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***Authorship and the Films of David Lynch: Aesthetic Receptions in Contemporary Hollywood*. Antony Todd. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012 (224 pages). ISBN: 9781848855809.**

A Review by Deborah Mellamphy, University College Cork

The death of Andrew Sarris in 2012 resurrected debates surrounding the importance and role of authorship in contemporary film theory and, despite the growth of industry studies and the dominance of poststructuralism and postmodern theory in recent years, the popularity of auteur studies continues to grow. The inherent reductionism of the auteur approach has justifiably led to the rejection of the strictly romantic ideal of the author genius and a revision of the auteur's image and role, yet the auteur continues to be relevant within contemporary film production and culture. Recent studies including Lucy Fischer's *Body Double: The Author Incarnate in the Cinema* (2012), Arved Ashby's *Popular Music and the New Auteur: Visionary Filmmakers After MTV* (2013), and Cecilia Sayad's *Performing Authorship: Self-Inscription and Corporeality in the Cinema* (2013) illustrate the continuing scholarly significance of auteur debates within contemporary cinema and media.

Discussions on David Lynch as auteur are not new. Since the release of *Eraserhead* (1976), scholars have considered his highly idiosyncratic cinema in terms of auteur theories. Erica Sheen and Annette Davison's *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions* (2004), Todd McGowan's *The Impossible David Lynch* (2007), and Justus Nieland's *David Lynch* (2012) have all focused on the director's personal vision. Antony Todd locates his study, *Authorship and the Films of David Lynch: Aesthetic Receptions in Contemporary Hollywood*, within a paradigm that acknowledges the limitations of the romanticised view both of the auteur, and of Lynch, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the importance of the figure. He establishes from the beginning that, in order to discuss the contemporary auteur fully, "it will be necessary to think outside these limiting categories and to see Lynch's films not as essentially 'Lynchian' (although they may often be read this way), but as auteurist and generic amalgamations that are presented to us by the industry and the critic, not in some harmonious marriage of textual fixity, but as contradictory sign carriers" (6), thus acknowledging the complexity of the figure.

It is refreshing to read a study of Lynch that is not bogged down by discussions of dream logic, Freudian theory and psychosexual textual readings, and instead focuses on Lynch's persona within a postclassical Hollywood context. The wealth of material on the career and films of David Lynch makes it difficult to find original scholarship on the director, but Todd has achieved this by considering and contributing to contemporary reception studies. Todd's study concentrates on the extratextual elements of auteurism, on the creation, development and use of Lynch's persona, and on how audiences interact with and interpret it. In this task, Todd discusses Lynch's "name" and reputation within press and promotional material and grounds his discussion in Timothy Corrigan's reading, in his *A Cinema Without*

Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam, of the contemporary auteur persona as a "commercial performance" (103). Todd examines Lynch's auteur persona within the publicity material surrounding his films, discussing the significance of the director's authorship and star persona to the production, reception and enduring legacy of Lynch's films. Thus, this is a vital and opportune contribution to scholarship on Lynch, on the contemporary auteur function and on current reception studies. Todd focuses his study on the construction of Lynch as a marketable auteur in a postclassical context. Thus, he examines the very contradictions and paradoxes inherent to filmmaking, within a system that dictates that "the auteur is not there to be unearthed by an intellectual elite, but is nowadays prominently and publicly mediated in the promotion and critical reception of films", illustrating the awareness and popularity of the figure today (5).

Todd's is a complex book that brings together a wide range of reception theories, including humanist and generic theories. He borrows from the contextual model used by Barbara Klinger in *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*, in which Klinger explains that a departure "from the idea that works alone reveal the genius of their authors … helps us grasp the dialogic function between artistic reputations and history—the dynamic circumstances under which an author's status and the status of her or his works are established, sustained, transformed, unappreciated, or even vilified" (7). In this task, Todd understands the importance of the author biography in the establishment of legends and myths surrounding the creative individual and takes into consideration the public function of Lynch's biographical legend, an author function used by David Bordwell in *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*. Todd examines what constitutes Lynch's biographical legend or mythology; like his films, Todd acknowledges that Lynch's "legend" and persona is built on a juxtaposition of "a childlike and personable Pacific North-Western conventionalism coupled with an interest in themes of a psychosexual and surreal nature", thus equating Lynch with his films (15). Todd also uses Janet Staiger's "authorship as origin" approach, an idea proposed in the preface to Staiger's *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*. Staiger argues that "contextual factors rather than textual materials or reader psychologies as most important in illuminating the reader process in interpretation" (xi–xiv). In the interaction between audience and author, Todd usefully locates the audience within a social and historical context by discussing two closely related levels of expectation: the level of expectation in general for the auteur film, as well as the more specific level of expectation for a Lynch film. Both levels are significant in a contemporary media saturated context.

Having established his theoretical framework, the book is more or less organised chronologically to track the progression of Lynch's oeuvre and persona. He breaks this linearity in his discussion of the politics of *Dune* (1984) to illustrate that, even when a filmmaker does not act as the auteur of a work, the film can still be examined as part of their larger canon. In each case, Todd addresses Lynch's relationship with mainstream Hollywood cinema and the commercial considerations of each film. Todd begins his study by tracing how Lynch found his auteurist niche *within* the postclassical system, rather than outside it, thus contradicting the typical perception of the director's films. Long considered the cornerstone of "New American Cinema"/arthouse avant garde, Todd discusses the ways in which *Eraserhead* opposes the political impetus behind the movement. *Eraserhead* was marketed as a film by a challenging director, establishing the tenets of what would later become known as a Lynchian film. Yet, Todd reveals that the film was partly funded by AFI grants, amongst other sources, and was shot in abandoned buildings owned by the AFI, thus illustrating how Lynch was directly supported by the Hollywood system since the beginning

of his career, despite his image as a dogmatically independent director who is opposed to the Hollywood system. Regardless of this support, promotional material involving the cast and crew testified that the film was a truly independent venture. Todd also establishes that Lynch was immediately identifiable as an auteur from his debut and examines the publicity surrounding the film's run as a midnight movie and a staple of the New American Cinema movement.

After establishing Lynch as a filmmaker of the weird and absurd, Todd turns to a discussion of *Dune*. Todd explains that *Dune* is still not considered a Lynch film as it was marketed as a genre and event film rather than as a personal film. Based on Frank Herbert's best-selling novel, adapted by Lynch himself along with Herbert, *Dune* compromised Lynch's agency as the original book contains strong auteurial presence. This was also the only of Lynch's films for which he did not maintain the right to final cut, making it his most collaborative work, with a strong divestiture of auteurial control. At the time of its release, Lynch was still not well known, despite the critical success of his previous work, *The Elephant Man* (1980), another film that nullified his auteurism as it was marketed as a human-interest story rather than as an auteur film, very different to *Eraserhead*. Todd argues that, despite its reputation as an event film and as one of the handful of films to use the infamous Allen Smithee pseudonym rather than Lynch's name, *Dune* presents a rich study of authorship. Todd uses the "personality of the text" approach that is possible when looking retrospectively at *Dune* from the perspective of Lynch as auteur (57).

In the next chapter, Todd turns to a discussion of *Blue Velvet* (1986), which, due to its purportedly personal nature, marked a continuation of the use of Lynch's name and reputation in the film's marketing. It was only with this film, Lynch's fourth, that the director fully emerged as an auteur. In this chapter, Todd does address dream logic from a philosophical perspective, arguing that this gendered approach accepts an auteurial presence, even if it is ethereal. He points out the difficulty of interpreting a film from a gender-neutral perspective and argues against Fredric Jameson's reading of the film as a pivotal example of an authorless piece of popular culture, instead turning to feminist readings of the film which, Todd argues, rely on the idea of an individual author. In terms of advertising strategy, Todd also examines promotional material which associated Lynch's image with Kyle McLaughlin, who was made into his alter ego, thus signifying an important marriage of director and star.

Chapter Five, "*Twin Peaks*: The Rise and Fall of a Public Auteur", is perhaps the most notable chapter considering the importance of TV auteurs today including Vince Gilligan, David Chase, and Alan Ball. The TV show, which originally aired on ABC from 1990–1991, marked what is arguably the pinnacle of Lynch's critical standing due to the pioneering nature of the show and its marketing, which proposed it as a distinctly Lynchian product. Lynch was arguably the first TV auteur, thus demonstrating that theories of authorship also stretched to the TV arena, at a critical juncture when TV was moving away from being simply populist and was being recognised for its artistry. Thus the importance of *Twin Peaks* lies in its challenge of perceptions of primetime TV, and in its presentation of new textual horizons and possibilities, as well as the expectations that fans of Lynch's films brought to his TV work. Significantly, *Twin Peaks* was sold and marketed as a Lynch product for a niche TV market, thus acknowledging his idiosyncratic auteurial signature. In this case, the niche market was the thirty-something yuppie interested in arthouse cinema, marking a "cultural turning point" (98). This chapter also addresses the wildly different reactions to *Twin Peaks* and *Wild at Heart* (1990), which were released concurrently (102). It was with the release of *Wild at Heart* that the critical tide turned against Lynch, also apparent with the

release of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992). By this time, Lynch had become a veritable, distinctive brand and a defined commodity for a certain audience and the release of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* was widely considered a pursuit of profit rather than a personal statement.

There are plenty of reminders throughout Lynch's career of the commodity-driven aspect of the industry. Chapter Six, "Brand Lynch", examines the advertising campaigns designed by Lynch at the end of the 1980s, thus acknowledging that his established audience was also a distinguished target. Todd questions whether it is acceptable for an auteur to work on commercials, thus acknowledging and directly addressing the commercial and commodity-driven aspect of the media, particularly in relation to paradigmatic readers. Todd draws parallels between Lynch's name being used as the auteur of cinema, television and in commercials to illustrate that auteurism is primarily driven by commercialisation, an important and still neglected aspect of the author function. This chapter also addresses *Lost Highway* (1997), what had become the then typical Lynchian text which confounded audiences and was deemed overly pretentious, as well as *The Straight Story* (1999), which failed because it did not conform to expectations of what constitutes "Lynchian".

The most detailed section of the book outlines the differences between the U.S. and European trailers and advertising campaigns for the release of *Mulholland Drive* (2001). In this section, Todd closely analyses the differences between the strategies, arguing that the European approach featured more overtly sexual imagery, whilst the American approach emphasised the film's noir-inspired plot, thus illustrating the industry-driven commercial needs of advertising, which Lynch was instrumental in.

Throughout the book, Todd explores Lynch as the ruling agency in his films, whilst also acknowledging the collaborative nature of filmmaking, arguing that Lynch exemplifies the freedom and hybridity of the postclassical auteur in terms of theme, aesthetic, structure, and form. Considering this, it is a shame that *INLAND EMPIRE* (2006) was not analysed in more detail. It is mentioned and analysed briefly, but as Lynch's arguably most confounding and idiosyncratic film, due to its inscrutable play with structure, pace, technology and performance, I would have expected a much more detailed discussion. Overall, the book will be of obvious interest to Lynch scholars and fans, yet it also presents interesting and convincing arguments on the status of the auteur within contemporary culture and filmmaking.

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Deborah Mellamphy completed her PhD at University College Cork in 2010 with a thesis titled *Hollyweird: Gender Transgression in the Collaborations of Tim Burton and Johnny Depp*. She has published articles in *Widescreen* and *Film and Film Culture*, as well as book chapters in *Dexter and Philosophy* and in *Mamma Mia! The Movie: Exploring a Cultural Phenomenon*. Her research interests include stardom and performance in Hollywood cinema, television studies, and video game studies.