux) due to the potential effects her decisions regarding him can have on her life. Her association with him has a negative impact on her relationship with her husband, whom she is also in conflict with, due to his dominance over her and his attempts to silence her voice. Susan Blue (Dern), Nikki's character in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, is in opposition with her husband; Billy Side (Theroux) and Doris (Julia Ormond), his wife in the film. The two lovers in the Polish story are also in conflict with their significant others. However, this basic theme is the only aspect of the film that at least borders on coherence. On a deeper level, *Inland Empire* is a film that revolves around the question of identity, and the journey in search of the answer requires the navigation of complex spaces, which are often indistinguishable from one another, or do not clearly belong to only one narrative. While certain characters and stylistic and visual choices are exclusive to one narrative in the film, others cross narrative boundaries and exist in multiple sections, and some defy logical placement and therefore function in undefined spaces. Storylines and identities merge, the variation of time and spaces does not follow a logical pattern and the stylistic choices also add to the conflict. As narrative subject, Nikki explores the diversity of conflicting voices. Through this navigation of non-coherence, she undergoes a transformation from someone who is bound by her surroundings and unsure of her place, to

someone who transcends her limits, asserts herself and achieves inner unity through new knowledge of self.

It is this convoluted style that provides *Inland Empire* with its rich heteroglossic structure. The presence of multiple storylines and the ambiguity of their relationships is an overarching source of conflict within the film. Furthermore, the inclusion of different cinematic genres adds to the various discourses present. *On High in Blue Tomorrows* begins as a Southern gothic narrative, but gradually transforms into a Polish drama, and the voices of the characters thus change as well. In the beginning, Susan's voice reflects assertiveness and control over her situation as she calmly rebuffs Billy's advances. As her relationship with Billy disintegrates and the narrative of *On High* shifts into the Polish drama, Susan's voice does the same. Reflecting her disillusionment, her speech is no longer calm and collected but rather coarse and volatile. Susan's speech is also contradictory to that of Nikki, who is quiet and reserved in the beginning, although their identities merge for a substantial period in *Inland Empire* and Nikki's voice grows stronger with the continuing narrative. Smithy's character undergoes significant changes from his part in the Southern gothic *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, to the Polish segment, to the end of the film where he reunites with the Lost Girl. The stories of secondary characters add to the multitude of voices in the film as well, such as that of the homeless girl beside Susan when she dies on the street, who talks of her friend Niko and her pet monkey. Her personal reminiscences are comparable to those of Susan talking to the man in the Hollywood office above the stairs. These anecdotes, less formal in nature, reinforce the transformation of *On High* from a romantic melodrama to gritty, confusing urban psycho-drama, as narrative convention is replaced by off-hand remarks and half-told reminiscences. All of these conflicting voices and narrative styles come together and, at the level of narrative structure, reflect the internal and external discord that Nikki must navigate in order to successfully create the character of Susan and find her voice as an actress.

In her lived reality, Nikki is an actress who has been chosen as the lead in an upcoming film. Her voice is initially drowned out by the other conflicting instances of discourse though. Nikki shares an extravagant home with her Polish husband, Piotrek (Peter J. Lucas), but even with its spacious rooms it is

restricting due to his oppressive presence. His voice, like that of Leland in *Twin Peaks*, is linked to power, and it silences Nikki's. He looks down at her from the top of the stairs as she celebrates with her friends after the phone call from her agent, and this is the most emotion she shows in the home, at least in his presence. His location in relation to her connotes his power over the space, as Nikki is in a lower, visually submissive position. Other than Nikki's excitement about her new role, the tension in the house is palpable. When Devon comes over for dinner, Piotrek takes him upstairs to have a discussion away from Nikki. By leaving her out of the conversation, her husband alienates her, deeming her voice unimportant. Nikki follows and listens from the doorway as Piotrek talks to Devon, but remains silent. He leaves no room for misinterpretation as he begins his warning: "Now I'll tell you something. And I will mean everything I say." Piotrek asserts a degree of control over Devon through the implications of his threat. He continues, "My wife is not a free agent. I don't allow her that." He expresses his patriarchal control over his home, including his wife, making it clear that it is his words that count, not hers. This dynamic between male and female voice is reinforced as Nikki silently walks away from the interaction.

His is not the first dominant voice of the narrative, however. Dominance belongs to a female voice, the new neighbor (Grace Zabriskie) who comes to visit Nikki. She is Polish, like Piotrek, but he is nowhere to be seen when she visits. Like the Log Lady and Louise Bonner before her, she appears only once and is privy to knowledge that is not available to anyone else. The enigmatic warning she gives Nikki resonates across all the narratives. She tells two variations of an old tale, intended to guide Nikki, though the destination is unclear as of yet. The meaning of these tales, however, becomes more apparent only at the end of the film, after Nikki has reached her destination. One version tells the story of a little boy who brings evil into the world while playing outside. The second speaks of a little girl who goes out to play and becomes lost in a marketplace, but ultimately finds a palace. This story hints at the route Nikki will have to take on her journey towards finding a stronger identity. The neighbor reveals the correct road to her: "Not through the marketplace, you see that don't you? But through the alley behind the marketplace. This is the way to the palace. But it isn't something you remember." The marketplace then is not as significant as the alley behind it, which symbolizes the route to self-discovery. The palace

the neighbor mentions represents finding true identity and thus achieving unity. Finding the palace is an option, as Schaffner (2009) points out, only available to the girl in the two tales, foreshadowing female transcendence in the film. In an instance of prophecy, she also contradicts Nikki and states that she is wrong in thinking that murder is not part of the story. At this point, Nikki tries to assert her voice by telling the neighbor that she should leave. However, the woman ignores Nikki and speculates on the ambiguity of time, pointing out to Nikki where she would be sitting if today were tomorrow. Nikki remains silent, and, in fact, is on the living room couch when she receives the news of her role, just as the neighbor predicted.

Although this interaction is a demonstration of the conflict between Nikki's voice and that of her neighbor, it is more importantly an expression of the possibilities for female dominance within the film. While Nikki's voice is largely silenced in the patriarchal space of her home, the neighbor is not only able to assert her voice, but she is the first to do so in that locale. This positions her as a dominant female force, in opposition to the male influence that pervades the setting at other times. Through her tales, she provides Nikki with the avenue for transcending the conflicting voices in her life, by finding her identity outside of the male voices. A parallel is also drawn here, and it is one that supports the power of female expression. It is a female voice that first becomes dominant in the space of the living room through the neighbor's speech, and it is also a female voice, Nikki's this time, that is the last dominant voice heard in that same space. Nikki is therefore able to overcome the conflicting voices to assert her own, and thus transforms a previously discordant, patriarchal space into one of feminine harmony.

Her voice is in conflict not only in the space of the home, but in the production space as well. She is soft-spoken and needs reassurance from men, depending on Kingsley Stewart (Jeremy Irons), the director, to tell her that this role will allow her to soar back to the top professionally and stay there. She also depends on Devon's opinion, asking him to validate her performance during rehearsals. The main, underlying conflict in the reality of the film's shooting, however, is the information Kingsley and Freddie (Harry Dean Stanton) reveal about *On High in Blue Tomorrows* being a remake of the supposedly cursed film, *47*. They tell Nikki and Devon that the original movie was based on a Polish gypsy folk tale, but

was never finished because the two lead actors were murdered. *On High in Blue Tomorrows* and *4 7* are, in essence, two versions of the same story. They represent two different voices whose conflict lies in the uncertainty about whether the production process for the two movies will be as similar as their scripts. The question of the truth value of this information permeates the production process, but becomes even more pertinent once Nikki and Devon begin their own affair. Their actions, which begin to increasingly mirror that of their characters, Susan and Billy, put them in clear conflict with the implications of the curse, which has carried over to *On High in Blue Tomorrows*.

This defiant act of agency, however, is how Nikki starts gaining a stronger voice within the narrative of reality. Up until now, her interactions with Devon have been brief and professional. When he asks her to have dinner with him after the shoot though, her voice expresses more emotion than the superficial friendliness she has used thus far. In a knowing, slightly sarcastic tone, she tells Devon that she bets he knows a “private little Italian restaurant tucked away with great food,” but agrees to see him after the shoot and walks away. This is similar to the reaction Susan has when Billy asks her to stay for a drink. He tells her he is lonely, and she calls him a poor, small, infant child. Billy, however, attempts to silence Susan’s voice by telling her that she talks too much. While a parallel exists between Nikki and Susan’s assertions of their voices at the beginning of their relationships, the ways in which they continue to assert their voices conflicts. As Nikki gains a stronger sense of self and begins to discover her identity outside of male relationships and influence, she is able to harmonize her inner conflicting voices. She no longer asks for validation from anyone regarding her professional performance or her identity. She now also has the opportunity to assert her voice in any setting if she so chooses, including her home, which has been rid of male conflict. Conversely, Susan’s voice becomes more and more disjointed as she loses sight of her identity as an effect of her relationship.

As Nikki and Devon film the love scene for their characters while engaging in a romantic relationship of their own, the lines between the real world and the world of the film begin to blur. This becomes evident in Nikki’s speech when she frantically tells Devon of another conflict, her fear that her husband knows about the affair and will kill them both. She then suddenly straightens up and exclaims,



“Damn! This sounds like dialogue from our script,” when in fact, she was supposed to be in character. This communication is evidence of three layers of dissention; the conflict between Nikki, Devon and her husband; the conflict between Susan, Billy, her husband and his wife; and the conflict of Nikki’s growing inability to differentiate between her real life and her portrayal of someone else’s life. This is intensified during the lovemaking scene, during which Devon is unable to differentiate Nikki from Susan, even as she pleads with him “Devon, it’s me, Nikki. Look at me.”

The conflict between Nikki and Susan’s identities intensifies until they finally merge, while Nikki is filming the scene in which Susan carries groceries down a back alley. Devon is not in this scene, which is significant because the sole female presence relates to the neighbor’s tale of the little girl finding the way to the palace in the alley behind the marketplace. This connection is a sign of the beginning of Nikki’s path to discovering herself and reaching the palace, inner unity. She enters a back door in the alley and walks through a stage, which turns out to be the set for *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. Nikki sees herself, Devon, Kingsley, the film’s director, and his assistant, Freddie, as they sat at their first meeting, practicing lines, a scene that has previously occurred in the film. At the time, Freddie had interrupted because he saw someone on set; Devon had searched the set to find the cause of the disturbance, but saw no one. It is now revealed that Freddie saw Nikki, as Susan, watching them. As Devon begins walking toward the set, Nikki watches herself disappear from the table. It is in this instant that she becomes the character of Susan, and not just an actress playing the role of Susan, which is why Devon cannot find anyone, although he hears her running. As Nikki, now Susan, runs, she sees Piotrek sitting above the set—paralleling the position he took in her home above her at the top of the stairs—but she enters Smithy’s house, or that of Susan’s husband, effectively shutting Piotrek out. He remains impassive, as if he can’t see her anymore. Neither can Devon, even as he peers through the window of Smithy’s house. Two sources of male influence and contention have thus been eliminated from Nikki’s life.

The space of this house is, in effect, Nikki’s blue box, containing the answer to who she is through stories of what was. After she enters, the number of conflicting voices in the text multiplies, heightening the existing ambiguity. Diverse, non-linear narrative modes, visual effects and

symbolizations continuously interact, conflict and merge to construct a surreal, non-coherent structure that inhibits any logical comprehension. Times and settings alternate to tell different, yet connected stories, but they do not adhere to conventional temporality. It is this illogical space that Susan begins to maneuver as she walks through the house, coming face to face with a group of prostitutes, of whom she asks the pivotal question of the narrative: “Who the hell are you?” The prostitute’s reply is not in the form of an answer, but rather a request that asks Susan to search within herself: “Look at us and tell us if you’ve known us before.” This appeal becomes a recurrent one, surfacing throughout the multiple narratives on Nikki’s road to discovering her true identity through Susan. The women are a manifestation of Susan’s conflict, an external expression of her inner voice. As Susan stands with her back against the wall, crying, she articulates her voice through the prostitutes. “There was a man I once knew,” one begins, and the others take turns adding their input, in a depiction of Susan’s disjointed thoughts about her relationship with Billy, after he convinced her to have an affair with him. “I let him do anything.” Each prostitute says no more than one word or phrase, illustrating the fragmented nature of Susan’s voices. This form of expression repeatedly surfaces in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, showing the ways in which Susan copes with her ended affair and how it affects her mental state. The scene in the living room of Smithy’s house strengthens the role that the prostitutes play by emphasizing Susan’s incongruous feelings. As one of the prostitutes voices the fact that she really thought they (Susan and Billy) would last, another contradicts her by stating “I saw it coming.” The belief that he was the one is followed by a dismissive “So what,” the solution of finding someone else and the prediction that “Tonight will be good,” indicating that Susan does not need Billy to be happy. This foresight begins the unification of Nikki’s voices through Susan, and her, at least momentary, feeling of peace, demonstrated by the prostitutes’ sudden choreographed dance to Little Eva’s “The Loco-motion.” Beyond the collective performance, the lyrics of the song also support the possibility of Susan overcoming her pain through the prostitutes’ visual representation of Susan’s multiple voices and identities merging to become harmonious: “It even makes you happy when you’re feeling blue.” The moment of purely female coordination reinforces the idea that unity can be reached without, and despite, male influence, as only

females inhabit this space. The momentary harmony, however, is in stark contrast with the ensuing emptiness and silence in the scene, signaling that Nikki's road to self-discovery is not yet complete. Closer to the end of the road, on Hollywood Boulevard, Susan sees herself standing around laughing with the group of prostitutes, a representation of her still fragmented identity. It is when she is able to express her voice through the physical manifestation of the prostitutes that she is most complete because it demonstrates a method of assertion that defies traditional discourse. Such a manifestation allows for a variety of expression that is not possible through traditional discursive methods. Such nontraditional avenues for asserting the female voice are allowed by the narrative's non-coherent form, which supports a strong female character who has more choices for expressing herself. This is due to the myriad conflicting elements within the text that she can use to either assert her voice, or subvert others. Since Susan has so many conflicting voices within her, assertion through traditional discourse would not be as effective as this nonconventional representation through the prostitutes. The prostitutes physically represent the multiple voices and experiences in creating Susan. However, traditional language would not allow for this concurrent diversity because Susan, and thus Nikki through Susan, would have to alternate voices, allowing only for a less comprehensive look at her inner turmoil. As Doris Side walks up and stabs Susan, however, the prostitutes all scatter in varying directions, leaving her empty, symbolizing the final fracture of her character's voice that is necessary for Nikki to resurface and assert her own.

Susan's struggle for navigation in the space of Smithy's house is in conflict with the lighting elements, as her journey takes her down dark corridors. The lack of light hinders her navigation of the spaces, but it also symbolizes her difficulty in achieving inner sight and illuminating her identity. The visual effects in the scenes with the prostitutes, however, are a further reflection of her conflicting voices, supporting the incongruity. When she first sees the prostitutes, they are obscured by darkness, their faces only partially illuminated by beams of light. Furthermore, the rapidly flashing lights in that scene and in the ones in which Susan sits (sometimes by herself and sometimes in the prostitutes' presence) in the center of the living room, reinforce the intensity of her inner turmoil, serving as a visual manifestation of her voice. The visual depictions interact with the sound of either loud music or thunder, emphasizing her

despair and desolation. These instances occur after she has gone to see Billy in the mansion and experienced his rejection. The fragmentation of her psyche begins to surface during her interaction with him, as she states her feelings, revealing their affair with no regard for his wife's presence. Her disintegration continues, and she has no one to share her feelings of misery with, which is why she is silent in these instances. The inharmonious lights and jarring sounds are therefore representative of the dissonant voices that she does not verbally express.

The prostitutes function not only as representations of Nikki's conflicting voices, but also as guides on her search for her identity. They have the power to reveal the events of the past and their consequences, which still have a resounding impact on the present, offering the opportunity to transcend these consequences in the future. They tell Susan, "In the future, you'll be dreaming. In a kind of sleep. When you open your eyes, someone familiar will be there." Susan covers her face with her hands, and when she removes them, she finds herself on an old Polish street. The two prostitutes leading her ask, "Do you want to see?" telling her that, similarly to the enigmatic neighbor's house, the scene of the crime in the Polish gypsy tale is just down the way. The truth to Nikki's identity then, is not far out of reach, but in order to understand the whole story, she has to make the conscious decision to follow the directions she receives. These instructions are explained by one of the prostitutes. Through her eyes, Susan learns the Polish folk tale of the two lovers, a story that is revealed discontinuously, within the narrative of Susan's life, but outside of the script of *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, thereby acting as another element of conflict in the film. Events from the Polish storyline alternate with real occurrences in Susan's life, representations of her voice via the prostitutes, her accounts of her past and images of the Lost Girl, none of which are depicted through a clear chronology. In the Polish tale, two lovers are discovered engaging in an affair by their significant others, leading to the man's murder and the woman's subjection to physical and emotional abuse, reinforcing the theme of forbidden desire and the neighbor's warning that actions do have consequences. Her warning refers to the fact that it was this event in Polish history that sparked the negative consequence of the curse that spans time and space. Conversely, other actions, like Nikki's successful discovery of "the palace," can lead to the positive consequence of ending this curse.

This abuse is doled out by a man referred to only as “The Phantom” (Krzysztof Majchrzak), whose patriarchal voice crosses the boundaries of the narratives conflicting with the voices of the Lost Girl, Doris, Susan and Nikki. As he adamantly states in the space of the hotel lobby where the Lost Girl is trapped upstairs, he is looking for an opening. This opening allows him to move amongst narratives, defying temporality. He attempts to assert his control over the women in multiple sections of the film from its opening scene to its conclusion. At the beginning of *Inland Empire*, a man and a woman walk down a hallway to a hotel room. Only their voices are heard and indistinct shapes seen; their faces are blurred. The concealment of their identities, suggests the film’s central theme of self-discovery. The woman’s identity as the Lost Girl is revealed only after her interaction with the man takes place and she is left alone in the room. The visual style of the film also undergoes a change here as well. The original black and white, fuzzy quality is replaced with color, which supports the emerging clarity. The Lost Girl sits on the bed, across from the television, crying, unable to leave the boundaries of the space she is now confined to by the Phantom, who is linked to the curse permeating *4 7, On High in Blue Tomorrows* and reality.

The Phantom also materializes in *On High in Blue Tomorrows* by hypnotizing Billy’s wife, Doris, to make her kill Susan, drawing a parallel between her and the Polish man’s wife in the gypsy story, who prays to God to remove the wicked dream that has seized her heart that causes her to kill her husband’s lover. This wicked dream, which the Polish man’s wife has no control over, is similar to the hypnotic state that Doris cannot shake. The Phantom causes both the wicked dream and the hypnotic state, drawing a parallel between the two women and their conditions. Doris’s voice therefore comes into conflict with Susan’s due to Susan’s affair with Billy, but Susan now is in opposition to the Phantom as well. Although Doris kills Susan, she does so under the Phantom’s influence. The Phantom, then, is the fundamental cause of Susan’s death. The underlying conflict between the two women surfaces the night that Susan goes to Billy’s mansion and asks Billy whether he loves her, despite Doris’s presence. Even at Billy’s dismissive “Be gone, Sue,” she desperately repeats that she loves him. As Doris stares into Susan’s face, she comes to the realization that it is Susan that she will kill, increasing the conflict from a

marital dispute to an impending murder. Awareness mixed with confusion crosses her face, and the film cuts to the Phantom chanting in an incoherent language, performing the hypnosis. The initial appearance of Doris in the narrative is also a component of conflict through its support of narrative non-coherence. She appears before filming of *On High in Blue Tomorrows* ever commences, and before Billy and Susan begin their affair. Doris is first seen in a police station, telling a detective that she has been hypnotized and will kill someone, but nothing indicates that she is Billy's wife. Furthermore, Doris and Nikki's appearance and voice after the affair is a stark contrast to their appearance and voice prior to its occurrence, paralleling their mutual deterioration into disheveled, frantic women. Both are negatively affected by Billy's decisions, leading to a decline in their actions and speech, as demonstrated through Doris's chase of Susan down Hollywood Blvd.

The negative effects of association with Billy are also indicated through the way in which Susan articulates her voice in the office above the stairs where she discusses her past. The entrance to this office is on a Hollywood street, and when Susan climbs the stairs leading up to it and enters, she finds a silent, unidentified man sitting at a desk. Before the affair, Susan's voice is assertive and able to take on various tones—sarcastic, amused, determined—against Billy's, portraying the facets of her personality. Her reply to Billy when he asks her whether she has feelings for him too, "I can't afford to," rings true, as by the conclusion of their affair, her speech has declined to bad grammar and expletives, and is infused with her overall hatred of men. This drastic change in character demonstrates the possible negative consequences women face if they allow male voices to dominate them. The episodes between Susan and the man above the stairs occur in one interaction, but are broken up into conflicting conversational segments within the film, once again defying temporal linearity. Susan's voice, in these instances, is in conflict on numerous levels. First, it is in opposition with the man's voice, who is silent for the majority of the time, in an expression of doubt regarding the truth value of Susan's narratives. His role or identity is never clearly stated, furthering the narrative's ambiguity and elevating anxiety. Susan's voice also conflicts with that of the men she mentions from her past, as well as with her voice before her affair, as she bitterly recounts the male relationships in her life in explicit detail. Her verbal accounts conflict with the actual version of

events, which are represented by flashbacks, because they are Susan's way of relating to her past. Similarly to the way that the border between fantasy and reality is never delineated in *Mulholland Drive*, no clear differentiation exists between Susan's real life and the events of her imagination in *Inland Empire*. When Susan walks into the room at the top of the stairs, the first words she says are "I don't really understand what I'm doing here," signaling her confusion about her life experiences. As she begins to try to explain her presence there, the voices of the prostitutes in Smithy's house coalesce and she states "There was this man I once knew." However, she does not talk about Billy, but about a man who tried to rape her when she was 15, and who she assaulted in return. She implies her revenge is one for women in general: "He come to reaping what he been sowing." The next story Susan tells is also about male violence. She talks of a man who came at her with a crowbar because he thought she was cheating on him, and once again, asserts herself as dominant over the male in question. "I don't take this kind of behavior," she states. "I kick him in the nuts so hard they go crawling up inside his brain for refuge." This part of the conversation is the only moment in which the interviewer addresses Susan at all, and it is a significant aspect of their interaction because it is an indication that her version of reality may be skewed. He asks whether she was in fact seeing another man; she replies, "I was screwing a couple of guys for drinks, no big deal." However, she then continues by elaborating on one of the men she was sleeping with, calling him "kinda cute," asserting her desire and her agency to fulfill that desire, regardless of male anxiety.

These two stories are divided by a flashback in which Susan tells Smithy that she is pregnant. After his less than enthusiastic response to this news, she sneaks out of bed that night to try to call Billy, but to no avail. Smithy beats Susan and tells her that he cannot bear children. Similarly to Piotrek in Nikki's home, Smithy silences Susan's voice. After the second story, the setting shifts to contemporary Poland, where Susan and her husband are grilling in the backyard. A group of people arrives, and Susan's husband tells her that he is joining a Polish traveling circus as caretaker for the animals. Although Susan objects to this plan, Smithy does not care what her opinion is. Once more, the male in the household establishes the power in the relationship. In order to reestablish her identity, Susan makes a familiar

request to two women—the prostitutes from her mind—sitting in the backyard: “Look at me and tell me if you’ve known me before.” In her first encounter with them, the prostitutes posed this same question to Susan and it initiated the process by which Susan’s conflicting voices began to coalesce. The response, “Yes, we will do that,” does not assuage Susan’s confusion by directly addressing the question of who she is. The two women agree to do as Susan asks, but never tell her whether they have known her before, demonstrating that she has not yet reached the end of this process.

Moreover, Susan’s confusion about time is another element of conflict. “I don’t know what happened before, or after,” she tells the man upstairs. “I don’t know what happened first, and it’s kinda laid a mind fuck on me.” Susan struggles to navigate the narrative of her own film, a textual reflection of *Inland Empire*’s fractured style. This fragmentation is reinforced through the temporal and narrative non-linearity that characterizes *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, and Susan’s bewilderment is underscored by the non-chronological revealing of her story. Her conversation with the man above the stairs does not happen until near the end of her narrative, but is sporadically interspersed within the narrative prior to its chronological occurrence.

Conflicting voices permeate all three storylines and are intensified through the blurring of narrative modes. The cinematic elements that conflict by creating the most ambiguity in the film, however, are those that defy the boundaries and logic of their respective narratives. *On High in Blue Tomorrows* is, if looked at separately in its simplest form, a film about a woman who is ultimately destroyed by her relationship. Susan’s story is told relatively chronologically, albeit intermittently. The time before and at the very beginning of the affair is depicted through Nikki’s and Devon’s rehearsals, and while the end of the romance is left out, the events that occur afterwards are shown in chronological progression. Susan makes breakfast in her home with Smithy, she tells him that she is pregnant, she tries to reach Billy to talk to him, she goes to see Billy which leads to Doris finding out about the relationship, she goes to talk to the man upstairs and Doris follows her and kills her. It is the interspersed, non-coherent details that conflict with this structure, such as the prostitutes serving as a reflection of inner voice and



showing Susan a way out of the narrative in order to witness another one in an entirely different time and setting.

The rabbits in *Inland Empire* are also elements of conflict, indicating the nexus where all the narratives of the film come together. They occupy a stage in the hotel that is also the location for the Lost Girl's confinement, the Phantom's interaction with the other Polish man and the setting where Nikki winds up after she finishes *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. This stage is therefore a bridge among the multiple filmic narratives. This is why the rabbits do not have fixed places within a single narrative, but are nonetheless able to interact with other elements and merge with characters. For instance, when Susan calls Billy at night, the phone rings in the rabbits' kitchen on set, and it is one of them who answers. It is one of the rabbits that transforms into the man at the top of the stairs who Susan talks to about her past, and the Polish mafia members sitting around the table change into the rabbits as the room grows dark. Their appearances are in conflict with the possibility of coherent narrative placement through their illogical speech, emphasized by the laughing studio audience heard on the soundtrack. They first appear on the Lost Girl's television screen, occupying a space that is not open to Nikki until she successfully completes her journey. Once she reaches the end of her road to self-discovery, however, the rabbits disappear from their stage, opening up the space for Nikki to enter and use to reach and then free the Lost Girl.

Furthermore, conflicting voices exist not only within the three stories individually, but span the narratives as well. Although they are thematically aligned, *On High in Blue Tomorrows* is in direct conflict with Nikki's real world. Nikki becomes the character of Susan and in doing so, overcomes the limits of her reality. The more fractured Susan's identity becomes, the closer Nikki is to achieving self-knowledge and the stronger she grows. The ultimate conflict takes place when Susan dies on the sidewalk at the corner of Hollywood and Vine, and Nikki successfully leaves the world of the film behind. This part of the film reveals an added layer of ambiguity, as up until this moment it was not clear that the depicted narrative(s) was/were part of an on-set shoot and not reality. This contradiction is disclosed by

the appearance of a camera in the shot as it films the conclusion of *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, followed by Kingsley's verbal corroboration of "cut," reflecting how the narratives have now begun to coalesce.

Nikki's transcendence of the conflicting elements of language occurs through her successful navigation of multiple spaces in order to answer the question of who she is while asserting her voice, her achievement of freedom from male influence, her lifting of the curse through her agency and thus liberating both herself and the Lost Girl and finding inner unity. Nikki is the subject of *Inland Empire* and although her voice is initially overpowered by others in the film, it consistently grows stronger as she maneuvers through the various narratives. By merging with her character Susan after her individual *On High in Blue Tomorrows* scene with the groceries, Nikki moves beyond the bounds of her real life, thereby leaving behind both her husband's oppressive control and Devon's influence. Susan provides Nikki with a new understanding of herself and venue for expressing her voice, as demonstrated through the words of the prostitutes and supported by the stylistic choices, like the lighting and music, in Smithy's house. Furthermore, Nikki, as Susan, actively chooses to follow the prostitutes to see the story of the two lovers, overcoming the limitations of yet another space. In both *On High in Blue Tomorrows* and the Polish tale, Susan asserts her voice in her search for her identity, making the recurring statement "Tell me if you've known me before," in an effort to know herself. As Susan gradually loses sight of herself because of the male interactions in her life, Nikki gains a better sense of self due to the lack of male influence. Susan's death in *On High in Blue Tomorrows* allows Nikki to pass through narrative boundaries, out of the film and back onto the set in reality. Her voice in the real world now demonstrates agency, in contrast with her voice before the production commenced. Her silence, however, is a more meaningful assertion of voice than words would be, demonstrating her ability to make her intentions known without verbal expression. Nikki ignores Kingsley and walks away from him even as he is praising her performance. She is no longer concerned with critical acclaim. She is in a seemingly catatonic state and walks across the street into a movie theater. The condition Nikki is in demonstrates that while she is now in the real world, she is also still in the role of Susan, a duality that is expressed through her watching the movie she just finished on the theater screen. She walks up the stairs of the

screening room, reminiscent of the stairs Susan climbed to reach the man's office, and finds herself in a dark, unfamiliar hallway, another space to navigate. Once she opens the door at the end of the hallway, she realizes that she has returned to the narrative space of *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, Smithy's house. Nikki then walks to the dresser and takes out the gun she finds there.

As Nikki walks around the space, she is unable to clearly see anything until the Phantom materializes at the end of the hallway. This lack of sight not only intensifies her physical struggle in navigating the space, but it is a representation of her difficult journey to achieve mental sight and figure out who she truly is. Her final obstacle to constructing her identity is the Phantom, and Nikki must rid the world of him and his curse in order to find complete inner unity. His voice is linked to power and he infuses it with evil, which permeates not only the Polish gypsy tale, but also the film *47, On High in Blue Tomorrows* and reality, keeping the original curse in existence indefinitely. His mere presence causes fear in the Lost Girl, who is confined in the hotel room after her encounter with him, and he instigates Susan's murder by hypnotizing Doris, thereby also affecting Nikki's understanding of her reality with his control in the movie. His identity is tied to the first of the neighbor's tales about the little boy who went out to play: "As he passed through the doorway he caused a reflection. Evil was born. Evil was born and followed the boy." The Phantom, whose origins are never explained, personifies the evil born from reflection because he initiates the curse that has the power to permeate the three narratives and is thus the original reason for violence and oppression in the stories. The first story thus serves to warn Nikki of what she will face, while the second story illuminates the path she must take to overcome the curse. Nikki takes the alley behind the marketplace to begin her journey, but she must transcend the main cause of conflict—the curse as embodied by the Phantom—before she can reach the palace—empowerment outside of male dominance. When Nikki sees the Phantom in the hallway and he starts walking towards her, she pulls out the gun and shoots him repeatedly, ridding all the narratives of his influence and effectively ending the curse. His face begins to melt, with Susan's face reflected in it, as blood pours out of his mouth. This mirrors Susan's last moments on the street, when she coughs up a pool of blood before lying down to die. Nikki's act of agency therefore is twofold. She rids the narratives of the main source of

male power left and also kills off Susan's character to emerge as her own person. By silencing the Phantom, she liberates herself and opens up spaces that were not available to her before. She walks into a room labeled 4 7 and finds the set previously occupied by the rabbits, who were waiting on Nikki and there only until she found her way.

Nikki's transcendence of the conflicting voices lies not only in her liberation of herself, but her liberation of the Lost Girl as well. As Nikki enters the room 4 7, Chrysta Bell's "Polish Poem" begins to play on the soundtrack. Instead of the ominous statement, "Something's wrong," which various characters state in both reality and the story of *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, the song simply states "Something's happening," a positive variation that points to Nikki's transcendence over the existing conflict in her past. The something that happens allows Nikki to finally leave the world of *On High in Blue Tomorrows* and return to her reality, yet not only preserve the character of Susan, but provide her with a happiness previously lacking. The Lost Girl's television, which has up until this point been showing her the interconnected narratives, now presents the room she is in. She sees herself on the screen as Nikki walks into the room. They kiss and Nikki fades away. The Lost Girl is now free to leave the room; she runs to Smithy's house where she has a joyful reunion with Smithy and their son. The kiss that the two women share merges the identities of Susan and the Lost Girl, providing each with freedom previously unattainable to them. Smithy is overjoyed to see her, and the presence of their son indicates a happier, more stable family life than she had experienced before.

Nikki has come to the end of her journey and returns to her home. She sits on the same living room couch the neighbor had predicted she would be sitting. The atmosphere of the space is a significant contrast to what it was at the film's beginning. Only Nikki occupies the space now, free of any other voices—particularly Piotrek. She has a flashback to the neighbor's visit at the beginning of the film and sees the neighbor and her previous self talking about the couch where Nikki now sits. During that interaction, prior to her attainment of self-knowledge, Nikki turned and looked in the direction the neighbor pointed and saw nothing but an empty couch. In this concluding scene, Nikki once again sits with the neighbor, whose demeanor has now changed, though, from cryptic to knowing; she smiles slyly

at Nikki's success. This time, however, as Nikki turns her head, she sees herself sitting alone on the couch. She now possesses a power of vision that she did not have before, one that she has achieved by navigating the alley behind the marketplace to reach the palace that the neighbor told her about in the little girl's Polish folk tale before.

## Conclusion

*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* showcase the strongest lead female characters among Lynch's films, making them particularly valuable for a feminist reading within his work. Laura, Diane and Nikki contradict Mulvey's (1975) image of the passive female by asserting their agency against the other intermingling discourses present and transcending the various conflicting voices within the narratives.

Much illuminating research has been conducted on Lynch through both feminist and semiotic frameworks, and this is where my thesis fits within the existing scholarship. While this research has utilized both semiotic and feminist frameworks to analyze Lynch's films, it has largely left questions about the female voice unanswered. My analysis addresses these questions by using Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia to examine women's use of voice as agency and therefore adds to the existing research by opening up new space for feminist film studies. By using heteroglossia as the tool for my feminist-semiotic analysis of Lynch's films, I was able to examine the voices of his lead female characters and how they used those voices to successfully overcome the other conflicting elements within the text. The concept of heteroglossia also offered a way to understand the relationship among the three films due to their centrality of conflict and the transcendence of the women.

Laura, Diane and Nikki all function as active subjects by not only furthering the narratives, but by telling the stories from their perspectives. Laura's abuse and her search for the truth is illustrated through her eyes. Diane furthers the narrative in both the fantasy and reality sections of *Mulholland Drive*, and the film shows events in reality from her point of view. Nikki is the subject of her reality, but she also becomes the subject as Susan in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, while simultaneously actively searching for answers as herself. Furthermore, similar elements of conflict exist in the three films, including characters' voices, visual and stylistic choices and narrative techniques. The female characters are all in conflict with a variety of voices within the films, but also specifically with a powerful male(s) voice(s) against whom they must assert their agency. Laura's voice is in direct conflict with both her father, Leland, and Bob, the character from the other reality inhabiting his body. Diane's main male conflict is in the character of

Adam, who she blames for destroying her relationship with Camilla. Nikki is in conflict with the most male voices, due to the number of narratives she participates in. She is in conflict with both her husband and co-star in reality, Billy in the film she is acting in and the Phantom. All three women find ways of asserting their agency in order to rid themselves of male influence. Laura decides to let Leland kill her in order to prevent Bob from using her body and by doing so transcends the conflicting voices. Diane asserts herself against Adam in two ways. In her fantasy construction she strips him of all power, while in her reality she has Camilla killed, thus taking her away from him. Nikki is able to successfully rid herself of male influence in her real life by becoming Susan, and she achieves complete liberation across all narratives by killing the Phantom and ending his curse.

Although Laura, Diane and Nikki share similarities in their struggles and acts of agency, they also show a progression as characters. A direct correlation exists in Lynch's shift in narrative style and the representation of his female characters. As he moves further away from traditional narrative structure and his films become more and more non-coherent, so do his female characters become stronger, more complex characters. *Fire Walk with Me* is the most linear and coherent film of the three. While Laura is the active subject who successfully asserts multiple voices, her conflicts lie more with the voices of other characters and not elements of ambiguity. She only functions in one, set reality for the majority of the film. In *Mulholland Drive*, the narrative becomes more convoluted by involving two realities and not clearly differentiating between them or explaining their significance. Diane's complexity is revealed through the conflict between who she really is and who she wishes she was. The placement of her fantasy before her reality strengthens this complex characterization because it shows the depths of her subconscious before the true story surfaces. The most non-coherent of the three films, and thereby embodying the most conflict, is *Inland Empire*, and it also offers the strongest female character. Not only does it involve multiple storylines, but storylines that ambiguously interact with one another, merging at times and conflicting at others, but never clearly differentiating among themselves. Nikki must navigate these blurred narrative modes and interact with them in order to assert herself. Her complexity lies in her search for her identity, as she undergoes a change from uncertain woman who is spoken over and treated

like property to a female character who goes on an interior journey, and achieves liberation and unity not just for herself, but for the Lost Girl as well.

Narratives of non-coherence, such as those found in Lynch's films, especially when examined with heteroglossia as a tool, are meaningful for feminism because they offer a unique way of looking at female representations and agency, which has not been previously available through other feminist investigations. These narratives focus on women who use their voices to interact and assert themselves within cinematic spaces, thereby opening up new space for women in film in general and providing new avenues for research. The fact that the convoluted plot structure and nonlinear narrative quality of these films enhances the possibilities for strong female roles and feminist readings demonstrates the array of opportunities for expanding this research. This is because the limitations that women face in the number of roles available to them in straightforward storylines do not exist in more complex, non-coherent narratives, as the ways that they are able to express themselves amplifies. They have the opportunity to communicate in and interact with multiple spaces, time frames and storylines, thus exhibiting more freedom than women confined to clear chronologies and a single plotline. In short, non-coherent narrative structures are potentially empowering for women both as characters within the film and as critical, engaged viewers. It would be valuable to examine other cinematic texts with this type of narrative structure in order to determine whether the female characters have such freedom of expression in those as well.

Heteroglossia is especially valuable in these cases because it reveals the diversity of conflicting voices within cinema, locating the female voice and examining how it interacts with the other elements. Furthermore, it illuminates the ways in which women in film can use their voices to assert themselves and thus transcend the elements of conflict, as well as how film form affects female characters. While a heteroglossic analysis reveals the connection between film form and female representations, this brings up questions about the relationship between non-coherent cinematic structure and genre and whether such narratives work better in certain types of films. For example, the Lynch films studied here are all mysteries in some way; the hidden connections and searches for truth that are indispensable to that genre



make them particularly amenable to heteroglossic analysis. An examination of a broader range of genres would provide further insight into the positions that women can and do inhabit in cinema. Moreover, a heteroglossic analysis can suggest new avenues for understanding the diversity of male voices within film and thus the operations of and potential to overcome patriarchal structures within cinematic narratives. Therefore, heteroglossia could be a progressive analytical tool and not one limited to analyzing gendered relationships.

What is clear is that Lynch's films are particularly open to such an analysis due to their intrinsic ambiguity and the strong female characters. Laura, Diane and Nikki overcome the obscurity and internal conflicts of the narratives and transcend the pain, confusion and patriarchal dominance that they have suffered. They therefore answer E. Ann Kaplan's question in the affirmative: Yes, it is possible for there to be a female voice, a female discourse.

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## Appendix

### *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*

A young woman named Teresa Banks (Pamela Gidley) is murdered in the small town of Deer Meadow, Washington, and her body, wrapped in plastic, floats down a river. FBI Chief Gordon Cole (David Lynch) calls Agent Chester Desmond (Chris Isaak) to go investigate the crime and tells him that he'll meet him at the Philadelphia hangar. Once Agent Desmond arrives, Cole introduces him to his partner, Agent Sam Stanley (Kiefer Sutherland) and tells them he has a surprise. The surprise is Lil, a silent girl who gives Desmond and Stanley information about the case through her facial expressions, body language and gestures. As the two agents drive towards Deer Meadow, they interpret these clues, anticipating problems with the local authorities, drug involvement and a lot of legwork.

The two men arrive at the local police station and tell Deputy Cliff Howard (Rick Aiello) that they would like to see Sheriff Cable (Gary Bullock). The deputy and the receptionist laugh at the agents and make things difficult, but Desmond gets back to Sheriff Cable's office and makes him turn over all the information about Teresa's murder. Desmond and Stanley then go to the morgue to examine Teresa's body, and they find that not only is her ring missing, but that a letter "T" has been placed under one of her fingernails. From the morgue, the two men visit Hap's diner, where Teresa worked, to get some coffee and ask the town's residents for information about Teresa. The diner's owner, Irene, tells the agents that she thinks Teresa was on drugs. Their next destination is Teresa's home in Fat Trout Trailer Camp, where they ask the owner, Carl Rodd (Harry Dean Stanton) to show them Teresa's trailer. Inside the trailer, Desmond and Stanley see a picture of Teresa wearing the missing ring. Stanley takes Teresa's body from the local police station back to Portland for a more extensive autopsy, while Desmond returns that night to the trailer camp. He finds Teresa's ring under one of the trailers and disappears.

At the FBI's Philadelphia office, Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) tells Cole that he is worried about the dream he told him about. He experiments with one of the security cameras, trying to be in two places at once until he sees his image freeze on the computer screen, and Agent Phillip Jeffries (David Bowie) walks down the hallway. Jeffries, who has been missing, tells Cole, Cooper and Agent Albert Rosenfeld (Miguel Ferrer) that he has been trapped in a nightmare. Afterwards, Cooper finds out that Desmond has disappeared and goes to Deer Meadow to investigate. He finds Desmond's car in Fat Trout Trailer Camp, with the phrase "let's rock" written on the windshield, but does not figure out what happened to Desmond himself.

One year later, in the town of Twin Peaks, Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) meets her friend Donna Hayward (Moira Kelley) and they walk to high school together. Laura snorts cocaine in a bathroom stall and meets biker James Hurley (James Marshall) in the gym after school, where the two kiss. Laura sees her actual boyfriend, Bobby Briggs (Dana Ashbrook), on her way home from school, and he confronts her about her whereabouts that afternoon. After school, Laura and Donna talk about James and Bobby, as well as what would happen to people if they were falling in space. When Laura gets home, she discovers that pages have been torn out of her diary. In a panic, she drives to Harold Smith's (Lenny Von Dohlen) house, tells him that Bob (Frank Silva) has found her diary and gives it to him for safekeeping. She tells Harold that Bob has been molesting her since she was 12 years old.

The following day, as Laura is preparing for Meals on Wheels, she is approached by Mrs. Chalfont (Frances Bay) and her grandson, who are two characters from another reality. They give her a picture to put on her wall and tell her that the man behind the mask is looking for her diary. Laura abandons Meals on Wheels and runs home. As she opens the door to her room, she sees Bob at the foot of her bed, and she runs outside screaming. She hides under some nearby bushes and sees her father, Leland (Ray Wise) exit the house. That same night, Laura returns home, and her father accuses her of having dirty fingernails at the dinner table. He then questions her about the necklace she is wearing, accusing her of having lovers, while her mother, Sarah (Grace Zabriskie) yells at him to stop. After dinner, Leland and Sarah sit in the living room, and Leland begins to cry. He goes up to Laura's room and tells her that he loves her. Before going to bed, Laura hangs Mrs. Chalfont's picture up in her room and dreams about the

other reality. In the dream, Agent Cooper tells Laura not to take the ring she sees, but she wakes up and finds it in her hand. The next morning, however, the ring is gone.

Meanwhile, Leo Johnson (Eric DaRe) is yelling at his wife, Shelley (Madchen Amik) to clean the house. He is interrupted by the phone ringing. It is Bobby calling, looking for drugs. Leo hangs up the phone, and Bobby then calls Jacques Renault (Walter Olkewicz), who tells him that he will have a delivery for him in two days. Laura is about to leave to go to the Bang Bang Bar that night when Donna comes over to her house, wanting to know where she is going. Laura leaves her, but Donna follows her to the bar. Before entering, Laura runs into the Log Lady (Catherine Coulson), who warns her about what happens when this type of fire starts. Once inside, Laura sits at a table and cries as she listens to the performer. She then motions to Jacques, who sends two men over to her as Donna watches. The three plan on going to another club to have sex. Donna comes over to their table and asks to come along, so the four of them leave. Once at the club in Canada, Laura and Donna begin drinking and dancing with the men. Laura runs into an old friend, Ronette Pulaski (Phoebe Augustine), and the two discuss Teresa's death and agree to meet Jacques and Leo at a cabin Thursday night. Laura sees Donna topless with one of the men and runs over to get her out of the club. The following morning, Donna and Laura discuss the night's events. Leland picks up Laura to take her to breakfast, and while in the car, the one-armed man from the other reality, Mike, chases them down. Mike, who has Teresa's ring on his finger, starts yelling at them, while Leland revs the engine to drown out his voice. After pulling into a parking lot, Leland has a flashback, which shows him in bed with Teresa. He remembers going to the trailer park to meet her and her friends, whom turn out to be Laura and Ronette, and then killing her. Laura, who recognizes the ring from her dream, asks Leland whether he had been home during the day last week. He initially denies it, but then changes his story.

The following night, Laura and Bobby go to meet Jacques's contact with the cocaine. The man takes out a gun to shoot Bobby, but Bobby kills him first. He then panics and tries to bury the man, while Laura looks on and laughs. The next day, Leland gives Sarah drugged milk in order to put her to sleep. Bob then climbs in through Laura's window and rapes her. During the rape, as Laura asks, "who are you," Bob turns into Leland as Laura realizes his true identity. After breakfast the next morning, Laura warns Leland to stay away from her. After getting high off cocaine that night, she agrees to meet James. Before she climbs out her window, Laura sees the angel disappear out of the photo on her wall. After telling James that his Laura is gone, she jumps off his motorcycle as he is stopped at a red light and runs into the forest. Here, she meets Jacques, Leo and Ronette and they go to the cabin where they have sex. Leland looks in through the window and as Jacques walks outside afterwards, hits him over the head. Leo leaves as well, and Leland takes the two girls, who are both tied up, to an abandoned train car. Simultaneously, Mike is running through the woods, trying to find them. In the train car, Leland's image alternates with that of Bob as he circles a tied-up Laura. As Ronette prays, an angel suddenly appears and her hands are untied. Ronette opens the train car, and Leland knocks her unconscious and pushes her out, while Mike throws the ring inside. Laura puts the ring on, and Leland kills her. He then wraps her body in plastic and puts it in the lake.

Bob walks through the forest and into the red room in the other reality, where "the arm" and Mike are sitting. "The arm" demands his garmonbozia (pain and suffering), and Bob pulls it out of Leland, who is suspended mid-air. Later, Laura sits in the other reality with Agent Cooper. She looks up and sees an angel hovering over her, and she begins to simultaneously laugh and cry.

### *Mulholland Drive*

A group of couples dances in a competition. The face of one girl emerges by the end, and she stands smiling with an older couple. The sound of breathing is heard from a bed with red covers. A woman (Laura Harring) is sitting in the back of a limo as it drives up Mulholland Drive. The driver stops the vehicle and points a gun at her. Before he has the chance to shoot her, a car full of teenagers hits the limo, killing everyone except the woman. Bleeding and in shock, she wanders down the hillside and falls

asleep outside of an apartment complex. When she wakes up, she sees a woman putting bags into a taxi. She sneaks into the apartment the woman is leaving, and lies down to sleep under the kitchen table. Two detectives investigate the scene of the accident and come to the conclusion that someone is missing.

Dan (Patrick Fischler) and Herb (Michael Cook) sit in Winkie's diner. Dan tells Herb about a nightmare that he had about that particular Winkie's and the man who lives behind it. The two men walk around back to take a look. As they get to the corner, the monster appears and Dan falls to the ground and dies.

Meanwhile, Betty Elms (Naomi Watts) arrives at the Los Angeles airport. Her travel companions, an elderly couple, wish her luck in Hollywood. She takes a taxi to the apartment the woman from the limo has fallen asleep at, while the couple gets in a limo and begins to laugh maniacally. Betty, whose aunt is letting her use the apartment while she is away filming a movie, meets the landlord, Coco Lenoix (Ann Miller). While she is looking around the apartment, Betty goes into the bathroom and realizes that there is a woman taking a shower. The woman finishes, sees a poster with Rita Hayworth on it, and tells Betty that her name is Rita and that she had been in an accident. Betty, who assumes that her aunt let the Rita stay in the apartment, lets Rita lay down and go to sleep. While Rita sleeps, Betty talks to her Aunt Ruth on the phone, who tells her that she doesn't know anyone named Rita. Betty confronts Rita about this, and she confesses that she doesn't know who she is. The women look through Rita's purse and find a large amount of money, as well as a mysterious blue key.

Director Adam Keshner (Justin Theroux) meets with his agent and the Castigliane brothers, who want him to cast Camilla Rhodes as the lead actress in his new film. Adam refuses and walks out. As he drives home, he talks to his assistant Camilla, who tells him that everyone working on the production was fired. When Adam gets to his house, he walks inside and finds his wife Lorraine (Lori Loughlin) in bed with Gene, the pool man (Billy Ray Cyrus). In retaliation, he soaks her jewelry in pink paint, but Gene ends up punching him and throwing him out of the house. Adam goes to Cookie's to spend the night, while a man from the mafia shows up at his house looking for him to find only Lorraine and Gene. Adam discovers that he has no money and calls Cynthia to find out what is going on. She tells him someone named the Cowboy would like to set up a meeting with him that night, which he agrees to. At the meeting, the Cowboy tells Adam that he must cast Camilla Rhodes in his film if he wants to regain control of his film.

In an old office building, Joe, a hit man (Mark Pellegrino), talks to an old acquaintance and then shoots him in order to acquire a black book. He attempts to set the murder up as a suicide, but accidentally shoots a woman in the next room. He goes over there, proceeds to drag her in the room and kill her. The janitor comes over there, and Joe shoots him as well. The alarms begin to go off in the building, and Joe escapes through the window.

Betty and Rita go to a pay phone and Betty calls to inquire about an accident on Mulholland Drive. The two have coffee at Winkie's, and the server's name tag sparks Rita's memory. She remembers the name Diane Selwyn, which Betty then looks up in the phone book. There is no answer, but the women make plans to go visit whoever lives at the apartment after Betty's audition the following day. That night, Louise Bonner, one of the residents of the apartment complex shows up at Betty's door, looking for her Aunt Ruth and telling her that she senses trouble. Coco comes by shortly thereafter to deliver Betty's lines for her and escorts Louise away. The next morning, Betty and Rita practice for the audition. Coco, who has since spoken with Aunt Ruth, tells Betty to get rid of any trouble. Betty goes to her audition and impresses everyone. One of the casting agents there decides to take Betty to Adam's set for his story. While Betty stands there, Camilla Rhodes auditions, and Adam says "this is the girl." Betty looks at the time, tells the casting agents that she has to leave because she promised a friend and walks out.

Betty and Rita go to Diane's apartment and knock on the door. A woman answers and tells them that Diane is in a different building because they switched. Betty and Rita go over there, but receive no answer, so Betty pushes one of the windows up and unlocks the door from the inside. They find Diane's decaying body on her bed and run outside. Back at Betty's apartment, Rita begins to cut her hair and makes a blonde wig for herself. Betty tells Rita that she doesn't have to sleep on the couch, but can share the bed with her. The two women make love and fall asleep together. In the middle of the night, Rita



begins chanting “silencio” in her sleep. Betty wakes her up, and Rita asks her to go somewhere with her. They go to Club Silencio where they listen to a man tell them that everything they will see is an illusion. They watch the performance of Spanish singer Rebekah del Rio and begin to cry as they listen. Betty opens her purse and finds a blue box in it. The two women hurry back to the apartment to take out the blue key and find out what is in the box. Rita takes out her purse and when she can’t find Betty, inserts the key into the lock. The box opens, and falls on the ground.

Aunt Ruth walks into her spotless apartment and looks around. In Diane’s apartment, as she lies on her bed in the same position that Betty and Rita found her body, the Cowboy opens the door and tells her it is time to wake up. As someone persistently knocks on the door, Diane gets up and walks to open it. It is the neighbor that she switched buildings with, there to pick up her things. After she leaves, Diane makes coffee in her kitchen and sees Rita, but calls her Camilla. Camilla vanishes, and Diane then walks to the couch. In the next scene, Camilla is lying on the couch topless. Diane gets on top of her and kisses her, but Camilla tells her that they have to end their affair. At a different time, Camilla is on a movie set with Adam, who is showing the young, male actor how to play the scene. As Diane, who is an extra, watches, Adam and Camilla kiss. Camilla comes to Diane’s apartment, but Diane yells at her and slams the door in her face. Diane masturbates on her couch. Some time later, Camilla calls Diane and tells her the car is outside waiting. A limo takes Diane up Mulholland Drive. It stops in the middle of the road and the driver tells Diane that there is a surprise. Camilla emerges from the trees and leads Diane up a secret path to Adam’s house, where he is hosting a dinner party. Adam’s mother, who looks exactly like Coco, greets them with impatience. Camilla immediately begins ignoring Diane once they get there and kisses the Camilla from Adam’s audition in front of her. Camilla and Adam are about to announce their engagement, but can’t stop laughing, while Diane looks on in tears.

Diane sits across the table from Joe at Winkie’s to set up a hit on Camilla. They are served by a waitress named Betty, and Diane sees Dan at the counter. Joe shows her a blue key and tells her that she will find it once the hit is completed. The monster behind Winkie’s holds the blue box, and the elderly couple climbs out. Diane sits on her couch and stares at the blue key sitting on the coffee table. Someone bangs on Diane’s door, and the elderly couple crawls under the door, grows to human size and chases her through the apartment. She screams, runs into her bedroom, takes out a gun and shoots herself, lying in her original position on the bed. Back at an empty Club Silencio, a woman with blue hair whispers “silencio.”

### *Inland Empire*

A record player broadcasts a radio show in the Baltic region. An unidentified man and woman with blurred faces walk down a Polish hotel hallway and into a room. The woman, who is a Polish prostitute, does not recognize the location and is scared. After the man leaves, she sits on the bed crying and watching television. Several rabbits are on a set consisting of a kitchen and a couch, engaging in strange dialogue. One of them leaves the room and walks into what seems to be a hotel lobby. The lights fade and when they brighten again, two Polish men are talking. One of them says he is looking for an opening.

An older woman (Grace Zabriskie) walks up a driveway and rings the doorbell of a house. The butler answers and the woman tells him that she is going around meeting her new neighbors. Nikki Grace (Laura Dern) invites the woman in for coffee. The woman asks Laura, who is an actress, about a role she is up for in a new film. The neighbor tells Laura two old tales about evil being born and talks of forgetfulness. She also predicts that Laura will get the role and that there is a murder in the story. The next day, Laura gets a call from her agent telling her that she got the role. Her Polish husband Piotrek Krol (Peter Lucas) watches her celebration ominously from the stairs. Nikki then meets with the film’s director, Kingsley Stewart (Jeremy Irons), her co-star Devon Berk (Justin Theroux) as well as the other people involved in making the film. Nikki and Devon appear on the Marilyn Levens Show, where their host (Diane Ladd) asks them if they will engage in an affair, something they both deny. Soon thereafter,

the co-stars meet with Kingsley and his assistant Freddie on the film's set to practice lines. They are interrupted when Freddie sees someone disturbing the set. Devon goes to investigate, but finds no one. Kingsley then reveals that the film, *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, is actually a remake of *47*, a film based on a Polish folk tale that was supposedly cursed and never finished because the two leads were murdered.

A woman sits in a police station and tells the officer that she is going to murder someone because she has been hypnotized. She does not know who it will be yet, but she will do it with a screwdriver. Meanwhile, production begins on *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, and Nikki's husband warns Devon away from her. As they continue to play the parts of Billy Side and Susan Blue, Nikki and Devon begin an affair, similarly to their characters. Nikki begins to confuse film and reality as she tells Devon that she thinks her husband knows about the affair and will kill them, though she is supposed to be playing the part of Susan. Her reality becomes more intertwined with that of the film's narrative during a lovemaking scene with Billy, during which Devon keeps calling her Sue. In another scene, Nikki is walking with groceries down a back alley, when she sees a doorway and walks inside. This back doorway leads inside to the set for *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, and Nikki sees herself practicing lines with Devon. As she sees Devon to come investigate the disturbance that they had heard, she runs away and hides in Smithy's house on set. Devon cannot find her, and Susan walks around the house. She enters a room and finds a group of prostitutes, who tell her that in the future she will be dreaming. Susan opens her eyes to find herself on an old Polish street. The prostitutes ask her if she wants to see, and the Lost Girl in the hotel room tells her that she has to use a cigarette to burn a hole through silk in order to do so. Susan then goes to sleep and makes breakfast. Sometime later, she follows the Lost Girl's instructions to see and once again finds herself on a Polish street. A man (the Phantom) beats up the Polish girl, while a man walks out on an argument with his wife to meet someone else. The man waits on the street, but no one ever shows up. The Lost Girl watches the events occurring on her television screen.

A man sits in a run-down office at the top of a stairwell, and Nikki goes to see him. She begins to tell him stories about her life, including an attempted rape when she was young. Suddenly, she is sitting in the living room of Smithy's house with the group of prostitutes. They talk about her ended relationship, expressing conflicting opinions about whether they thought it would last. The prostitutes then break out into a choreographed dance to "The Loco-motion," after which they vanish. Susan is then eating dinner with her husband and tells him that she is pregnant. He does not seem happy about the news, and that night, Susan sneaks out of bed to try to call Billy. When the phone rings though, it rings on the set with the rabbits. The scene then returns to Susan talking to the man at the top of the stairs. She tells him about a boyfriend trying to beat her up because of suspected affairs, and of a man who lived in a town with a chemical plant. Susan is then suddenly in a backyard in contemporary Poland having a cookout with her husband. An assortment of people arrives and her husband reveals that they are a traveling circus and have asked him to be a caretaker for the animals. Meanwhile, in historic Poland, a woman prays, and the prostitutes ask "who is she?" A woman lies dead in the street, and the Polish girl is walking and runs into the Phantom, who tells her about the murder of someone she knows. It is the man who was waiting in the street during the earlier scene. Susan continues talking to the man about the people at the circus. On a different night, Susan drives to Billy's mansion and finds his wife, Doris (Julia Ormond), at home as well. She tells Billy that she loves him, and Doris slaps her repeatedly. In the meantime, Susan's husband goes looking for someone, but is told that whoever it was, left, and only said something about *Inland Empire*. Susan receives a visit from a woman who tells her about a man named Crimp. Susan goes to see him, is frightened and runs away with a screwdriver. In Poland, Susan's husband walks into a room where a group of men and a girl sit at a table. He, however, cannot see the girl. He is instructed to take a gun and leave.

Susan is now on Hollywood Boulevard, but she also sees herself on the other side of the street with the group of prostitutes, while Doris follows her to try to kill her. The scene shifts to prostitutes on a Polish street, then back to Hollywood again as Susan runs away and goes inside a club to try to hide. A woman shows her out the back way, and Susan walks up the stairs to talk to the man in the office. She tells him of her husband, who said he wasn't who she thought he was. She also talks about her confusion after her son died. When the man gets up to answer a phone call, Susan leaves. She winds up back on

Hollywood Boulevard with the prostitutes, until Doris comes up and stabs her with the screwdriver, and they all run away. Susan runs until the corner of Hollywood and Vine, where she lies down between some homeless people and eventually dies.

A camera then comes into view and Kingsley yells “cut.” The actors playing the homeless people stand off and walk off set. Nikki slowly gets up as well, and as Kingsley calls for a round of applause for her performance, walks away. She does not respond to his praise and goes outside. She walks across into another set and sees *On High in Blue Tomorrows* being screened in a theater space. She sees a man walk up a set of stairs and follows. After making her way through several dark hallways, she finds herself in Smithy’s house, where she gets a gun from a dresser drawer. As she walks around, Nikki comes face to face with the Phantom and shoots him multiple times. She then enters a door labeled 47 and finds herself on the set that the rabbits have been occupying. As she stands in front of a microphone, the Lost Girl watches on the television. Suddenly the television screen mirrors the girl’s room, and Nikki walks in. The two kiss and embrace, Nikki disappears and the girl runs out of the room. She runs down the hallways, downstairs and into Smithy’s house, where she is reunited with her husband and son. Nikki stands on the stage and then is sitting alone on the couch in her living room.