

## Meanings and authorships in *Dune*

**Tony Todd**

University of the Arts London, London College of Communication

*Dune*, released in 1984 and directed by David Lynch, from his own adapted screenplay of Frank Herbert's epic science-fiction novel, provides a rich example for a reception study on ideas of authorship. On the one hand, Herbert's 1960s cult bestseller has evolved into a franchise and is thus regarded by *Dune* enthusiasts as a sacrosanct text. From a Lynch perspective, though, the film is usually seen as his least personal work – an event movie no less – and as such it holds the rank of the most uncared for text in his filmic canon. It is the goal of this paper to analyse *Dune's* meanings in relation to critical writings founded upon the tenets of early auteurism so we might explore its function as a reception preference for the predisposed reader. But rather than simply dismiss auteurism as humanist idealism (as has been the habit with historical assessments of authors), the outcome of this paper seeks to also take account of the writing pleasures the author might bring to the interpretation of filmed texts.

The late 1960s witnessed the Franco-philosophical interventions of structuralism and post-structuralism both of which had repercussions for auteurism. On the one hand, the idea of the author genius came to be viewed in terms of a mythical romanticism and the auteur theory, as Robert C. Allen put it,

68

'merely bolstered the historiographic notion that film history was to be studied as a succession of texts' (Allen 1998, 13). Through Roland Barthes's call for the death of the author, meanwhile, hermeneutic rights passed from producer to reader. As a consequence a succession of revised auteurisms emerged over the years all of which wrestled with early auteurism's romantic conundrums.

But the evolution of auteurism through more empirical territories should not cloud the fact that the textual fetishism associated with early auteurism remains the dominant public channel by which the poetic filmed text has come to be enjoyed and understood. Seen, then, as a formulaic literary adaptation, *Dune* is the Lynch film that is perceived as least 'Lynchian' and has thus proved most problematic for Lynch's biographers. Martha P. Nochimson summed up this feeling in her book *The Passion of David Lynch, Wild at Heart in Hollywood* when she wrote that '*Dune* is the only Lynch film about which there is valid general agreement that it doesn't work' (Nochimson 1999, 123).

On its theatrical release *Dune* was not promoted, nor widely read, as 'a Film by David Lynch'. His emergence in the promotion and reception of his films only properly occurs through the release of *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986), written and directed by Lynch sequentially following *Dune* (and for the same production company, DEG). This fact points to the historically transient and volatile nature of meanings, since in retrospective promotions and readings (that now tie in Lynch's name), the creative sources in *Dune* are often disputed and expectations for the film potentially muddled. *Dune* is all the more interesting in this respect since there also exist different versions of the film: the theatrical version and an extended, 'more coherent', version produced for domestic exhibition. While the theatrical version came to appear on video and DVD formats as 'David Lynch's Stunning Sci-Fi Spectacular', the extended 'Special TV Edition' conceals Lynch's name on its sleeve altogether. In the credits for the latter, indeed, Lynch's name as director and screenwriter is replaced respectively by the pseudonyms Allen Smithee and Judas Booth<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In their essay 'The Specter of Illegitimacy', Jeremy Braddock and Stephen Hock suggest that Allen Smithee 'became the pseudonym set aside by the Directors Guild of America for those directors who feel – or more importantly, can prove to the Guild's satisfaction –

It was under the direction of structuralism and its focus on the structuring of language that the author came to be viewed as ideologically constituted agent. The myth of artistic genius – that which imbues the artist with powers of celestial inspiration – was rejected on the understanding that an individual could not transcend the structures of language. The artistic genius was thus viewed as a structured edifice of market forces. Barthes and Foucault were key influences in rethinking the author and where she or he stood in relation to interpretations of the text. Foucault saw authors as serving institutional interests through their classifying function, which, by means of such devices as the author biography, the critic could help control a text's meaning (Foucault 1979, 141). Barthes was more immediately concerned with the act of reading, of course, and proposed that the text needed to be understood as more than 'a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author God)'. For him the text should be seen as a 'multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash'. And with particular reference to the relationship between the author and the critic, Barthes contended that the critic allots him or her self 'the important task of discovering the Author...beneath the work [and] when the Author has been found, the text is "explained" – victory to the critic' (Barthes 1977, 147).

I want to pursue the theme of the author function firstly in terms of how transcripts of authorial intent might function in the act of interpreting Frank Herbert's *Dune*, first published in the US in 1965. J. A. Sutherland situates the novel - with other 'million -sellers' such as *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) - within the context of a 'new mass-readership' for 'cult' science fiction (Sutherland 1979, 162). Indeed, such has been the *Dune* saga's fan base that up until his death in 1986, Herbert had published five pre/sequels: *Dune Messiah* (1969), *Children of Dune* (1976), *God Emperor of Dune* (1981), *Heretics of Dune* (1984) and *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1985). In due course the novels prompted associated media and ephemera – including, of

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that their films have been taken out of their control' (Braddock and Hock 2001, 9). They make no reference to Judas Booth although it's reasonable to assume it served a similar function here with regard to screenwriting credits.

course, the filmed adaptation of the first novel in 1984 – all geared towards building upon the continuing *Dune* franchise.

Set in the year 10191, across four distant planets, *Dune's* narrative is, at its most rudimentary, the tale of feuding monarchies contesting the control of a desert planet (Arrakis/Dune), which is the most important planet in the known universe since its sand produces a spice that is able to extend life, fold space and expand consciousness. In respect of its generic make-up, *Dune* is seen as something of a modern hybrid. On the one hand, the novel conforms to what Robert Scholes refers to as 'hard-nosed' science fiction through its themes of technical exploration (Scholes 1997, 169) while Adam Roberts spoke of *Dune's* 'groundedness in a medieval literature and film' that incorporates an 'almost medieval technological non-sophistication' (Adams 2000, 36-46). But for all its alignment with medieval and classical themes, *Dune* has been commonly discussed as a modernist text since, as Joseph M. Lenz has suggested, its narrative seemed to pose 'a virtually infinite set of questions' (Lenz 1983, 47).

As an authored work *Dune's* symbolic multiplicity has been read through Herbert's stated alignment with the ideological concerns of the 1960s American counter culture movement. Meaning is channelled, for instance, through *Dune's* concerns with ecology and the effects of hallucinogenic drugs. Herbert had become concerned with how humankind 'inflicted itself upon the planet'. These ideas are manifest in the environmental design of the novel's four planets and particularly in the desert planet Arrakis. The properties of the melange extracted from the sand, meanwhile, are given meaning here, not only through the analogous context of 1960s counterculture and the widespread use of hallucinogenic drugs, but in Herbert's anti-capitalist affiliations: Drugs, Herbert believed, only 'enable people to endure an otherwise intolerable existence' and so 'remain on the production/consumption treadmill' (Herbert 1987, 106).

It is, though, through Herbert's mystical interests and influences that *Dune* begins to invite compound readings. Herbert signalled his intent in producing a polysemic novel when he stated the following:

In studying sand dunes, you immediately get into not just Arabian mystique but the Navaho mystique and the mystique of the Kalahari primitives and all [...] I [found through research] fresh nuances, things in religions, in psychoanalytic theories, in linguistics, economics, philosophy, in theories of history, geology, anthropology, plant research, soil chemistry, in the metalanguages or pheromones. A new field of study rises out of this like a spirit rising from a witch's caldron: *the psychology of planetary societies* [...] Now we have stories with which we go on after we finish reading them. I deliberately did this with *Dune*. (Herbert 1987, 106)

But while *Dune* is often read as a distinctive, polysemic, work of literature, this is not in any radical structural sense. By way of contrast, Lynch is an author who regards himself, and is usually regarded, as an artist freed from the structural constraints of history and language (although he does not repudiate narrative out of hand).

After a decade of protracted pre-production negotiations (see Pourroy and Shay 'The Shape of *Dune*' 1985, for instance) Dino De Laurentiis renegotiated Herbert's contract on the rights to *Dune* and its sequels (written and unwritten). Pre-production commenced in earnest on the first filmed version of *Dune* in June 1981 when the film's producer, Rafaella De Laurentiis (daughter of Dino), secured the services of Lynch as director and screenwriter.

Lynch had originally collaborated on a screenplay for *Dune* with Eric Bergen and Christopher de Vore (he had worked previously with both men on the script for *The Elephant Man* [David Lynch, 1980]). According to Lynch, however, De Laurentiis had been unhappy with the direction of the writing since it deviated too much from the source novel. As a compromise, De Laurentiis allowed Lynch to take on screenplay credits for himself on the proviso that he worked in consultation with Herbert (although Herbert is not credited on *Dune* other than 'based on the novel by...').

In *Lynch on Lynch*, *Dune* is presented (as it is in all of his biographies) as the film that Lynch finds least satisfying since he sees it as a project in which his individualism was most compromised. He tells Chris Rodley how before agreeing to work on *Dune*, he had turned down an offer from George Lucas to direct *Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1984) on the grounds that he

'never really liked science fiction' and that '*Star Wars* was totally George's thing'. His rationale for working on *Dune* was that he was drawn to the novel's textures: '*Dune* was different; it has believable characterizations and depth. In many ways, Herbert had created an *internal* adventure, one with a lot of emotional and physical textures' (Rodley 1997, 113-114).

Despite this initial optimism, however, Lynch proceeds to bemoan the creative constraints placed upon him by the film's producers and, by proxy, its financial backers. These include the insistence that *Dune* be given a PG certificate thereby broadening the film's potential for box office returns (of which Lynch says, 'You can think of some strange things to do but as soon as they throw in a PG, a lot of them go out of the window' [Rodley 1997, 115]) and the imposition of a maximum duration of two hours and seventeen minutes. This point is particularly pertinent since not only did Lynch object to the 'butchering' of the filmed material, critical receptions of the film often cite a compacted narrative, and a subsequent lack of narrative cohesion, as the film's key flaw. But Lynch's more general disquiet with *Dune* is summarised thus:

I didn't really feel I really had permission to make it [*Dune*] my own. That was the downfall for me. It was a problem. *Dune* was like a kind of studio film. I didn't have final cut. And, little by little, I was subconsciously making compromises – knowing I couldn't go here and not wanting to go there. (Rodley 1997, 119-120)

Nonetheless, Lynch discusses elements of the film in which he did impose his signature. These refer almost exclusively to the look of *Dune*. But the assumption that a director does (at very least) exert total control over the film's *mise en scène* is undermined in this instance. With reference to *Dune's* set and costume design, for instance, Lynch speaks of wishing he had been able to go further with 'factories and rubber and some industry [...], instead of long, flowing robes and that medieval sort of feel' (Rodley 1997, 116). Likewise, although it was mandated that *Dune* be shot in colour, Lynch wanted to desaturate the colour against the wishes of *Dune's* producers. The path of compromise is aptly illustrated in a separate interview in the trade journal *American Cinematographer* with *Dune's* cinematographer, Freddie Francis, who

observed that, 'We've gone very low in key for color, sometimes hardly as low as David would *like* to go, but one has to think of other people who have to sell the film' [Mandell 1984, 50]). For all this, though, *Dune* was pre-sold as a new departure for the science-fiction event film.

In the wake of *Dune's* commercial and critical failure, much has been written on the choice of Lynch as director. With only two features to his name, there was a degree of consensus that deemed Lynch ill-equipped to creatively orchestrate an event picture. Yet according to pre-publicity, *Dune's* producers had chosen to think of the film in terms of a new variation for the genre. In discussion with Chris Auty at a lecture given at the National Film Theatre coinciding with the film's UK release, Raffaella De Laurentiis articulated the production team's ambitions as follows,

I'm not saying everybody, but almost everybody can do special effects [...] We wanted a stranger; different movie that would take you places. People said the \$40M [budget] was not the gamble but David Lynch [...] What makes *Dune* a great picture? I am very proud [...] we did a very special movie; a very different movie. I think it is going to be very controversial because it is not a conventional movie [...] I think I've done something new for the industry.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these progressive claims, it seems that the decision to hire Lynch was not based upon the perceived idiosyncrasies of a director who worked against the restraints of genre ('The most original horror film ever made' to quote the promotional jargon for Lynch's first feature, the surrealistic nightmare, *Eraserhead* [David Lynch, 1976]). It was Lynch's involvement with the classically structured *Elephant Man* (and no doubt its recognition amongst the Academy through eight Academy Award nominations including best director) that drew De Laurentiis to Lynch. It was not, then, the perception of Lynch as an artist so much as an artisan that made him an appealing choice for the film's producers. This line of argument is supported in declarations made in the same interview in which Raffaella states that, 'I was very moved by *The Elephant Man*. But more

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<sup>2</sup> This lecture is not commercially available. A videotaped copy of the interview between Auty, Lynch and De Laurentiis is held at the National Film and Television Archive in London. It is catalogued under David Lynch/*Dune* as 'The Guardian Critic Lecture', National Film Theatre, (23 January 1985).

importantly, I knew that I'd found the right director for *Dune*. *The Elephant Man* proved that David could handle both character and special effects, and that was the kind of mixture I wanted to include in *Dune*'. And, asked by Auty if she'd seen *Eraserhead*, Raffaella insisted (laughing) that she only saw the film after she had begun working with Lynch, while claiming that she didn't 'know what [she] would have done if [she'd] seen it before' (ibid.). These declarations begin to reveal a number of interesting inconsistencies that arise through the film's publicity and marketing and how the identification of a creative source will differ according to its marketing and publicity contexts.

There exists a knotty critical correlation between the auteur and generic production since the general assumption is that the former should be distinctive and the latter merely repetitive. Such a proposition is far too simplistic. Still, generally speaking, the auteur picture has been perceived historically as one that re-moulds, or works against, generic conventions and as such the auteur picture is dependant upon a shared understanding between producer and receiver of what those conventions are. Under such circumstances it is important to establish how *Dune* has been promoted as a generic text. This is of wider significance, too, since it will inform on the relationship between the promotion and reception of Lynch's *Dune*.

It is largely with respect to *Dune*'s mise en scène that the film has been publicised and read publicly as marking a departure for the contemporary science fiction blockbuster since, in some respects, it resists the polished technological look associated with the contemporary *Star Wars* cycle. Gary K. Wolfe argues that *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), like *Dune* and a broader tendency in science fiction, 'attempts to resolve the opposition of self and environment' by means of what he terms 'autoplastic and alloplastic fantasies'. Under the former category the films are similar since the autoplastic dimension of *Star Wars* is manifest in its desert, ice and jungle planets 'where the rebels live and are forced to adapt themselves to unpromising environments' and in the fact that the 'ancient Yoda survives by drawing on an inner power called "The Force"' (Wolfe 1983, 67).

It is more in an alloplastic sense - 'completely remaking environments to meet cultural needs' - that *Dune* differs from *Star Wars*. As Wolfe says, 'the villainous Empire is consistently associated with alloplastic adaptations – huge spaceships, superweapons, even an entirely artificial planet called the "Death Star"' (Wolfe 1983, 69). It is, for instance, through the polished white interior and high key lighting of the Death Star, the white plastic armour worn by the Storm troopers, the film's technological nova and the glut of state of the art special effects that contrast with the moody, medieval and industrial worlds of *Dune*.

The connection between *Dune* and *Star Wars* isn't by any means arbitrary since it is clear that in a generic sense *Dune* was a text that embodied many of the proven commercial formulas of the *Star Wars* cycle. Yet generic production is fundamentally nebulous: it is dependent upon a fine tension between innovation and repetition. In this sense, *Dune* had also to be perceived as distinguishable in some way. In Ed Nana's tie-in book for *Dune*, *The Making of Dune*, the film's difference is presented in terms of its design and special effects, and in creative terms, through the exceptional endeavors of specialist individuals working in collaboration with Lynch.

In the first place, reference is made to Anthony Masters' production design that for the interiors of the organic planet Caladan, incorporated rich decorative wood finishing, while the palatial gold and jade architecture of the regal planet Kaitain was influenced by the ornate and curving decoration associated with 8<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Moorish architecture. Masters' spacecraft and prop design, meanwhile, were conceived of as organic rather than technological and took on what Masters termed an 'insect-like appearance' (Nana 1985, 47-64). Costume designer, Bob Ringwood had been hired under the proviso that he considered the costume for the four planets as industrial, dignified, military and earthy, and, unlike 'anything [that] resembled a costume seen before in a science fiction movie' (Nana 1984, 65-78). And Nana's book suggests that *Dune* marked a departure from the science fiction event picture through its emphasis on characterisation (rather than special effects). Indeed, a number of *Dune*'s special optical effects, designed by 'visual wizard' Kit West, were considered relatively primitive since they relied not so much on such devices as stop-

motion animation, blue-screen shots and rotoscoping, (tracing live action with animation), as with what West describes as the staging for the camera of 'physical effects'.<sup>3</sup> As Nana comments, 'the characters and their adventures are the real focal points of the picture, while the special effects are used liberally to create a sense of realism' (Nana 1984, 139).

Herbert's presence on the set (documented through publicity stills such as those featured in Nana's book), and his general endorsement of the film, functions both to reassure *Dune* enthusiasts that the filmmakers have done justice to the novel and to generate certain expectations for the finished film.

The sleeve notes for *The Making of Dune* banner the book 'The reality behind the fantasy! The story behind the spectacle! The filming of Frank Herbert's best-selling science fiction masterpiece!' The sleeve also features a photograph of Herbert and Lynch (the former holding a clapperboard featuring the film's title) accompanied by a quote, attributed to Herbert: "Tell the fans they're making the real *Dune*" (Nana, 1984, sleeve notes). Herbert's endorsement is, indeed, reiterated within the pages of the book: 'the characters are exactly as I envisioned them...sometimes even better' (Nana 1984, 35).

Audience expectations for *Dune* were also generated according to different promotional strategies. Because Lynch's status as auteur was not publicly established, his name was not foregrounded in general promotion for the film (except in France where *Cahiers du Cinéma* had championed the Hollywood auteur some thirty years earlier and where the lobby poster bannered *Dune 'un film de David Lynch'*)<sup>4</sup>. In America, Britain and other European countries the film was sold as a 'Universal Pictures' event'. In the run up to *Dune's* Christmas release, pre-publicity for the film, which appeared in

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<sup>3</sup> Nana describes how it was West's job to, 'create a host of eye-boggling stunts that can be carried out "live" while the cameras are running' (rather than in post-production). According to Nana, physical effects are 'an almost mathematical endeavor, requiring technical savvy, imagination, ingenuity and an uncanny sense of timing' (Nana, 1984, 140).

<sup>4</sup> The *Dune Index* (see above reference) displays promotional posters from Germany (x4), France, America (x4), Spain (x2), Argentina, Mexico and a range of UK lobby promotional material. These include the original promotional poster, an eight-card British lobby card set featuring stills from the film 'The *Dune* movie promo poster card', and a *Dune* cinema leaflet.

British theatres in the form of lobby cards and fliers, promised a film 'beyond all experience, all imagination ... the motion picture event of 1984'.<sup>5</sup>

The epic proportions of the film are also tagged in *Dune's* theatrical trailer. However, in this case it is Herbert and Dino De Laurentiis who emerge as creative agents. Visually the trailer places its emphasis on the spectacular and romantic elements of the film, while a ceremonious voice over announces,

You are about to enter a world where the unexpected and the unbelievable meet. Where kingdoms are built on earth that moves ... and skies are filled with fire. Where a young warrior is called upon to free his people. A world that holds creation's greatest treasures and greatest terrors. A world where the mighty, the mad and the magical will have their final battle. *Dune*: a spectacular journey through the wonders of space from the boundaries of the incredible, to the borders of the impossible. Now, Frank Herbert's widely read, talked about and cherished masterpiece comes to the screen. Dino De Laurentiis presents *Dune*: a world beyond your experience and a world beyond your imagination.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of *Dune's* creative multiplicity, it would be patently wrong to shelve *Dune* on the grounds that it is not an auteurist picture: that Lynch's signature didn't come to bear on the reading of the film's style or its content. All the same, the general bent of my paper so far has been to bring into disrepute Lynch's status as the film's author on the documented evidence that: *a*, he was part of a creative collaboration; *b*, because of the producers' wish to stay true to the essence of the source novel (in structural and thematic terms the filmed version of *Dune* would seem closer to Frank Herbert's *Dune* than 'David Lynch's Stunning Sci-Fi Spectacular'); and *c*, despite pre-publicity that made claims for the film as a 'new departure', *Dune* was nonetheless planned and articulated as a generic work; as a science fiction event picture rather than an auteur picture.

In dry empirical terms, then, we might discard Lynchian readings of *Dune* as little more than hermeneutic folly; that, under Berys Gaut's terms, his

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<sup>5</sup> The National Film and Television Archive in London also hold 'hard copies' of the UK poster and lobby cards, and a *Dune* press book, although this material is displayed at the *Dune Index* (see above footnote for reference).

<sup>6</sup> The original trailer is featured as an 'extra' on the widescreen video (theatrical) version of *Dune* (Universal, no. 0782463, 2000).

authorship is implied rather than actual (Gaut, 1997, 149-172). But to retire on such a position doesn't help us account for the workings of the auteur as a preferred way of reading a text. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has stated, 'films mean because people want them to mean [...] it is the result of a process whereby people 'make sense' of something with which they are confronted' (Nowell-Smith 2000, 10). Understood in these terms, then, auteurism can be seen as an ideological (rather than scientific) operation through which the ontology of the text – be that formal, thematic and/or industrial - will trigger the search for an authorial voice from the *predisposed* reader.

As we know, the early auteurist method of reading has become commonplace in journalistic criticism and we can trace this process back to *Dune's* initial cycle of reception (that, we will remember, predates Lynch's emergence as a public auteur and therefore any settled intertextual expectations for a film bearing his name). In his article entitled 'The End of Science Fiction', originally published in *The Village Voice* in 1984, J. Hoberman was confronted with a film that challenged his expectations for a science-fiction event picture. In one respect his account was typical in that he viewed *Dune* as a film of 'frantic compression' and 'plagued with clumsy exposition'. But it was Herbert who helped explain the film's 'morass of clichés', its 'laughable' dialogue 'and its 'pretentious terminology'. Hoberman, though, was much more stimulated in declaring that *Dune* didn't 'look like any science fiction film ever made' and that 'there are moments in this movie when you simply can't believe your eyes'. Referring to the film's *mise en scène*, it was Lynch (to the detriment of Masters, Ringwood, West and 'special effects mechanical features modeler', Carlo Rambaldi), who emerged in the 'lysergic Jules Verne' style of 'dull [and] tarnished [...] weathered Deco patterns', the 'bosom suppressing gowns of 18<sup>th</sup> century Spanish infantas' and 'the film's most startling creature, a thing called the Spacing Guild Navigator [...] that talks through what can only be described as a withered vulva (typically shown in tight close-up) complete with clitoris' (Hoberman 1991, 206-207).

Indeed, given that *Dune* was an adaptation, and that Lynch was yet to emerge as a personality, critics tended to inscribe Lynch in *Dune* (if at all) as a

stylist (a metteur-en-scène rather than a true auteur under the terms of *la politique des auteurs*). *Films and Filming* carried a review suggesting that 'Lynch has made of *Dune* an almost mythic, semi-religious fable, with a true sense of grandeur, the like of which the screen has not felt since the heady days of The Ten Commandments' (Sloman 1985, 36), while *Variety* spoke of David Lynch's 'visually unique' film that 'holds the interest due to its abundant surface attractions' (Cart 1985, 16).

With the above in mind, then, I want to turn my attention more purposely towards the nature of the text in respect of the role of the author through retrospective readings of *Dune*; that is, readings of the film that cast Lynch as a true auteur and wherein *Dune* is 'revisited' within the arc of Lynch's biographical legend. What we see in these examples is an implicit or explicit acknowledgment of the long-standing genre/commerce/auteur/art conflicts that lie at the core of modern Western aesthetic judgments.

In these accounts evidence of collaboration or compromise is seen as detrimental to the auteurist legend. Charles Drazin, for instance, suggests that the 'producers' need for a marketable commodity' dictated that 'in being faithful to the Frank Herbert novel, Lynch accepted many of the absurdities that he might otherwise have questioned' (Drazin 1998, 36) while Paul A. Woods proposed that *Dune* is 'only nominally 'A David Lynch Film', in that touches of its director's obsessive imagination sporadically filter through before being neutralised by the dated, anonymous sweep of the traditional Hollywood epic' (Woods 1997, 65).

But even if we accept *Dune* as the least Lynchian film in his oeuvre, the above readings still follow the established speculative auteurist pattern of seeking out intertextual associations with Lynch's other films. Indeed, *Dune* needs to be necessarily Lynchian since auteurist masterworks such as *Blue Velvet* score their eminence against these lesser texts. Nochimson, then, suggested that the planet Giedi Prime was 'in hindsight, the home of the mutilated masculinity as it is more powerfully defined in *Blue Velvet*' (Nochimson 1997, 128) while Drazin argued that *Dune* pre-empted future works by Lynch in the sense that 'the grotesque baron [Harkonnen] seems like a prototype for Frank

[Booth] and the larger than life villains that would follow in Lynch's subsequent films' (Drazin 1998, 37). But in addition to these arbitrary instances of analysis, we might consider readings of *Dune's* leading protagonist, Paul Atreides, vis-à-vis *Blue Velvet's* Jeffrey Beaumont, since both roles were played by Kyle MacLachlan.

Following the release of *Blue Velvet*, MacLachlan (who also played a leading role as Special Agent Dale Cooper in the television series *Twin Peaks* and its cinematic prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*) came to be viewed by the auteurist as Lynch's alter ego. I am not suggesting that the character of Jeffrey is not generically grounded (indeed, readings of *Blue Velvet* commonly identify Jeffrey as the archetypal oedipal hero); rather, critics imbued Jeffrey with Lynchian traits in a way that they did not with Paul. So while the writing of Lynch's legend accommodates inconsistent speculations upon the meanings in his films, we are able to see that certain expectations must seem to be met for a film to justify the rank as the work of a true auteur. In other words, the auteurist must verify the author's personality within the text.

It is important to remember that *Dune* was MacLachlan's first screen performance and as such he constituted a 'clean slate' onto which a star persona could be written. MacLachlan, then, could not be read into *Dune* on an intertextual level since he had no screen history. Accidentally or not, such anonymity suited the wishes of the producers very well since the casting of MacLachlan removed the potential to distract from the essence of the book. Indeed, promotional material for *Dune* emphasised MacLachlan's long affinity with Herbert's book and particularly the character of Paul. As MacLachlan is quoted at the time of *Dune's* release, 'I don't know any character I feel closer to [...] When I was growing up I always thought of myself as Paul ...'What would Paul do about this? What would Paul do about that" (Nana 1984, 44). However, since Lynch only began to develop a public auteur status proper with the release of *Blue Velvet* - and as *Blue Velvet* is habitually read as an auteurist masterwork - it is at this point in time that MacLachlan begins to be read as the personification of Lynch himself. The following passage, taken from Michael Atkinson's book *Blue Velvet*, underpins this tendency quite clearly,

Lynch found MacLachlan for *Dune*, and doubtlessly had hopes he could use him in *Blue Velvet's* self-reflexive manner sometime after the lumbering, ill-planned sf fiasco [*Dune*] had receded into the past. By using MacLachlan as his doppelganger, Lynch places himself and his pathologies in the centre of *Blue Velvet's* mill wheel; although the film is easily recognisable as absolutely 'personal', MacLachlan's presence [...] tells us that Lynch knows it as well, and the film is some form of self-revelation, or self-interrogation. (Atkinson 1997, 22)

The speculative nature of the above statement is noticeable if we measure it against Lynch's indifferent take on the subject. In his discussion with Rodley, Lynch acknowledges certain physical resemblances with MacLachlan but implicitly refutes the idea that Jeffrey/MacLachlan was intended as his ideological incarnation,

*Through Dune, Blue Velvet and Twin Peaks, Kyle MacLachlan has become associated with you in a similar way to, say, Jean-Pierre Léaud with François Truffaut. Is it possible that Kyle MacLachlan functioned as your alter ego in Blue Velvet?*

People say that. Kyle buttoned his shirt because he saw Jeffrey as me. And he just took certain things. So Kyle did dress like me in that picture. (Rodley 1997, 141)

For the purposes of my argument it is unimportant whether or not, or to what extent, Lynch intended MacLachlan to function as his alter ego. What I want to stress is the underlying rationale of Atkinson's judgement that is based upon the principle that evidence of agency must manifest itself in the auteurist text in a way that it does not in the genre picture.

Atkinson was not alone in this judgment. Although his position on *Dune* is less vitriolic, Michel Chion argued that we never come to know what Paul represents because 'Lynch's own view of his character is impossible to situate or determine [...] he does not even have a viewpoint'. Indeed, Chion begins his engagement with *Blue Velvet* by stating that 'MacLachlan as Jeffrey makes us forget Paul Atreides' (Chion 1994, 79 - 86). Nochimson alluded to this position, too: 'for Lynch, the passion of Paul's story is in his subconscious life' and that 'dreams constitute the core of *Dune* and suggest what the film might have been

had Lynch not been constrained to do a conventional treatment of Paul's destiny'. At the same time Nochimson echoed Atkinson's sentiments by suggesting that Jeffrey is the 'Lynchian seeker [...] whose discovery of the severed ear is significant in its revelation of cultural limits placed on the incipient seeker by both law enforcement and outlaws' (Nochimson 1999, 102-130).

What we can conclude from these examples is that although the auteurist text must be perceived as personal in some way, and while the reader can use an author's testament to empirical ends, auteurist reading finally boils down to an act of humanist conjecture. Still, and while recognising the principle of Barthes' understanding of the variable reader, the process of early auteurist reading is, as we have also established, governed by an ideological faith (in the artist). In this sense, early auteurist readings are, despite generating variant judgments on the same texts, at least ideologically stable.

Wolfgang Iser has suggested that a text has an existence that precedes the act of reading and that that text 'represents a potential effect that is realised in the reading process' and through which 'textual repertoires and strategies [...] offer a frame within which the reader must construct for himself [sic] the aesthetic object' (Iser 1978, 107). By this line of calculation, Iser suggests that there occurs a "transfer' of text to reader' the effect of which is dependent upon 'the extent to which the text can activate an individual reader's faculties of perceiving and processing' (Iser 1978, 107). This line of argument seems to support the idea that a film perceived to be of individual character might initiate a search for an author from the inclined cineaste. Barthes, indeed, acknowledged as much.

What fundamentally distinguishes Iser's position from Barthes' model, though, seems to be the idea that texts do not 'automatically imprint themselves on the reader's mind of their own accord' but that through the reading process there occurs a 'dynamic *interaction*' between text and reader (Iser 1978, 107). This is not to say that the interaction with the text cannot be arbitrary (or automatic), or, indeed, that a given reader does not possess the capacity for plural readings. But Iser's position is instructive since auteurist

readings, where the ideological goal it is to locate the author in the text (through the central protagonist perhaps?), are the precise product of 'dynamic interactions' through which the auteurist 'constructs the aesthetic object' for him or her self (Iser 1978, 107).

As I have said, one limitation in adopting empirical authorship models is that they fail to account for the pleasure that authorial readings offer. Both Iser's, and his colleague Hans Robert Jauss's, work is more amenable in this sense since they address specifically the idea of aesthetic values. Indeed, in his essay 'Interaction between text and reader' Iser commented that the act of dynamic (non passive, or auteurist say) reading is one regulated by the act of revelation and concealment. He wrote 'what is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light' (Iser 1980, 106).

Under such terms the auteur reading can be thought of as one that starts from the position that a text's meaning is either or both illogical and/or hidden within the text. What we can say, then, is that the auteurist text might generally be thought of as one that sits closer to Barthes writerly paradigm (*Blue Velvet*, say) since the readerly text (*Dune*, say) is a narrative, to reuse Barthes term, that is 'held together with a kind of logical "paste"' (Barthes 1975, 156).

We know now that early auteurist writing is erroneous in the sense that it is based not so much upon an objective, materialist form of analysis, as a subjective, humanist type. It is important to concede this limitation, but, in his call for a hermeneutic plurality, Barthes' writing is subject to some of the same humanist drawbacks that befall auteurist writing. In other words, Barthes' account of textual pleasure rather assumes an idealised agent in accounting for how the reader experiences the reading/writing of a given text.

In one respect, Barthes distinction between pleasure ('the comfortable practice of reading') and bliss ('the text that unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions') serves to reassert institutionalised hierarchies between low (genre) and high (modernist) culture since, according to Barthes, the higher state of bliss is not attainable through the hermetic readerly, or popular (generic), text (Barthes 1975, 14). Put another way, Barthes'

account of textual pleasures embodies a certain reductionism in the sense that it prescribes a given affect that is brought about through the encounter with a given text. But the effect brought about through an encounter with a writerly text will not be to everyone's, or, for that matter, most peoples taste. All the same, it is even handed to predict that the auteurist reader will be open to, and might favour, the blissful pleasures on offer through encounters with novel texts and/or those with 'writerly' characteristics.

Returning, finally, to the widespread critical repudiation of *Dune* on the grounds that it is a generic, rather than a (truly) auteurist text, through his identification of the generic 'masterwork', Jauss was able to show that such meritorious division is a specific feature of a capitalist paradigm that extols the virtues of individualism. Jauss contrasts this with medieval literature paradigm that was aesthetically merited according to the transformation of generic codes: a 'masterwork', such as 'the *Chanson de Roland*, Chrétien's romances...or the *Devinia Commedia*', was according to Jauss, 'definable in terms of the alteration of the horizon of the genre that is as unexpected as it is enriching' (Jauss 1982, 94). Within the medieval paradigm, then, the concept of genre was approved of since it was seen to open up a range of aesthetic possibilities rather than a restrictive set of codes.

Miles Orvell has suggested that the judgmental stand off between artistic imitation (through the repetition of generic formulas) and authenticity (the work that is individual in its character) is a direct consequence of trade interests. 'The concept of authenticity', he argued, 'begins in any society when the possibility of fraud arises, and that fraud is at least possible whenever transactions – whether social, political, commercial, or aesthetic routinely occur.' Orvell, moreover, identifies in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century a broad shift in intuitive assessments of value since 'the culture of authenticity that developed at the end of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century' and which 'established the aesthetic vocabulary that we have called modernist' reflected 'an effort to get beyond mere imitation, beyond the manufacturing of illusions, to the creation of more "authentic" works that were themselves the real thing' (Orvell 1989, xv-xvii).

Jauss' model, then, might assist in helping to understand the broad epochal shift towards an ideological investment in the individual even if different horizons will exist within the same historical paradigm. This is apparent in the idea that early auteurist analysis circulates in the public domains of serious and specialist journalism as opposed to the more classified realms of the academy. In the case of *Dune* and *Blue Velvet* at least, Lynch's testimony must be of little or no significance through the hermeneutic speculations of the auteurist reader/writer since it is the task of pin-pointing a salient authorial voice that acts as the final stamp of textual authentication.

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