

Introduction

British Academy of Film and Television Arts The 2007 David Lean Lecture given by David Lynch

Transcript

Princess Anne Theatre
195 Piccadilly, London
27 October 2007

Not many people realise that BAFTA is a charity, with an educational remit to support, develop and promote the art-forms of the moving image, by identifying and rewarding excellence, inspiring practitioners and benefiting the public.

Excellence is acknowledged and rewarded at the Academy's various Awards ceremonies throughout the year. Alongside these, the Academy has an ongoing monthly events programme in London and throughout the nations and regions. This events programme gives members and the public alike the opportunity to hear from practitioners first hand and to showcase the crafts of film, television and video games.

The David Lean Lecture is an important date in the UK film industry and BAFTA events calendar as it allows a prolific filmmaker to have their own voice and give an insight into how they have made such iconic films. The David Lean Lecture is annual event that is made possible by the generosity of the David Lean Foundation. I would like to thank Anthony Reeves from the DLF for all his help and continuing support.

The focus of this evening and the reason we are all here and looking forward to it, is a man who embodies the word 'inspiration'. He has inspired all of us with his contribution over many years to film and television. We are all very much looking forward to this and would like to thank him very much. Thank you to David Lynch. Jason Barlow is going to host this evening so I now hand over to him.

Hilary Bevan Jones
Chairman of the Academy

Transcript

Jason Barlow: Hello and welcome. This year, the Academy celebrates a very special anniversary. It's 60 years since the then British Film Academy was founded under the chairmanship of the pioneering film director David Lean. This lecture is held annually to commemorate his memory and to celebrate the work of film directors who, like Sir David Lean, have made an outstanding contribution to cinema. Previous names have included Robert Altman, Woody Allen, Ken Loach and Sidney Pollack. This year the lecture celebrates the work of an artist, and he truly is an artist and a groundbreaking, visionary film director. Certainly anyone who has seen *Eraserhead* will never forget the impact that it had on them. His other films include the likes of *Blue Velvet*, *Wild At Heart*, *Mulholland Drive*, most recently, *INLAND EMPIRE*, and for television, *Twin Peaks*. Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome David Lynch.

David Lynch: Thank you very much. I'm very honoured to be here. It's great to be with you tonight.

JB: You've just flown in from Edinburgh – how did you find that?

DL: ...I found it on the map. [Laughter] I found it very nice, great place. Incredible, incredibly sturdy buildings.

JB: If we can go, well, a long way back to '50s America – it's the period you grew up in, obviously – a fascinating time in modern American history and clearly a great influence on your work.

DL: Yes. The '50s – what a beautiful time. The birth of rock and roll in the '50s changed music so much and it was such a thrill. In the '50s, where I was, there was an optimism in the air, a feeling of a bright and shiny future. There were cars that were very, very beautiful with lots of chrome and it was a beautiful time to dream.

JB: But you've said as well that you were a troubled child.

DL: Oh no, I wasn't a troubled child; I had a beautiful childhood. I always say we're like detectives. We sense things [as children], and as you look around you sense that maybe things are not so

bright and shiny and you get little winds of trouble.

JB: You were not particularly academic. You got into art and I think we all agree you can see that influence very much in your films. When did that happen for you?

DL: Well, when I was little I would draw all the time. Because it was right after the war, I would draw mainly guns, rifles and knives, and really enjoyed that drawing. My mother, for some reason, refused to give me colouring books, which was a real blessing.

JB: She might have been a bit worried about you, actually, if you were drawing all that stuff?

DL: [Laughs] No, no. My father would bring paper home from the office and I would draw on that. I got into painting and never thought it was something an adult did seriously. It was so much fun and so thrilling but I thought it would come to an end. Then I met my friend Toby Keeler, on the front lawn of my girlfriend's house, not knowing that soon he was going to be stealing my girlfriend from me. But it didn't matter because Toby told me that his father was a painter. At first I thought a housepainter and then I realised that he was a fine artist and it totally, completely changed my life. From that moment on (I was 14 or 15), I wanted to be a painter.

JB: So one lost girlfriend, one found career.

DL: No problem...[Laughter]

JB: A fair trade perhaps?

DL: She was a very nice girl.

JB: You're also fascinated by machinery and industry and belching smoke stacks.

DL: The smoke stack industry... unbelievable. Smoke and fire, big machines, great sounds. It's fantastic visually and for sound. It's just beautiful.

JB: It's one of those things that's in steep decline. It's certainly in decline in this country.

DL: I know it's terrible, but good for the environment of course. In the old days [some] factories were literally like cathedrals. Now they're non-descript, small. Maybe they're dealing with even more power but it's not visually good and sound-wise, pathetic.

JB: *You've embraced modern technology. You were a fairly early avatar of the internet. It seems to me that your work is very rooted in that time. One of the things I love is [your] love of big noise and big machinery. Are you a bit adrift in this world where everything is smaller?*

DL: Well, you know, cinema can create another world. That's what's so beautiful about it. So, even though out in this world things are one way, we can get ideas and make a world to go into and have experiences, so all those things can come to life.

JB: *Well, that leads me neatly into the first film we're going to talk about which is Eraserhead. There are things in it that only cinema could have really delivered. How often do you watch Eraserhead these days?*

DL: I saw Eraserhead last with my then 14-year-old son.

JB: *...and what questions did it prompt from him?*

DL: I don't answer them really. But he really liked it. Believe it or not, Eraserhead is my most spiritual film.

JB: *Elaborate on that.*

DL: No, I won't. [Laughter]

JB: *What I do know is that you spent five years working on that film and you even did a paper round while you were shooting. Does the David Lynch of 2007 look back and marvel at the dedication of the David Lynch of the early 70s?*

DL: No, no. It's so beautiful that the only problem is running out of money. But the sets were there all during that time. I always say I was so fortunate that Jack Nance's hair stayed good during those five years. It was so good to be in that world.

JB: *That was shot in Beverly Hills?*

DL: It was shot on an 18 acre estate, a 55-room mansion on the hill but I had the entire stables. I had a hay loft, maids quarters, I had a camera room, editing room, food room, rooms for sets, garages, stalls. I had a mini studio for over four years. It was incredible.

JB: *Who was the benefactor?*

DL: The American Film Institute.

JB: *It's such a hermetically sealed film. It's astounding that it took that long to make, isn't it?*

DL: Yes. There is one scene, at least one, where Henry is on one side of the door, turns the knob, there's a cut and a year and a half later he enters his room. [Laughter]

JB: *Tell us a little more about how it actually came about. You mentioned the AFI there, how did you get involved with them?*

DL: I was involved with them before. I was studying painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. I was in a studio one day, working on a painting of a garden at night. I was looking at this painting and from the painting came a wind. The green starting moving and I said 'Oh... A moving painting'. I did a thing for the experimental painting and sculpture contest of a stop-motion painting on a sculptured screen that went continuously with the sound of a siren and that was going to be the end of it. But a gentleman saw this, and commissioned a similar thing for his home. In doing that, I purchased a new camera, which I didn't realise was broken. Two months later, I get the 100ft piece of film back and it was a total blur. But it was not a depressing feeling. It was an optimism soaring out of that.

JB: *Why?*

DL: Because I talked to them and [explained] what had happened but said I had an idea for another thing called The Alphabet. It was animation and live action. Then I wrote a script called The

“Everybody probably knows that success is just as dangerous as failure, maybe more. You second guess yourself from then on because you're afraid to fall. Failure? Terrible at first but then, oh man, total freedom. There is nowhere to go but up, and it's a very good thing.”

Grandmother. I heard about the American Film Institute, [how] if you submit previous work and a script that you want to make, maybe you could get a grant. I got an independent filmmaker's grant from the American Film Institute and was able to make The Grandmother. On the strength of that I got accepted to the Centre of Advanced Film Studies in LA.

JB: *...and Eraserhead was the project?*

DL: Yes.

JB: *How did it feel when the film was released and it began to take off?*

DL: It didn't ever take off.

JB: *It took wing and flew, an awful metaphor.*

DL: I always say it came out at the time when the midnight circuit was very popular. Had it not been for the midnight circuit, Eraserhead would have been long gone. But a guy named Ben Barenholz, who they called the grandfather of midnight films, saw it in New York, loved it and he distributed it. He said: “David, I'm going to spend no money, no advertising and there'll be lines around the block within two months.” And it was sort of true. It played in some theatres for three or four years. Even though it only played one night in the

theatre, it was always on the marquee. So word kind of went around.

JB: *What kind of buzz did you feel the first time you saw it up on the marquee?*

DL: Oh, it was a big, big thrill.

JB: *So after 15 years in the margins, you arrive with The Elephant Man. We're going to move on to that now. You've got Oscar nominations coming out of your ears...*

DL: Well, afterwards.

JB: *You were even nominated by BAFTA for Best Director – it was Akira Kurosawa who beat you on that occasion. But you must have felt amazed [going] from Eraserhead to being in that situation very quickly. How did that feel?*

DL: Incredible. Fate handed me Mel Brooks. He saw Eraserhead [and] I thought this would be the end to everything. But he came out of the theatre racing towards me, arms out, embraced me and said “You're a mad man. I love you.” [Laughter]

JB: *Did you give him a big cuddle afterwards?*

DL: Yes, a very tight hug. Mel Brooks backed me up 100% on that film and it worked out really well.

“The rule for me is to get the thing [music] to marry with the picture. I think it’s intuited, it’s not an intellectual thing. You may love many, many songs but they’re not necessarily going to marry. A lot of times, it’s a big experimentation to find the thing that marries – how the thing enters, how it grows, how it moves and how it exits.”

JB: *We’re going to look at a scene from The Elephant Man now. In this one, Anthony Hopkins’s character is inviting Sir John Gielgud’s [character] to look beneath the surface of the Elephant Man and find the humanity within. That to me is one of the most powerful scenes in cinema, frankly. What do you remember when you were shooting that scene?*

DL: I won’t tell you *that* story. There you have John Hurt who literally became, in his morning make-up, transformed into John Merrick – just beyond the most beautiful performance. Tony Hopkins was rock solid and Sir John Gielgud – what a great human being he was. The day I was going to work with Sir John, I was putting on my underwear and thinking ‘Here I am, putting on my underwear and I’m going off to work with Sir John Gielgud’ [laughs].

JB: *I wondered what you’re feeling when you’re nailing a scene like that? It’s exquisite.*

DL: You know, a thing is built with elements. You just try to get every element to feel correct as you march along, based on the idea.

JB: *You mentioned Mel Brooks earlier on and an executive called Stuart Cornfeld. Can you tell us a little bit about how you got The Elephant Man and the process that took you to this project?*

DL: I had a script I wrote after Eraserhead called Ronnie Rocket. Stuart called me out of the blue one day, raving about Eraserhead, and was trying to help me get Ronnie Rocket going. No-one wanted to know so, after trying for a long time, I called and said “Stuart, I think I should try to direct something that exists. Do you know of any scripts that I could direct?” Stuart said: “David, I know four scripts that you could direct. Come to lunch with me at Nibblers and I’ll tell you about them.” So we met up at Nibblers, sat down and before we even ordered anything I said: “Stuart, now tell me.” He said: “Well, the first one is a film called The Elephant Man,” and an explosion went off in my head. I never heard the other three. It wasn’t easy. This film was turned down by six studios. Everybody said: ‘Nobody wants to see a film about a monster like this.’ Somehow, Stuart got this to Anne Bancroft. Anne Bancroft got it to Mel and Mel made it happen.

JB: *Looking back, knowing what we know now about the themes and preoccupations evident in your films, the jump to Victorian England seems even more profound. I mean, you went from Jack Nance to Sir John Gielgud.*

DL: I was born in Missoula, Montana and here I am in London doing a Victorian drama – pretty strange. When I first met Wendy Hiller [who played Miss Mothershead], she grabbed me by my neck (she’s short) and lifted me about a foot in the air, marched

me around the room and said: “I don’t know you. I’ll be watching you.” [Laughter] She became one of my biggest supporters when things got tough.

JB: *Now obviously the make-up and prosthetics used in the film were a spectacular job.*

DL: Christopher Tucker saved the day.

JB: *You were apparently holed-up in Wembley of all places and you were determined to do the make-up yourself but it didn’t work, did it? A bad time by all accounts.*

DL: It was a bad time, four very dark days when I thought I wouldn’t make it. In sleep, the nightmares were so horrible, but waking up was worse and I wished I could go back to those nightmares. Mel Brooks flew over from LA and I thought he was gonna send me packing. Meanwhile, Jonathan Sanger the producer had gotten hold of Chris Tucker. All Mel said was “Thank God for Chris Tucker. David, you shouldn’t have been worried about that. You gotta direct the film.” So again, Mel Brooks like a saint relieved all this horror.

JB: *Why were you trying to do the make-up?*

DL: It’s a long story Jason but I thought I could make it happen.

JB: *Well, I’d love to go into it but we’ll move on to Blue Velvet. Of the things we think of in your films, I think it’s fair to say they reached a zenith in Blue Velvet. I don’t agree with this assessment myself but there were accusations of misogyny at the time, given the violence to Dorothy Vallens’s character.*

DL: Sure... People think that a woman in a film represents all women. This kind of thinking leads to those kind of things but it’s just her, her particular character in this particular world. Those things happened to her.

JB: *It seems to me that Blue Velvet is even more powerful now, 21 years on, than when it was released. We live in very morally policed times.*

DL: It’s like in the ‘50s, the optimistic shiny exterior and then a lot of darkness swimming beneath it. These sorts of things go on, no matter what time it is.

JB: *It’s the first evidence of your love of music. It’s the film where you hooked-up with Angelo Badalamenti – a very fruitful partnership that turned out to be.*

DL: For sure. The beginning of the ideas for the film came out of Bobby Vinton’s [1963] version of Blue Velvet. So Isabella [Rossellini] is required to sing this song. She started on her own with a voice coach but they learnt the 1952 version which, you know, was a big mistake. We tried to correct this in the studio. It wasn’t working so Fred Caruso, the producer, said: “Let me bring my buddy Angelo down and he can work with Isabella.” Angelo came down, played the piano and worked with Isabella. They recorded a thing – it was incredibly beautiful. Angelo played it to me the first time I met him, in the driveway of the Beaumont house in Lumberton and I said: “Angelo, this is so beautiful we can cut it into the picture right now.” Then we were trying to get another song. It was costing a lot and there were legal problems, whether we could get it or not.

JB: *‘Song To The Siren,’ wasn’t it?*

DL: Yes it was. So Fred said “You’re always writing things, why don’t you send Angelo some stuff and see if he can write something that feels as good?” I said: “Fred, there’s 20 million songs. I want ‘Song To The Siren.’” But Angelo wrote the song ‘Mysteries Of Love’ and it did go in. Then I said “Angelo, you gotta score the picture” and that’s how we started working together.

JB: *You’re one of the few film directors who really seems to understand how a pop song, any sort of music in fact, can work with a scene. So few filmmakers know how to do that – maybe Martin Scorsese, Wim Wenders – but primarily you I think.*

DL: The rule for me is to get the thing to marry with the picture. I think it’s intuited, it’s not an intellectual thing. You may love many, many songs but they’re not necessarily going to marry. A lot of

times, it's a big experimentation to find the thing that marries – how the thing enters, how it grows, how it moves and how it exits. You get it to feel correct. For you, based on the idea.

JB: *The other thing we will remember from Blue Velvet is Dennis Hopper's incredible portrait of Frank Booth. I actually interviewed Dennis Hopper a while ago and was startled to find out that it was the first film he did after he got clean and sober.*

DL: No it wasn't, it was the second I think, maybe the third. He was on the list of actors for sure but the reputation of Dennis had fallen and you couldn't work with him. So one day his manager calls and says: "David, you know Dennis is clean and sober. He made another picture and you can talk to the director and he can tell you how great it was working with Dennis. Also, Dennis really wants to talk to you." So the next phone call was Dennis Hopper and he says: "David, I have to play Frank Booth because I am Frank Booth." So it was good news and bad news combined. But Dennis is the perfect, perfect person and it was so beautiful that he did that.

JB: *I want to move on to 1990, the year Wild At Heart came out, the year it won the Palme D'Or at Cannes. It's fair to say you were going through something of an imperial phase at that time.*

DL: What's an imperial phase?

JB: *Things were going pretty well. You have often talked about yourself as a kind of radio, a receiver of signals and you sort of channel them.*

DL: *I catch ideas and translate them to a medium.*

JB: *In that period of time, do you think that the Lynch radio had locked onto a particularly potent frequency or was it that the world had locked onto you?*

DL: I don't know. I think Twin Peaks caught so much of the world.

JB: *We're going to look at a scene from Wild At Heart now. In this scene, Sailor Ripley, played by Nicolas Cage, serenades Lula, played by Laura Dern.*

DL: Laura Dern as Lula is really incredible.

JB: *I think we had seen her as Sandy [in Blue Velvet] four years before that. To go from embodying an all-American innocence to someone slightly less innocent in Wild At Heart...what is it with Laura? You use her a lot.*

DL: Well, I worked with her in Blue Velvet and then she became a friend. When you know somebody more you see different sides of them and you see that they can do different things... so when it came to Wild At Heart, I knew she could do it. Lula's got this kind of goodness in her and so does Sailor. I always say it's a modern romance because Sailor really respects Lula and Lula really respects Sailor. They are equals going down the road. It's a real nice relationship.

JB: *For me it's the film of yours that's got the most sensory overload. I take it all that's intentional?*

DL: For sure. It's based on Barry Gifford's book. The book is written very minimally but it sprouted so many seeds in my head and so the script is different than the book. There was something going on in the world then, and it had just gotten worse and worse but it seemed like things were coming apart.

JB: *What was going on in the world back then?*

DL: This was 1989, so I forget what it was but there was a feeling in the air that things were starting to get pretty crazy.

JB: *It is quite a crazy film but, looking back at it now, the world as it is now is horribly close to some of the stuff going on [in the film]. That degree of violence is almost cartoonish, isn't it?*

DL: There's humour. There is a lot of absurdity in life but films do reflect the world in which we live. Ideas come from our world. As the world changes, ideas change, cinema changes. Thirties cinema has a certain feel, it says 'that time'. Sixties cinema – a whole different feel, 'cause the world changes, cinema changes.

“You work so hard after ideas come to get this thing built, and all the elements to feel correct, in this beautiful language we call cinema. The second it's finished, people want you to change it back into words and it's very saddening... it's a torture.”

JB: *There's absurdity but there's humour and a great deal of optimism because love conquers all in Wild At Heart. It's a hellish kind of world but there's a happy ending. Of course, the book didn't have a happy ending, did it?*

DL: No... and no one could really live with that. Barry was cool with this happy ending.

JB: *And what about Nic Cage?*

DL: Great, great actor. Fearless and so much fun to work with. Get an idea, run it by Nic and he can make it happen.

JB: *It strikes me as a film where – and I think this is always a hallmark of a successful project – it looks like everyone involved was having a hell of a time.*

DL: A really great time.

JB: *You alluded earlier on to Twin Peaks, which you were involved with around the same time in '89, working on the pilot. You're so obviously in love with the power and the dynamism and the uniqueness of cinema and yet you got involved in television, which is commercially and artistically very restraining. What possessed you?*

DL: I loved the idea of a continuing story, so that seemed intriguing. I always thought of it as a film – we shot on film, we worked the same way as film. This world was so fantastic to go into, such great characters. I could see it going on and that was the

thrill. The commercials and interruptions are, you know, a very bad thing.

JB: *You chanced upon Sheryl Lee, a fortuitous thing.*

DL: Fortuitous? Huge. She was supposed to just play a dead girl. When interviewing her I said: "I would like to dip you in grey dye. Do you have a problem with that?" "Who killed Laura Palmer?" – the mystery of that was what drove everything. When we had to solve that mystery, that's what killed everything.

JB: *It must have driven you slightly crazy...*

DL: What, the solving of it?

JB: *No, the solving is fine...*

DL: No, the solving isn't fine. It could still be going.

JB: *It probably still is going somewhere.*

DL: It is going, maybe, mentally, but it's not going on television. [Laughter]

JB: *Did the success of Twin Peaks and the fact that pretty much half the world was watching and obsessing about it and wanting to know who was responsible for her death, drag you down a bit? Or did you think you'd created a prison of your own making in a way?*

DL: It's a little bit of both. You're happy and surprised at how it travelled. But at the same time there's a huge, huge, amount of work to keep it going and I wanted to get on to Wild At Heart in the middle of all of this. It's a tough thing.

JB: *Were you turned on a little bit by the notion of smuggling something into the mainstream?*

DL: No, this is another world that we can go into. I see it [TV] just like cinema. We had a tremendous amount of freedom. There was some dialogue censorship but it was unbelievable freedom... right up until we had to solve the murder.

JB: *So you're a filmmaker who's done some fairly extreme, challenging things. You had complete satisfactory freedom on that television project?*

DL: Yes. You've got to have freedom. Why would you do something if you didn't have freedom? It's a horror. It's a nightmare.

JB: *The other thing that's intriguing about Twin Peaks is that you revisited it. You felt compelled to go back to it with Fire Walk With Me, why was that?*

DL: I just felt that this whole thing of Laura Palmer, her side of the story, the last seven days of Laura Palmer, thrilled me.

JB: *There was some feeling that you were heading into a creative cul-de-sac, perhaps. Do you care what anybody really thinks?*

DL: You've got to do what you believe in and you never know what audiences are gonna think. There wasn't a lot of the humour from Twin Peaks, it was a dark story. But I love this film. I didn't die a death when it didn't do well. I was very happy.

JB: *You seem brilliantly built to cope with the vicissitudes of fame and success.*

DL: You go up and you go down. Everybody probably knows that success is just as dangerous as failure, maybe more. You second guess yourself from then on because you're afraid to fall. Failure? Terrible

at first but then, oh man, total freedom. There is nowhere to go but up, and it's a very good thing.

JB: *We are going to move on to Mulholland Drive. I could ask you what the film is about but you don't really like to tell people. Can I ask you instead what other theories you have heard, what have other people propounded to you about Mulholland Drive?*

DL: Oh, many, many things.

JB: *Let's hear a few of them, then.*

DL: No, no, no. [Laughter] The film is the thing. You work so hard after ideas come to get this thing built, and all the elements to feel correct, in this beautiful language we call cinema. The second it's finished, people want you to change it back into words and it's very saddening... it's a torture. When things are concrete, [there are] very few variations and interpretations. The more abstract a thing gets, the more varied the interpretations. But people still know inside what it is for them. You come up with many, many different things as you go along as a detective.

JB: *Okay, Detective Jason thinks it's a ghost story. Is it a ghost story?*

DL: It's a ghost story for you. [Laughter]

JB: *You've always maintained that you have no awareness or working knowledge of psychology as such. This film [Mulholland Drive] invites that sort of reading doesn't it?*

DL: Sure. When I finished Blue Velvet, I think it was a friend of Isabella [Rossellini]'s, a psychoanalyst, who got together periodically with a group of 16 psychoanalysts and they would write-up things on film. They took on Blue Velvet and sent me the pages. It was pretty interesting.

JB: *Do you remember some of the stuff they came up with?*

DL: No, I don't really remember. Again, it's the world we get to go into. You feel and you think and you come to these conclusions for yourself and you don't need the director to say anything.

JB: *We kind of do, we want the vision.*

DL: You have everything in the film. That's the thing, it doesn't matter what I say, zip. It can only be a negative. The thing is built so you don't want to take anything away and you don't want to add anything to it, it's complete, that's it.

JB: *So you put the material out there and you just invite us to kind of...*

DL: I get ideas that I fall in love with. I fall in love with them because of the idea and the way cinema can translate that idea. You get painting ideas, chair ideas, photography ideas, music ideas, such a beautiful thing to get an idea. Then you see it, you hear it, there it is. And then you just translate it and you build it. A lot of the times I get an idea, I don't know what that idea means. So I think about it and find a meaning for me. Another idea comes and hooks to it, the script starts going and building. Then you build that thing until it feels correct, based on those ideas that have been driving the boat. Then you get it to feel correct and it's done.

JB: *Then someone comes along and imposes their own reading on it.*

DL: I understand but it's just not right to say something [about the film] because you could hurt it.

JB: *This brings me on to the final clip, from INLAND EMPIRE. I think everything you've said in the last five minutes holds true for this film – without a doubt the most intriguing film I've ever seen. Is it true that you were writing dialogue and script and basically riffing and improvising and then giving it to the actors the next day when shooting?*

DL: No. I got an idea for a scene and I thought it was a one-off scene. I had this Sony PD150 camera. I wrote the scene out and shot it. Then I got another idea. I thought it was a one-off thing so I shot it. It didn't relate to the first thing at all. Then I got another idea and it didn't relate to the first two. I shot that. Then I got some ideas that

related those. This happens in writing a script but here it was already shot with a Sony PD150, so I continued with the Sony PD150 and then more ideas came and I shot in a more traditional way. But [I'd] always have the script before we went out and shot anything.

JB: *So the whole thing was locked down?*

DL: No, it was locked down scene by scene but the end was not known for some time.

JB: *So you weren't making it up as you were going along, then?*

DL: No, I don't ever feel like I'm making something up. You're getting ideas. It's like getting fish. You don't make the fish. It swims in, you catch it, and then you can cook it bad, medium or good. The little fish swim in as ideas and you catch them, you see them and this fish is so beautiful and you love this little fish. It's just a fragment of something but you love it and you write down the idea. It's like a bait that will bring in more, and they'll marry to that and a story just starts coming up.

JB: *Do you agree it's the most abstract thing in your canon?*

DL: What, fish? [Laughter]

JB: *No, INLAND EMPIRE.*

DL: Yes, probably. I know what you mean when you say that.

JB: *I think what I'm trying to say is that I'm kind of excited by you moving further away from conventional techniques.*

DL: I'm not doing it for any reason except for falling in love with the ideas. The Straight Story is linear and I say that is my most abstract film. I read the script, which I did not write, but a script is like getting organised ideas. When you read the words, the thing comes alive in your head. It was the emotion that I felt in that script. I said: 'How do you get this emotion with so few elements in an

absolute straight, linear line?’ So it was an experiment to get this sound and music and words and look so that it’s a thing. We all see people crying or doing something on screen but the crying doesn’t come to the audience. They’re crying but you’re not crying. You’re not feeling it. To get the feeling, there is a trick. It’s an experiment, finding that way.

JB: *You shot INLAND EMPIRE digitally. Is this an example of you embracing the technology, or has technology forced you into its reluctant embrace?*

DL: Let’s say Marilyn Monroe steps in next to you Jason. Would it be a reluctant embrace, for you to embrace her? No reluctance. Forty minute takes, light weight, automatic focus, smaller crews. It’s a dream for scenes. Sound has been digital for years, picture is going digital.

JB: *So, a new lease of life really.*

DL: It’s not any kind of new lease. It’s just a better way to go. No two prints of film are the same. It breaks, it gets dirty, it burns, it gets water marks, hairs and the equipment is so heavy, giant equipment.

JB: *Much of INLAND EMPIRE was shot in Poland, isn’t that correct?*

DL: Some of it was shot in Poland. Sometimes you visit a place and get ideas from that place, and this is what happened visiting Łódź.

JB: *Why Poland? I’ve been there, it’s a rather beautiful place in many ways.*

DL: I went to the CameraImage Film Festival. The guys that run the festival, now my good friends, came to visit me way back when in 2000, I think, to talk to me about coming to the festival. I said: “If I go, would you help me get into factories to photograph and would you get me nude women at night to photograph?” and they did that. The city of Łódź has this mood in the winter and ideas came.

JB: *There’s a section in that film where there is Polish dialogue. I presume it’s Polish – we have some subtitles then we have no subtitles.*

DL: If they are speaking a foreign language other than English, there’s supposed to be subtitles. If there’s not, there’s a big problem here in England.

JB: *You say that, but I’m not sure it’s a massive problem. One of the things I’ve found very intriguing about you is that you’ve said you’re not sure you really like words but you often like the way they sound.*

DL: It’s the flow of them. The loud and the soft of them and a little bit of a pause. Those things plus the meaning.

JB: *Is INLAND EMPIRE the strangest David Lynch film?*

DL: No [laughs].

JB: *Can I ask which one you would nominate?*

DL: No. It maybe is abstract and I certainly know what you’re talking about but what do you mean by ‘strange’?

JB: *If we get into a debate about the semantics of strange and abstract we’ll be here a very long time.*

DL: It’s a human being story.

JB: *Anything else?*

DL: No. [Laughter]

JB: *David, thank you for talking to me.*

DL: Thank you, Jason, very much.

Editing: Ruth Grenville, Christine Robertson
Design: Browns
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