

## A JOURNEY THROUGH *BLUE VELVET*

### FILM, FANTASY AND THE FEMALE SPECTATOR

Fantasists enjoyed little success with her: for, although she did not say very much . . . her bright eyes and that subtle ironical smile told them: 'Dear friends! how could you believe of me that I should regard your transient poetic fancies as real beings, possessing life and action?' For this reason Clara was stigmatized by many as cold, unfeeling, prosaic.

E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Sandman*

David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet* threatens to make interpretation redundant, so openly does it flaunt its Freudian themes and narrative. Its protagonist, Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan), is an Oedipal hero. His real father is struck down (by a heart attack); he sets out on a journey, encounters woman as enigma, woman as symbolic mother figure, and makes love to her; finally, he kills the murderous father-substitute - at which point some form of normality is restored and the hero is free to take a young woman of his own. The narrative is liberally dotted with Freudian signposts, often humorously treated: a severed ear, the symbolic use of 'keys' (to unlock the unconscious), the Oedipal drama which Jeffrey witnesses from a wardrobe, repressed homosexual desire when Frank (Dennis Hopper) kisses Jeffrey, the multiplication of father figures, the separation of a mother from her (male) child, woman as masochist, and so on. This surface knowingness and playfulness, the ironic tone and insistent parody of family values, mark *Blue Velvet* as a post-modern text. It also displays the expected generic pastiches of *film noir*, melodrama, and pornography. The send-up of Freudian themes - as when Frank snaps his scissors over the Blue Lady's pubic area - suggests a deliberate trap for the earnest or unwary theorist. But to argue that this puts the film somehow 'beyond' analysis not only falls into the intentionalist fallacy, it also misses the more interesting and disturbing questions about fantasy and spectatorship which *Blue Velvet* opens up. Certainly the film is parodic, but it can still be read in terms of what happens to its own surfaces, even in terms of its refusal to take itself seriously. From this point of view, *Blue Velvet* emerges - especially in its representation of Freud's primal fantasies - as an *hysterical* text.

The concept of fantasy has recently been taken up by film theorists, particularly feminist writers, because it seems to offer a way out of a couple of related problems: too narrow an account of the film-spectator relationship, and the denial of a position for the female spectator.' The turn to fantasy has enabled them to counter the tendency to ascribe a fixed, masochistic place for both

female characters in the diegesis and the female spectator in the cinema. Instead, they have emphasized the sliding subject positions of the female protagonist and the multiple positions of identification for the female (and male) viewer. It is this new sensitivity to the mobility of identification that makes fantasy such a suitable concept with which to call *Blue Velvet's* double bluff.

The important aspect of fantasy for Freud was not its relationship to reality, but its degree of psychical reality in the life of the individual. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, whose article 'Fantasy and the origins of sexuality' has been a key point of reference in this debate, he saw psychical reality as 'alone truly real, in contrast with the majority of psychological phenomena'; it is just as 'real' as the material world.<sup>2</sup> Freud did not divide fantasy into conscious and unconscious fantasies: he insisted that the same nucleus is present in the deepest unconscious fantasy, in daydreams, and in the secondary revision or conscious interpretation of dreams when we are awake. But he did distinguish between original, structural - or primal - fantasies and secondary imaginary fantasies.

The primal fantasies deal with the major enigmas of a child's early life, enigmas which concern the origin of the individual, the origin of sexuality, and the origin of sexual difference. Fantasies of the primal scene picture the origin of the human subject, that is, the creation of the child in the parents' love-making. Fantasies of seduction, in which the child desires to seduce or be seduced by the parent, represent the origin of sexual desire. And fantasies of castration dramatize the origin of the difference between the sexes. Although these three scenes are sometimes treated as if they were staged quite independently of each other, Freud's discussions in a number of case studies stress the way they interrelate and overlap. Also, Freud does not invoke copulation, castration, and seduction as *general* concepts: the figure of the powerful father largely (but not totally) dominates all three primal fantasies. The primal scene is invariably depicted as a wounding or rape of the mother by the father. Castration is usually represented as the castration of the son by the father. Seduction is discussed in the main as the seduction of the daughter by the father. The seduction of the infant by the mother is central to the pre-Oedipal period, however, and must play a part in the seduction fantasy; Freud also spoke of the child's desire to seduce the parent.

Behind the three primal fantasies, then, lies the drama of the Oedipal crisis which turns on the twin figures of the phallic mother and the castrating father. As John Fletcher argues:

The primal fantasies operate so as to reorganize the pre-Oedipal sexual field through the alignment of a set of identifications and object attachments which are dramatized for the subject as alternatives. This assigns a meaning . . . to the gender positions it constructs: masculine/active, feminine/passive.<sup>3</sup>

The primal fantasies are thus bound up from the start with the organization of sexual difference. Later, I shall argue that, within the signifying practices of the film text, the spectator's stance in each of the fantasies is aligned with both the sadistic and masochistic positions in different degrees; this sets limits to the freedom and bisexuality of identification in fantasy.

It is important not to underestimate the degree of mobility in identification

that the concept does allow. In her article 'Fantasia', Elizabeth Cowie stresses Laplanche and Pontalis's definition of fantasy as the *mise-en-scene* of desire.<sup>4</sup> This approach begins by relating fantasy to auto-eroticism. This is a crucial step, because it shows that desire is not just a welling up of the drives: it comes to exist as sexual only as it is articulated in fantasy.

The argument about how the drive becomes auto-erotic only after the loss of the object can best be illustrated by the infant's experience of satisfaction as it suckles at the breast. This involves not just the allaying of hunger, but also sensual pleasure. In this process, the instinctual satisfaction of hunger becomes linked to a sexual object outside the infant's own body - the mother's body. When the child becomes hungry in the mother's absence, it will attempt to re-create the original experience of feeding through hallucination: 'the first wishing seems to have been a hallucinatory cathecting of the memory of satisfaction.'<sup>5</sup> Thus, whereas the need for milk can be satisfied by drinking, the infant's *desire* is directed not to an object such as milk or the breast but to a fantasy of lost satisfaction. It becomes split through the function of representation. It moves into the field of fantasy and, in so doing, it starts existing as sexuality. Fantasy and sexuality thus both emerge as auto-erotic: sexual desire becomes uncoupled from non-sexual functions and detached from any natural object.<sup>6</sup>

It is in this sense that fantasy is not the object of desire, but its setting. Fantasy does not depend on particular objects but rather on the *setting out* of images in which the subject is caught up. Hence fantasy as scene, as the *mise-en-scene* of desire which is to be found not only, as we have seen, in unconscious fantasies, daydreams, and secondary revision, but also, as Elizabeth Cowie argues, in such public forms of fantasy as films and novels.<sup>7</sup> Within these fantasy scenarios, the subject is free to take up a number of subject positions.

In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign:

he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images. He forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene although, in the earliest forms of fantasy, he cannot be assigned any fixed place in it. . . . As a result, the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a desubjectivized form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question.<sup>8</sup>

As an extreme example of this dispersal of the subject, Laplanche and Pontalis invoke the primal fantasy of seduction: 'a father seduces a daughter'. This constitutes a 'scenario with multiple entries, in which nothing shows whether the subject will be immediately located as *daughter*; it can as well be fixed as *father*, or even in the term *seduces*'.<sup>9</sup> The fantasy thus dramatizes and organizes the otherwise formless indeterminacies, dispersions, and displacements of desire in the individual subject.<sup>10</sup>

#### BLUE VELVET: FANTASY AND FILM

At least three different forms of fantasy can be distinguished in *Blue Velvet*. Like any other film, it is (in Elizabeth Cowie's phrase) a 'public fantasy'.

Secondly, the structure of the film suggests that the hero may have dreamt the whole thing. The image of the ear is used to 'frame' the events-as-dream. In the opening sequence, the camera zooms down and into the interior of a severed ear which Jeffrey finds in a country lane; in the final sequence, the camera pulls out from the inside of an ear - in this case Jeffrey's. He awakens on the lawn of his parents' garden, where the film's action also began. If *Blue Velvet's* narrative of death and desire is a dream, this is not spelt out for the spectator; it is impossible to separate out the 'dream' events from those which precede and follow them. Thirdly, Freud's three original fantasies - the primal scene, castration, and seduction - are specifically depicted within the narrative (Jeffrey's dream?). In short, *Blue Velvet* is a public fantasy about a private dream which involves a representation of the primal fantasies.

*Blue Velvet* presents a tongue-in-cheek detective story in which the young protagonist, Jeffrey, investigates the 'true' nature of life's darker side. The credits are superimposed on a background of crushed blue velvet which, in close-up, assumes the texture of wood or bark. The opening sequence presents an ironic introduction to the film's setting, Lumberton, USA, where the houses are all neat and squeaky clean, the gardens neatly manicured and the skies perfectly blue. White-white fences are framed by red-red roses and firemen wave happily from their truck as children are ushered across the street by friendly adults. On the soundtrack, Bobby Vinton croons 'Blue Velvet', a sentimental 1950s ballad about first love. Lumberton is the archetypal American small town, a place of suburban banality which exists only in wishful memories and television serials like *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It To Beaver*. A disc-jockey's platitudinous voice tells the happy inhabitants of Lumberton that, as it is a sunny day, they should 'get out those chainsaws'. Throughout the narrative, his voice is heard announcing the time: 'At the sound of a falling tree, it is 9.30.'

This parody of a suburban idyll is gradually undercut by a sequence of disturbing images. A woman watches a television drama in which a gun is seen in close-up pointing to the left of the screen. The film cuts to a man outside watering his lawn: suddenly he writhes in agony as he falls to the ground with a heart attack, his hose between his legs so that he appears to be urinating, the water spurting forth in an absurdly comic manner. A dog jumps up and down, attempting to catch the spray. Thus, the film's first suggestion of violence is linked to the female gaze: a woman looks at a fictional gun pointing in the direction of the outside world where her husband is suddenly struck down. This drama is watched by a small child whose narrative significance becomes clear only in the film's final sequence. The symbolic family configuration - mother/father/child - mediated in this sequence by the image of the gun and the unexpected violence forms a metonymic pattern which becomes central to the narrative. Its ominous undertone is reinforced in an equally unexpected series of images in which the camera seems to burrow down into the ground, beneath the clipped lawn, to reveal a magnified jungle where insects are devouring a grub with cannibalistic frenzy. An eerie collection of sounds invades the soundtrack; these are repeated later in the narrative at moments of intense fear and horror.

The heart attack triggers off the film's drama. When the man's son, Jeffrey, is

returning from the hospital, he finds a severed human ear in a grassy paddock. He takes it to Detective Williams, who discourages Jeffrey's curiosity about his bizarre discovery. After leaving Williams's house, Jeffrey meets the detective's daughter Sandy (Laura Dern), who emerges from the night shadows in a parody of the *noir* style. It is woman's body which links the film's two worlds - the 'outer' world of idealized family life and the 'inner' world of violent, perhaps fatal, symbolic relationships. Later, another woman, Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini), also emerges from the suburban darkness. This time, woman's body is naked and battered, a brutal reminder that the two worlds are two sides of the same coin. This theme is repeated in the film's final sequence. An obviously mechanical robin, which might have flown in from *Mary Poppins*, is chomping on a bug. The reference to *Mary Poppins*, the phallic mother *par excellence*, is surely deliberate: Lumberton is her home territory.

Sandy tells Jeffrey that she sometimes overhears her father discussing his work. It seems that a woman named Dorothy Vallens might be involved in the mystery surrounding the ear. Also known as The Blue Lady, she signs in a local night-club; her theme song is, of course, 'Blue Velvet'. Fascinated, Jeffrey hides in Dorothy's apartment in the hope of 'seeing something'. The events that follow lead him into an underworld of crime, kidnapping, drug dealing, murder, and sexual abuse. This crime narrative, however, functions as a Hitchcockian McGuffin: the film is primarily concerned with the drama of human relationships and the role of sexual fantasy in them. The film's final sequence repeats images from the opening, revealing that 'normality' has returned to suburban family life. The camera pulls out from the interior of Jeffrey's ear as he wakes in the garden to the sound of Sandy's voice calling him to lunch. This shot rhymes with the earlier shot in which the camera enters the recesses of an ear, signifying the possibility that the drama has been a dream. Jeffrey's father chats to Detective Williams, Aunt Barbara expresses disgust at the cannibalistic behaviour of robins, and Dorothy Vallens embraces her son, a small boy wearing a coloured party hat whose image recalls the infant who watched his father writhing on the lawn at the beginning of the film. The symbolic family configuration of mother/father/son has been reworked many times throughout the narrative in its parody of Freudian themes.

It is in the hesitation between parody and a more disturbing representation of the primal fantasies that *Blue Velvet* raises interesting questions about fantasy and spectatorship. The critical apartment scene, for example, seems at one level to endorse the argument that in those texts which stage the primal or original fantasies, the places of the characters are not fixed and, as Elizabeth Cowie puts it, 'the staging of desire has multiple entries' for the spectator. Nevertheless, I want to argue that this multiplicity is neither infinite nor indeterminate. The spectator is not completely 'free' to identify with any character position at will. Entry is coded in specific ways; certain spectator positions are encouraged over and above others.<sup>11</sup>

In this scene, Jeffrey has stolen into the room of Dorothy Vallens, a woman he does not know but whom he believes to be connected with the underworld, and hidden himself in a cupboard. The voyeurism of Jeffrey's 'peeping' is heavily marked in a close-up of him peering through the cupboard's door slats at



The hero as voyeur - *Blue Velvet*

Dorothy as she undresses. When Dorothy discovers him, however, this voyeuristic look is turned against him and he becomes the object of woman's aggressive desire. She threatens him with a knife while angrily questioning him: 'Do you sneak into girls' apartments to see them undress?' (This echoes Sandy's earlier comment: 'I don't know if you're a detective or a pervert.') Dorothy orders Jeffrey to undress. 'I want to see you,' she tells him, pulling down his pants. 'Don't move! Don't look at me!' she shouts. As she begins to make erotic advances, presumably to bring on an erection, she orders Jeffrey to remain still. 'Don't touch me or I'll kill you! Do you like talk like that?' 'No,' Jeffrey replies, adamantly. Dorothy's threat as she makes love to him orally while holding a knife is painfully clear: an erect penis is easier to castrate than a flaccid one. At this point woman controls the gaze, the knife, and the key to man's pleasure. Jeffrey is rendered totally vulnerable, his voyeuristic gaze deflected, his concern directed towards the threat and pleasure (the threat of pleasure?) offered by the woman.

Female viewers find this one of the most interesting and disturbing scenes in *Blue Velvet*. Woman is in control of the situation, her desires, and the look. She investigates his body, his sexual organs. Even if Jeffrey's youth and inexperience undermine her power to some extent, Dorothy is still depicted as a figure in control. In this staging of the primal fantasy of seduction, the spectator is presumably free to identify with either male or female, or with both characters. Initially Jeffrey subjected the woman to his voyeuristic gaze as he secretly watched her undress. Dorothy reverses this balance of power: she subjects him to her gaze and, while wielding a knife, forbids him to look at her. Thus a series of positions is presented, the terms of which are taken up successively by



Overdetermined seduction - Kyle MacLachlan and Isabella Rossellini

Jeffrey and Dorothy. The spectator, however, is not completely free to identify with either man or woman or the symbolic positions they occupy - Jeffrey as son/lover, Dorothy as mother/lover. The representation of the seduction fantasy is overdetermined by the theme of castration: Jeffrey voyeuristically views Dorothy as woman, signifier of castration; Dorothy strips Jeffrey naked and threatens him with a knife. Because castration (having and not having a penis) means such different things for women and men, the freedom of the female and male spectator to enter into the scenario via the processes of identification cannot be unbiased.

#### THE GENDERING OF SPACE

To understand these constraints on identification, I want to discuss more generally how cinematic *mise-en-scene* is coded to produce a 'gendering' of space. In her article on visual pleasure and spectatorship, Laura Mulvey linked the look of the male protagonist, the bearer of the gaze, to notions of power and a desire to control and possess the heroine, the object of his look.

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence.<sup>12</sup>

Much of the spectator's pleasure derives from this power and control. Although Mulvey does not specify this, I would argue that this has shaped certain conventions of *mise-en-scene*. In the typical Hollywood two-shot, the woman is

placed in the centre of the screen space, the man to either her left or right and closer to the foreground. She thus becomes, literally, an object along the axis of his gaze.<sup>13</sup>

This structure is perhaps most evident in *film noir*, especially at those moments when the hero first glimpses the heroine - think of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Double Indemnity*, *Out of the Past*, *Gilda*, *Body Heat*. In these scenes, shots of the hero at the edge of the frame as he gazes at the heroine are invariably intercut with close-ups of parts of the woman's body. Thus the voyeuristic gaze alternates with a fetishistic attempt to contain the woman's beauty, her threat, in a 'frozen' image. Only very occasionally is the pattern reversed, with the female protagonist at the left or right of the frame and the male protagonist centred. When it does happen, the woman's position or look is compromised in some way. She may be pushed more to one side, for instance, her gaze weakened by her less central position in the frame; in *Humoresque*, Joan Crawford has to put on spectacles to see more clearly.

In the conventional two-shot and shot-reverse-shot, then, it appears that the edges and the centre of the frame are differently 'gendered'. This is reinforced by codes of lighting, with the 'masculinized' edges dark and shadowy and the figure of the heroine, in her 'feminized' space, being more brightly lit. Often, she emerges from the shadows into the light: the scene when Jeffrey first sees Sandy draws upon all these structures. Their significance is suggested, I think, by Kaja Silverman's discussion in 'Masochism and subjectivity' of the passive position usually occupied by a film's female protagonist.

The masculine subject viewing a film or reading a novel in which the passive position is occupied by a female enacts, through displacement, the compulsory narrative of loss and recovery. I will hazard the generalization that it is always the victim - the figure who occupies the passive position - who is really the focus of attention, and whose subjugation the subject (whether male or female) experiences as a pleasurable repetition of his/her own history. . . . The fascination of the sadistic point of view is merely that it provides the best vantage point from which to watch the masochistic story unfold.<sup>14</sup>

This suggests that filmic space is defined in terms of the passive/feminine and active/masculine split. I would go a step further, and argue that filmic codes produce a gendering of this space and that male or female subjects are free to take up either of these positions. This calls into question the idea of the 'controlling male gaze', in so far as that assumes that the position of the voyeur is always and only a position of mastery. Silverman argues that the masculine subject 'surreptitiously' identifies with the feminine position. Thus, the place of the voyeur could be seen - in many instances - as a place in which the active 'male' subject in the diegesis is represented in order more effectively to 'identify' with the passive 'female' subject.

I am not suggesting that this feminization and masculinization of space is in any way biologically determined and/or fixed. There is no reason why the placing of hero and heroine should not be switched. Conventionally, the space to the left or right of the frame has been assigned to the male, but only because he is generally 'the bearer of the look' - which, as Silverman argues, is more





Framing the heroine in *Gilda*



.. and *Out of the Past*

than simply a look of power. In a film like *Death in Venice*, Aschenbach's homosexual desire is signalled in part by the frequent placing of the boy, Tadzio, in the centre, mid-ground of the shot. Aschenbach gazes at him from the foreground, from the edge of the frame; this axis defines the way the spectator sees Tadzio. Films representing lesbian desire, where characters have been stereotyped in heterosexual terms, reveal a similar structure. This coding of filmic space thus suggests a widespread 'staging of gender', which will be one determinant of processes of identification and spectatorship in the cinema.

How does this gendering of space work in *Blue Velvet's* apartment scene? Here the *mise-en-scene* emphasizes the voyeuristic aspects of looking. The apartment is shrouded in darkness; the semi-naked body of a woman is on display; a male figure peers from his hiding-place. The film cuts from a close-up of his profile, which emphasizes his 'looking', to the reverse shot which reveals the object of his look - the woman, placed in the middle distance as she moves around the apartment, unaware she is being watched. When Dorothy takes control of the situation, her gaze takes on the control and curiosity previously invested in Jeffrey's voyeuristic look. As she peers at him through the darkness, ordering him not to look at her, the male is transformed into an object of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. At this point, Jeffrey is positioned to the front left of the frame; Dorothy, kneeling before his naked body, takes up the conventional woman's position in the centre, medium shot. Although Jeffrey's voyeurism was, in Mulvey's terms, a response to the threat of castration posed by woman, Dorothy's look, although not motivated by this fear, remains voyeuristic (she is looking at his genitals) and sadistic (she threatens him with a knife).

In psychoanalytical terms, the atmosphere of the room is marked by a 'masculine' desire, in the sense that it is active and aggressive. The seduction scenario played out between the male and female protagonists sets in place variable subject-positions; each of the protagonists in turn occupies the passive/feminine and active/masculine roles. The spectator in the cinema is not free to take on these roles at will, however. Identification must be strongly influenced by the *mise-en-scene's* coding of these positions as either masculine or feminine. This does not mean that the female spectator will automatically identify with the feminine position - the situation is too complex to produce a neat split in relations of looking between female/feminine and male/masculine.<sup>15</sup> Although the representation of the seduction fantasy *per se* may not necessarily be locked into any particular form of looking, in this instance it has been overwhelmingly determined by the *voyeuristic* structures of the look (looking at the naked body) which are invariably linked to a scenario of castration within filmic *mise-en-scene*. If fantasy is the *mise-en-scene* of desire, then desire, and the look of desire, must also be aligned with the specific features of the *mise-en-scene* - particularly the gendering of space - and thus marked in a particular way.

'BABY WANTS TO FUCK!'

The seduction sequence is brought to an abrupt close by the appearance of the violent, psychopathic Frank Booth. His perverse and unpredictable behaviour makes the rest of the scene shocking and difficult to watch.<sup>16</sup> The audience soon

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understands that events will not follow any familiar or comforting narrative line.

Dorothy's fear of Frank forces her to abandon her aggressive rape/seduction, and she hides Jeffrey. The scenario which unfolds before his eyes takes on dimensions of the bizarre and the grotesque. It is clearly a re-enactment of the primal scene, represented from various perspectives: the primal scene as parental coupling and the primal scene as birth. To add to this complexity, the primal scene merges into a scenario marked by Oedipal desire and castration. During this entire sequence, the camera cuts again and again to isolate Jeffrey in extreme close-up, as he watches voyeuristically from the security of the cupboard.

With Frank's arrival, Dorothy hides the knife and pulls on her blue velvet dressing-gown. This, we soon learn, is an essential part of a sadistic love-making ritual which has obviously been staged before. Next, she puts a small stool in place before the couch and says to Frank: 'Hello Baby!' Frank snarls back: 'It's Daddy, you shithead! Where's my bourbon?' After she pours his drink, Dorothy turns off the light and begins to light a candle. 'Don't you fucking remember anything?' Frank asks, as he sits down on the couch. He sips his bourbon and snaps out an order: 'Spread your legs!' 'Show it to me!' As he finishes his drink and takes a deep breath, he again yells at Dorothy: 'Don't you fucking look at me!' - an order which he continually screams at her throughout the ritual. This echoes Dorothy's earlier command to Jeffrey, which can thus be read retrospectively as an attempt, on her part, to make him take up 'her' place. From the cupboard, Jeffrey spied on her when she could not 'see' him; thus, she made him assume the same position. In the context of the primal scene, however, Frank's order takes on a different meaning.

Frank takes an oxygen mask from his pocket. The soundtrack swells with sinister music and the noise of Frank's laboured breathing. The camera moves behind Dorothy's back, momentarily blacking out the screen, and then comes to rest on a close-up of Frank's face. 'Mummy!' he groans while moving towards Dorothy on his knees. He puts the oxygen mask back on, still groaning - the mask associates Frank with Jeffrey's father who also made strangulated sounds from behind his life-support systems in hospital. 'Mummy loves you,' says Dorothy, using a phrase she later repeats to her son, Donny. The temporary blackness, the sounds of Frank's laboured breathing, the oxygen mask, the woman with her legs spread - all of these signify a scenario of birth. Next the camera cuts to a close-up of Frank who is now screaming, 'Baby wants to fuck!' Suddenly, he begins to snarl, shaking with fury and yelling: 'Get away you fuck! You fucking fucker!' Frank has dropped the role of Daddy and has become the jealous infant, warning the father not to interfere. Dorothy looks down at Frank who responds with a hard slap, screaming again, 'Don't you fucking look at me!' The camera cuts to a close-up of Dorothy's face turned upward from the bottom left corner of the frame. It becomes clear that she enjoys the violence - a smile of satisfaction spreads across her lips. This shot is repeated several times during the ritual. All pleasure generated in the scene is recorded on the face of woman - it is as if man's face cannot, is not 'allowed' to, signify sexual pleasure, only power and aggression.

Frank discards the oxygen mask, demanding a piece of blue velvet. Baby

wants blue velvet,' he yells. Dorothy's hand comes into frame as she begins to stuff a piece of blue velvet into Frank's mouth. The blue velvet functions symbolically as an umbilical cord and also as the 'velvet' lining of the womb and vagina - a point I shall discuss in more detail later. Frank throws Dorothy to the floor - her pubic hair is revealed - and begins to snap a pair of scissors over her semi-naked body. This is ambivalent: it has connotations of severing the umbilical cord as well as of castration. This time man, not woman, is the agent of castration. Frank seems to be caught up in both roles: baby and father. He begins to shout, 'Daddy's coming home!', but this could be either a triumphant announcement (Frank is now the castrating father) or a cry of urgency (the baby must fuck the mother before the father arrives home and discovers them). Frank begins to stuff one end of the blue velvet into Dorothy's mouth and the other back into his mouth; once again the blue velvet seems to symbolize the umbilical cord.

In this sequence, Frank oscillates between the sadistic position of the punishing father and the masochistic position of the child in relation to the mother. The central desire of the masochistic fantasy is the child's desire for the all-powerful mother. 'The masochistic fantasy cannot by its very nature fulfil its most primal desire - "dual unity and the complete symbiosis between child and mother" - except in the imagination. As a consequence, death becomes the fantasy solution to masochistic desire.'<sup>17</sup> Frank's fear of losing the mother, as represented by Dorothy, is given visual force through the velvet cord which he uses to join himself to the body of the mother. His anger is directed at an imaginary father figure who threatens to separate him from the mother. The child's desire to achieve re-fusion with the body of the mother is, however, fraught with ambivalence. The promise of reincorporation is also a promise of death. In one sense, then, Frank re-enacts the moment of separation from the mother (the cutting of the blue velvet) in order to delay the final and absolute 'pleasure' - death. 'Only death can hold the final mystical solution to the expiation of the father and symbiotic reunion with the idealized maternal rule', argues Gaylyn Studlar. 'The masochist imagines the final triumph of a parthenogenetic rebirth from the mother.'<sup>18</sup> Frank's attempt to give birth to himself at the moment of sexual union with the mother clearly represents a desire for just such a rebirth without the agency of the father.

Next, Frank assumes the role of the father. He puts his hand inside her dressing-gown, bringing her to orgasm manually. Dorothy groans in ecstasy as Frank falls on top of her, pumping his body roughly into hers. Frank then rolls over, stands up, and hits her again, screaming at her not to look at him. He then flicks his right hand several times, apparently to rid himself of Dorothy's vaginal fluids which still cling to his fingers. He then rolls Dorothy over saying, 'You stay alive, baby. Do it for Van Gogh!' - a reference to the severed ear which, it later turns out, belongs to her husband, Don. Frank leaves. Cautiously, Jeffrey comes out of his hiding-place to comfort Dorothy. (Later, they begin to make love but Jeffrey leaves when Dorothy tries to make him hit her.) At this point the camera breaks its identification with Jeffrey's gaze. Throughout the entire sequence of sixty-seven shots, nineteen are from Jeffrey's point of view. The camera, Jeffrey, and the viewer share the same voyeuristic position as the scene

unfolds. The repeated screening of the tight close-up of Jeffrey's profile as he watches Frank and Dorothy, interspersed with shots of the scenario itself, help to maintain the distance which Christian Metz argues is essential to the voyeuristic gaze.

The voyeur represents in space the fracture which forever separates him from the object; he represents his very dissatisfaction (which is precisely what he needs as a voyeur), and thus also his 'satisfaction' insofar as it is of a specifically voyeuristic type. To fill in this distance would threaten to overwhelm the subject.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE MASOCHISTIC LOOK

Laplanche argues that the position of the spectator in relation to primal fantasy is aligned with masochism. He compares the infant to Tantalus, who was forced to watch the spectacle of his parents engaged in the act of copulation. Its passive position, claims Laplanche, 'is not simply a passivity in relation to adult activity, but passivity in relation to adult fantasy intruding within him'.<sup>20</sup> Thus Jeffrey's voyeurism is counterbalanced by this passivity and helplessness. Not only is his looking completely unauthorized, he is in danger of extreme punishment from Frank, the father substitute, if he were to be caught. This also helps to explain why Jeffrey does not interfere, as he does later when Frank attempts to humiliate Dorothy. I would argue that the audience is also placed in a position of masochism. Not only is the scene difficult to watch, as I mentioned earlier, but the spectator is also punished for watching in that the events which unfold before the eyes of the 'innocent' viewer/child are both shocking and violent.

Although Metz argues that all voyeurism is sadistic to a degree, in this scene Jeffrey's voyeuristic look seems to be predominantly grounded in structures of masochism. Frank as the infant who desires re-incorporation into the mother's body is also located in a passive position in which his ultimate desire is a desire for death. Unlike the voyeur, Frank fails to maintain a distance between himself and Dorothy's body. His desire to re-attach himself to the mother by way of a symbolic cord signifies the extent of his desire to suppress the gap between object and subject. According to Metz:

To fill in this distance would threaten to overwhelm the subject, to lead him to consume the object (the object which is now too close so that he cannot see it any more), to bring him to orgasm and the pleasure of his own body.<sup>21</sup>

As with the representation of the seduction fantasy, however, this staging of the primal scene is inexplicable outside the terms of castration. Frank as castrating father, snapping his scissors over woman's genital area, here becomes the central figure.

Here too, of course, the film is manifestly displaying its Freudian knowingness, parodying its own concern with the working of the male unconscious. And this is where, beneath the surface irony, *Blue Velvet* is at its most hysterical - for, in his refusal to accept his 'proper' gender role in relation

to the mother, Frank becomes an hysteric.<sup>22</sup> He rants and raves against the world. Symbolically, he wants to return to the womb, to recover a symbiotic relationship with the mother. The blue velvet itself comes to stand for the womb (I shall come back to this) - the womb whose disturbance was thought to cause hysteria and which provides the etymology of the word.

The representation of Dorothy/woman in this sequence is extremely complex. On the one hand, she can be seen as a masochistic, degraded figure, physically, sexually, and verbally abused by Frank. Her smile after Frank hits her indicates that she derives pleasure from pain and humiliation. On the other hand, the close-up of her head falling back with a look of intense pleasure on her face suggests an auto-erotic desire and its fulfilment. Frank screams at her: 'Don't the fuck you look at me!' Although she does not 'look', her power is assured through the pleasure of erotic self-sufficiency. She experiences a pleasure from which the man is excluded. Her 'look' is directed to a place within herself. This scene is particularly disturbing because it represents woman as masochist while also giving voice to a cultural prohibition - the possibility that one can derive pleasure from pain.



Freudian games - Dennis Hopper and Isabella Rossellini in *Blue Velvet*

Earlier I referred to Kaja Silverman's work on masochism and the look. She extends her argument that it is the victim, not the voyeur, who is the focus of interest in the cinematic text by turning her attention to films, such as *The Night Porter*, in which woman is shown 'to find pleasure in her own pain and victimization'. Silverman suggests why this is 'culturally inadmissible':

It disputes the inevitable desirability of the active, masculine position, privileging instead what has been marked as the inferior, feminine position. The masculine subject can no longer surreptitiously identify with that

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position; the taboo identification threatens to become conscious, and in so doing to disrupt the phallogentric order. In addition, voluntary exhibitionism makes overt the disquieting fact that the female spectacle is defined not by any actual male gaze, but by the Gaze of the Other. It discloses the abyss between the male subject and the Symbolic. . . . It poses a much more profound castration threat than Freud was willing to acknowledge, for by making overt the distance between the gaze and the Gaze, and by revealing the fatal attractiveness of the feminine/masochistic position, it quite literally cuts off the masculine sadistic position.<sup>23</sup>

*Blue Velvet* suggests not only that women can find pleasure in pain, but also that this can be a male desire too. In the dramatization of the seduction fantasy, the male is clearly represented in a masochistic position; Dorothy cuts Jeffrey's cheek with a knife and forces him to submit while she takes pleasure in his body. Although it appears as if the narrative's acts of sexual violence are primarily directed against Dorothy, Jeffrey in fact takes the heaviest blows - not only is he punched savagely by the brothel-keeper Ben, (Dean Stockwell), he is later beaten by Frank in a scene of sadistic/sexual violence. He is also hit by Sandy. Jeffrey leaves Dorothy's apartment when she asks him to hit her; he later returns even though she brutalized him in their first encounter. Frank also takes up the position of masochist in his relationship with Dorothy, who plays the all-powerful mother to his 'child'. In this sequence, Frank appears completely to regress to a pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic position. 'The Oedipal moment parades as the moment of primal loss, but actually it screens that loss from us.'<sup>24</sup> Frank pushes back to that moment of primal loss, his pleasure/pain expressed through his grunting and the sounds of breathing as he re-enacts the moment of birth. The appeal of *Blue Velvet* lies in its powerful critique of the notion of the coherent self, the self which sustains the fiction of Lumberton.

#### THE VELVET WOMB

In the fantasy of the primal scene, the origin of the subject is represented as a violent act. In retrospect, the earlier sequence in which Jeffrey finds the severed ear takes on new meaning. According to Freud, the primal scene is constructed by the child not just on the basis of what he or she 'sees' but also in relation to what is heard. He first discussed primal fantasies with reference to the case in which a woman patient claimed to have been photographed when she was with her lover and said that she heard the 'click' of the camera. Thus Freud gives a privileged position to hearing, to the fantasy of listening, as well as to sight.<sup>25</sup> Because the child is at an age when it cannot fully master what it has witnessed, it will imagine the primal scene to itself as one of violence, specifically of violence by the father against the mother. In this context, the severed ear - which belongs to the father of Dorothy's child - may signify more than castration. It might also connote the primal scene through the disavowal of the forbidden sounds of copulation. The balance between Jeffrey's finding this ear and the image of his ear in the closing sequence suggests at least the possibility that this is his fantasy, or secondary revision, of the primal scene.

The child also is too young to understand the nature of coition and invariably fantasizes it in a distorted form. The woman, for instance, may be pictured as having intercourse with an animal, or the child may imagine that insemination and birth take place via the mouth, ear, or other orifices.<sup>26</sup> Distorted re-workings of the primal scene are central to many sci-fi horror films in which birth is represented as a grotesque, impossible scenario. In *Blue Velvet*, the woman is shown being humiliated and hurt by the man-as-child who fucks her, thus planting his own seed in the mother. According to Freud, an extreme form of the primal fantasy is that of the child 'observing parental intercourse while . . . still an unborn baby in the womb'.<sup>27</sup> In *Blue Velvet's* scenario, the child imagines itself as its own father. The primal scene is also staged as a birth scene; the sound of Frank's laboured breathing, through the oxygen mask, suggests that he is impregnating the mother and being born at the same time. He desires to be born at the moment of conception. The tie between the mother-son couple is the cord of blue velvet, both umbilical cord and a metaphor for the interior of the female genitals. And Jeffrey, hiding in the cupboard, is placed like the child secretly watching its parents engaged in the sexual act.

In pornography, 'velvet' (often 'liquid velvet') is a generic term used to signify the interior of the vagina. When Jeffrey discovers the severed ear, the camera begins a slow journey into the ear, suggesting an exploration of internal, secret places. Asked why he used a severed ear instead of a finger or a limb, David Lynch replied: 'It had to be an ear because it's an opening. An ear is wide and you can go down into it. It goes somewhere vast.'<sup>28</sup> The metaphor of travelling into an interior, secret place is alluded to in the opening sequence of the film when the camera discovers a hidden world of violence and cannibalism, death and decay beneath the neat suburban lawn - a place where insects and other forms of life are locked in a deadly, chaotic battle. The distortion and magnification involved in these two shots underline their surreality. They also suggest the emotional trajectory of *Blue Velvet*: a burrowing into secret, subterranean places - the earth, the interior of the body, the unconscious, the womb. Jeffrey's journey into Dorothy's world (her apartment is dark, secret, womb-like) is essentially a descent into the interior of woman, into her hidden places, ultimately into the womb of which the film presents two opposing images.

Through a process of displacement, woman's womb, on the one hand, is seen by the terrified male as dark, mysterious, and deadly; on the other hand, it is seen as erotic and sensuous, a secret interior of blue velvet. Even the velvet assumes both aspects; sometimes its surface looks soft, at others it appears rough like the bark of a tree. The journey into Dorothy's womb is first suggested by Frank's bizarre attempt to re-enact his birth and later by the scene in which the camera holds Dorothy's parted red lips in a tight close-up, while she and Jeffrey make love, suggesting not just her lips but also her labia. In this shot, held for a long time, we see the tips of her teeth protruding slightly from her parted lips. The position of the camera, held above her face, emphasizes the displacement from her facial to her genital lips. The overt fetishization of the female genitals is emphasized in a later scene in Jeffrey's bedroom. Hanging on the wall is a fetish image, suggesting a primitive carving of the toothed vagina.



Frank's brutalization and conquest of Dorothy are a taming of woman and the terror she holds within herself. But what makes this scene most disturbing is the way Frank, unable to deal with his rejection of the adult male role - his desire to exclude the father and become an infant once again - takes on the role of the male hysteric.

Dorothy is partly presented as the phallic mother because of her placing in the desires of the male protagonists. These desires are spoken through a staging of the three primal fantasies, and they shape the structure of the narrative. But desire for the son is also Dorothy's desire. In this sense she holds the key to male pleasure and happiness and she knows it. This is why Frank screams at her not to look at him. He cannot bear to see that she ultimately holds the power.

#### POSITIONS OF DESIRE

Before Frank's arrival at the apartment, Jeffrey had been listening to Dorothy on the phone talking to both Frank and little Donny; the identities of Frank and Donny were deliberately blurred. It is not clear to which one Dorothy is speaking when she says, 'Mommy loves you.' Behind the triangle of Dorothy-Jeffrey-Frank lies another Oedipal grouping: Dorothy-Little Donny-Don. When Frank kidnaps Don and little Donny, he is free to take up symbolically the positions of either father or son in relation to Dorothy. Her request to be hit could be seen as a wish to have her deviant desires punished - her desire for the son, symbolized first by Frank, then by Jeffrey, and finally by her own son, Donny. She is finally reunited with him, but only through the exclusion and death of the real father (Don) and the symbolic father (Frank). The other father struck down in the course of the film is Jeffrey's, whose heart attack is witnessed by a small child standing in the garden, watching. After this event and his discovery of the ear, Jeffrey begins his secret affair with Dorothy, the narrative's symbolic and real mother. The reason we never actually see 'little Donny' during the course of the narrative is that he represents Jeffrey-as-a-child. Jeffrey is the baby, separated from the mother, whose secret desires for her set in motion the chain of events which leads to the exclusion of the father. Frank is also the 'baby'. When he says to Jeffrey, 'You're a lot like me,' this should be understood in its widest sense. Like Frank, Jeffrey desires to be both son and father; above all, though, he wants total access to the mother and the elimination of all rivals. The final image of Dorothy with her son, who is wearing the phallic hat which Jeffrey 'recognized', suggests that the narrative drive of the film has been to fulfil the child's wish for the mother to give up the father. Behind this lies another Oedipal configuration; when Jeffrey first visits Detective Williams at the latter's home, he is shown sitting in his study staring at a portrait of his daughter, Sandy. She also tells Jeffrey that she sometimes 'overhears' her father discussing his cases in his office.

Not only are the three primal fantasies at work in *Blue Velvet*: the narrative presents them in such a way that subject positions, specifically those of mother-child-father, become interchangeable. The movement between these symbolic places is so varied and complex that the film could be read as a dramatization of the *inter changeability* of subject positions in relation to the staging of fantasy.<sup>29</sup>

Although the various positions take on meaning only in relation to each other, I would argue that this sliding stops in relation to the figure of the woman. Only she can signify 'blue velvet', the womb, the source of life.

In a later scene at Ben's place, called *This Is It*, there is also a clear suggestion that not even the terms of sexual difference (man/woman) are fixed. Wearing make-up and jewellery, Ben appears as a drag queen, yet he mimes a song, 'In Dreams', sung by a man, Roy Orbison. In her review of the film, Karen Jaehne writes that Ben's 'masculinity is only mime . . . [he is] a drag king'.<sup>30</sup> The ambiguity of sexual identity is further undermined when Frank smears lipstick on himself and kisses Jeffrey, transferring the 'lips of woman' (Dorothy's red lips are visually highlighted throughout the film) from one man to another. When Frank beats him, Jeffrey is placed in the passive position of 'woman' within the *mise-en-scene*. The terms of sexual difference are deployed in this scene almost as if to suggest the possibility of *overcoming* sexual difference, of closing the gap between masculine and feminine.

Although I do not want to tie different primal scenes too directly to different forms of looking, it does seem that in *Blue Velvet* the fantasy of castration is overwhelmingly linked to a voyeuristic/sadistic look while the fantasy of the primal scene is linked to a masochistic look. The fantasy of seduction seems to involve an exchange of looks in which both forms, sadistic and masochistic, are represented. What is most interesting, however, is that in the representation of each of the three scenarios of desire, the look was not deterministically linked to gender. It may even be possible that certain genres draw more frequently on specific fantasies and forms of looking. The horror film, for instance, frequently utilizes the structures of the primal fantasy and the masochistic look for both male and female subjects within the narrative; the fantasy of castration and the sadistic gaze are central to *film noir*. Clearly, thinking in terms of fantasy makes it possible to theorize spectatorship in a new context. It suggests that many (all?) possible roles can be taken up by the subject in the narrative, which in turn allows multiple identifications for the spectator. Another way of freeing critical discussion from the tendency to posit only a 'male' gaze is to look more closely at the way in which *mise-en-scene* produces a 'masculinization' and a 'feminization' of space. If filmic space is represented differently, then this allows for a greater mobility of gender positions - male characters being able to take up a 'feminine' place and vice versa. Furthermore, Kaja Silverman's work on masochism and subjectivity suggests that the very notion of the 'active' voyeuristic gaze should itself be questioned.

One implication of this approach is the need to re-examine the privileged focus on the castration fantasy in critical discourses about cinema. Although John Fletcher's argument that 'all three scenes are haunted by the fantasy of castration-as-difference'<sup>31</sup> may in the end prove to be justified, it might be illuminating to study the role of the three primal fantasies in the cinema (their interweaving and interconnectedness as well as their separateness) without prejudging the question. In sci-fi horror -*Aliens*, *The Brood*, and *Inseminoid*, for example - the representation of the primal scene is a constant theme; the fantasy of castration is not a central concern. This change of emphasis would also focus attention on the representation of the usually neglected female Oedipal crisis.<sup>32</sup>

For feminism the problem is that the castration fantasy, which posits a voyeuristic and fetishistic (male) gaze, invariably relegates the woman in the fiction to the position of a threatening but ultimately powerless figure. If Laura Mulvey's theory of the 'male' gaze were viewed as a theory about *one* of the primal fantasies, the fantasy of castration - of which it is a brilliant exposition - then this would leave open the possibility of a female gaze within the fictional world of the film in relation to the two other primal fantasies. Although a female subject who plays out the sadistic, castrating role is theoretically possible - the phallic woman of pornography is such a figure - her voyeurism would be less intimately bound up with an active, penetrating look within the diegesis, because she would not be attempting to ascertain the presence or absence of the penis. The fantasies of seduction and of the primal scene are not so deterministically tied to fixed notions of sexual difference, where difference is constructed as an opposition (having and not having a penis). Consequently, where deployed, they open up the possibility of multiple subject positions for the characters and multiple points of entry into the text for both the male and female spectator. In terms of a theory of fantasy, of course, the spectator is also free to take up any position in the castration scenario: to cite Laplanche and Pontalis again, the primal fantasies 'are characterized by the absence of subjectivization'. Nevertheless, it is possible that in relation to the castration fantasy the female and male spectator do identify differently because this fantasy is *about the origins of sexual difference*.

This still leaves unanswered the question of the relative 'freedom' accorded to the viewing subject. The psychoanalytical theory of the primal fantasies suggests that all possible roles are available to the subject; as Victor Burgin puts it, the subject may 'be represented as observer, as actor, even in the very form of the utterance.'<sup>33</sup> But other factors, derived from the text's status as a signifying practice, play a role in determining, and constraining, the way in which the subject plays out her or his role. First, other themes at work in the text's representation of a particular fantasy may be influential. As I have attempted to demonstrate, although it is only one of the three primal fantasies, castration does seem to play a significant part in structuring the representation of the other fantasies in *Blue Velvet*. If this is true of other films, it may help to explain the centrality of the castrating, male gaze in the cinema; it also indicates why Mulvey's 'sadistic model' of looking speaks with such authority. A second determinant is the coding of space as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. And thirdly, in *Blue Velvet* for instance, modes of looking are closely linked with the point of view of a male character. This must make a 'difference' for the female subject who identifies with that character and 'his' fantasy in comparison with the male subject who also identifies but with a figure who is represented in his 'own image'. Narratives presented from the point of view of a female protagonist, as in the women's film, must also invite a different form of identification for the male viewer. Even if the difference is minimal, unexpected, contradictory, or impossible to theorize, the fact of that difference must be acknowledged.<sup>34</sup>

Theresa de Lauretis writes that she sees emerging from current feminist debates a female subject 'that is at the same time inside *and* outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that

division, that doubled vision'.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the viewing subject, whether male or female, is also aware of a 'twofold pull' when identifying (whether as observer/actor/utterance) with a fictional character of the other sex. My epigraph from Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (Ben the 'drag king' mimes a song about the Sandman) states that woman is both 'inside' and 'outside' fantasy where the fantasy represents male desire. 'For this reason Clara was stigmatized by many as cold, unfeeling, prosaic' For the present, this is a problem that the female spectator must confront. Despite being able to identify with the multiplicity of subject positions, for her the fictional characters of mainstream, male-centred cinema are not 'real beings, possessing life and action' because, in general, they belong to someone else's fantasy.

#### NOTES

Many thanks to Freda Freiberg for her invaluable comments and criticisms.

- 1 See Janet Bergstrom, 'Enunciation and sexual differences (Part i)', *Camera Obscura*, 3/4 (Summer 1979), 2-9; Elisabeth Lyon, 'The cinema of Lol V. Stein', *Camera Obscura*, 6 (Fall 1980); Elizabeth Cowie, 'Fantasia', *mlf*, 9 (1984); Gaylyn Studlar, 'Masochism and the perverse pleasures of the cinema', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Fall 1984); Constance Penley, 'Feminism, film theory and the bachelor machines', *mlf*, 10 (1985).
- 2 Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the origins of sexuality', in Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986), 8.
- 3 John Fletcher, 'Poetry, gender and primal fantasy', in *Formations of Fantasy*, op. cit., 114.
- 4 Cowie, op. cit., 71.
- 5 Sigmund Freud, quoted in Victor Burgin, 'Diderot, Barthes, *Vertigo*', *The End of Art Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 121.
- 6 Laplanche and Pontalis, op. cit., 27-8.
- 7 Cowie, op. cit., 77.
- 8 Laplanche and Pontalis, op. cit., 26.
- 9 *ibid.*, 22-3.
- 10 Burgin, op. cit., 129.
- 11 This question has not been adequately discussed in most articles on fantasy and spectatorship. See Donald Grieg, 'The sexual differentiation of the Hitchcock text', *Screen*, 28, I (1987), 46; also Cowie, op. cit. and Penley, op. cit.
- 12 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, 16, 3 (1975), 12.
- 13 I develop this argument in my 'Feminist film theory: reading the text', in A. Blonski, B. Creed, and F. Freiberg (eds), *Don't Shoot, Darling: women's independent filmmaking in Australia* (Melbourne: Greenhouse Publications, 1987), 303-4.
- 14 Kaja Silverman, 'Masochism and subjectivity', *Framework*, 12 (1980), 5.
- 15 See Freud's theory of the libido in 'Femininity', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican Freud Library, volume 2 (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973).
- 16 In their interesting review of *Blue Velvet*, Bill and Diane Routt suggest Frank may be suffering from Tourette's syndrome, 'a neuropsychiatric disorder . . . affecting the victim's appearance, behaviour and perceptions'; its symptoms include 'uncontrollable verbal obscenity and erotic obsession with textured fabrics, such as velvet'. They argue that 'the physiological base of Frank's actions, whether we as viewers know

- about it or not, absolves him from guilt somewhat. It makes this most repulsive of villains a victim.' *Cinema Papers*, 62 (March 1987), 51.
- 17 Studlar, op. cit., 269.
  - 18 *ibid.*, 271.
  - 19 Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the imaginary signifier* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 60.
  - 20 Studlar, op. cit., 274.
  - 21 Metz, op. cit., 60.
  - 22 Freud insisted that the hysterical subject could be male as well as female. See 'Observation of a severe case of hemi-anaesthesia in a hysterical male' (1886), *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, volume 1 (London: Hogarth Press).
  - 23 Silverman, op. cit., 6.
  - 24 *ibid.*, 7.
  - 25 Laplanche and Pontalis, op. cit., 18.
  - 26 Freud, 'From the history of an infantile neurosis', *Case Histories 2*, Pelican Freud Library, volume 9 (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1981).
  - 27 Freud, 'The paths to the formation of symptoms', *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican Freud Library, volume 1 (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1974), 417.
  - 28 Laurent Bouzereau, 'Interview with David Lynch', *Cineaste*, xv, 3 (1987), 39.
  - 29 See Cowie, op. cit., 39. Cowie presents an excellent account of *The Reckless Moment* demonstrating that the film seems to be about the shifts of positioning. My article is indebted to her analysis.
  - 30 Karen Jaehne, 'Blue Velvet', *Cineaste*, xv, 3 (1987), 40.
  - 31 Fletcher, op. cit., 114.
  - 32 Grieg (op. cit.) comments on this neglect.
  - 33 Burgin, op. cit., 128.
  - 34 Steve Neale also questions the degree of fluidity of access to positions of identification in his excellent discussion of fantasy and film: 'Sexual difference in cinema - issues of fantasy, narrative and the look', *Sexual Difference: Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 8, 1986.
  - 35 Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: essays on theory, film and fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 10.