

“Rockin’ Back Inside My Heart”: Cruise, Badalamenti, Lynch - Postmodern Nostalgias

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“Questions in a World of Blue”
Julee sings at the Roadhouse in *Fire Walk With Me*

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“It is happening again. It is happening again.”
Coop’s vision at the Roadhouse, *Twin Peaks* episode 14, “Lonely Souls”

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“Where we’re from, the birds sing a pretty song and there’s always music in the air”
Red Room scene from the *Twin Peaks* trailer episode

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“Through the darkness of future past the magician longs to see. One chants out between two worlds,
‘Fire - walk with me.’”¹

Angelo Badalamenti’s scores for David Lynch’s various projects since their initial collaboration on *Blue Velvet* are a crucial component of the overall affectivity of Lynch’s audio-visual texts. In particular, the songs which result from collaboration between Lynch as lyricist, Badalamenti as composer, and Julee Cruise as vocalist occupy a pivotal position within Badalamenti’s work. They are, of course, often noted for their referencing of American popular musics of the 1950s, from Rock ‘n’ Roll through Bebop and Cool Jazz. However, this nostalgic referentiality is always undercut with a keen sense of irony, situating such modernist styles of the ‘50s within a more ‘90s postmodern sensibility. As Lynch himself has commented, with reference to the Rock ‘n’ Roll guitar elements in the *Twin Peaks* soundtrack:

...it’s a fifties thing. Banal in a way. Misplaced, almost. A fifties/nineties combo was what *Twin Peaks* was all about. We weren’t making a period thing.²

Indeed, it is the avoidance of “a period thing” within Badalamenti’s music that calls forth the necessary distancing from the ‘originals’ and which opens up the space of ironic significations - an aesthetic space which, for Lynch, is also a *mis-placing*, a dislocation of the referenced styles from their original contexts and meanings while intertextually re-locating them within new contexts, carrying certain elements of their original meanings with them, yet simultaneously turning these meanings upon a new axis of signification.

A semiotic trawl through the four CD albums which collate these collaborative pieces soon reveals the sources upon which their intertextuality operates. In particular, the sonorities of ‘50s Rock ‘n’ Roll guitar styles are prevalent,³ from the use of reverb effects to glissandoing chords inflected by the use of the whammy bar, as is particularly evident in both

¹ Lynch, p.165.

² Lynch, p.134.

³ However, it is worth noting that various elements of Hip-Hop, Dub, Reggae, and classical avant-gardism can also be located in specific tracks.

the rhythm and lead parts of “The Pink Room”, composed by Lynch himself. Equally prominent in the rhythm guitar here is the use of a standard Rock ‘n’ Roll figure of incessant quaver triplets providing the chordal context, much as, for example, Fats Domino’s piano right-hand does in tracks such as “Blueberry Hill”. Moreover, there is also a certain correlation between the blues-inflected bass-line of Lynch’s track, and the right-hand parts of Domino’s piano style, which generally serves to articulate the structures of root triads and octaves, filled in with blue-notes.

A similar conjunction appears in “Rockin’ Back Inside My Heart”, a Lynch/Badalamenti composition sung by Cruise. Here, the triplet quaver figure is restored to its more normative placing on the piano, and again, we find a bassline stating the outline of the tonic chord, this time in a dotted rhythm more akin to the ostensible model found in Domino’s “Blueberry Hill”. In fact, this time, the bassline can be seen as an almost direct reference to “Blueberry Hill”, in that it operates as a minimalistic articulation of the first and third notes of Domino’s figure (root and fifth), simply swinging, pendulum-like, through a dotted rhythm from one note to the other. Furthermore, in both of the Lynch and Badalamenti tracks, the harmony is extremely static - “The Pink Room” sits squarely on the tonic chord throughout, while “Rockin’ Back” sits primarily on the tonic, with very brief movement elsewhere (not even the chorus shifts from the tonic presented in the verses). The extreme harmonic minimalism of these two tracks are given a profoundly hypnotic affect through the combination of the repetitive quaver triplet assertions of the tonic and the reduced basslines which pick through and restate its basic structure over and over. Indeed, the constriction of the original ‘50s style which is achieved in both “Pink Room” and “Rockin’ Back” is overtly a Minimalist recomposition of Rock ‘n’ Roll.

Of course, one of the other primary reference points is ‘50s Jazz, from Bebop through Cool Jazz. Such tracks as “Audrey’s Dance”, “Freshly Squeezed” and “Don’t Do Anything I Wouldn’t Do” use vibes parts clearly reminiscent of Milt Jackson of the Modern Jazz Quartet. Moreover, the basslines of “Freshly Squeezed” and “Dance of the Dream Man” both share an opening minim statement of bare octaves prior to moving into a descending figure which then opens out into standard walking bass extemporisations, while “Up in Flames” merely dispenses with the octave figure and moves immediately into the descending bassline. In all three tracks, the percussion consists of brushed snare and finger-clicks.

“The Bookhouse Boys” is a collage of several of the elements discussed above - initially, we hear a slightly aimless improvisatory sax solo with heavy reverb suggestive of distance, which combines to give the impression of listening-in to a sax player warming up in the cavernous basement of a Jazz club. This is soon overlaid with an improvisatory drum-kit solo utilising brushed snares, and establishing a rambling, if discernible metrical foundation, which the sax nonetheless, being performed as if “from another place” in the mix, resolutely does not follow. The third event is the entry of a ‘50s-oriented guitar line using both reverb and whammy-bar chordal glissandi following a solidly-grounded metrical pattern established by “cool” finger-clicks which nonetheless, once more, resolutely ignore the rambling meter of the drum-kit. Finally, a keyboard part related to the Laura Palmer theme enters, again, out of metrical sync with the established parts. In this way, several different elements are combined in a metrical collage, moving from free meter in the sax part, through to rambling meter in the drum-kit part, and strict meter in the guitar and fingers part. Throughout, however, these three different metrical strands fail to fully meet up and regulate themselves according to an all-encompassing metrical pattern - each musical strand exists in metrical parallel with the others, randomly phasing in and out of sync with each other, pursuing their own *mis-placed* temporal trajectories. In this, several popular music elements - which normally depend upon

congruent regularity of meter - are thrown into an avant-garde context which uneasily questions their normative structural contexts.

But the very fact that many musical figures are common to so many tracks within the Lynch/Badalamenti collaborations opens a further layer of intertextuality between the tracks themselves within this repertoire, aside from the evident intertextuality of its nostalgic referencing of the '50s. Equally, the fact that several songs within the repertoire appear on more than one album, and within more than one project, situated in different contexts each time, also links into the functions of repetition and difference which intertextual praxis set into play - each time we hear the same song, but placed in a different context, with its meaning imperceptibly shifted into a new field.

Of course, this constant intertextual trope which combines difference with and within repetition relates very precisely and specifically to Lynch's comments above about the *misplaced* quality of these modernist elements from the '50s, aesthetically and temporally relocated within an overall '90s postmodernism. Indeed, the function of Lynch's lyrics within the songs hooks into this intertextual field, lending it an even more intense ambience of ironic nostalgia. Lynch's lyrics for these songs, again, adopt stock phrases from the corpus of '50s popular music, picking up on the clichés and displacing them within the '90s context, giving their meaning a new, yet often disturbing spin. While Fats Domino could sing, in all innocence and without irony of finding his thrill on Blueberry Hill, of the fact that "the moon stood still", and that "the wind in the willow" sang "love's sweet melody", of the fact that "though we're apart, you follow me still", when Lynch writes the highly saccharine and clichéd platitudes of innocent youth and its loves, the context in which Julee Cruise as singer of these lyrics is placed not only hollows out the content of the original '50s models, but replaces their lost innocence with disturbing, often menacing possibilities. As Lynch has commented, "Popular phrases can have different meanings..."⁴ - and indeed this is what is effected in his use of Cruise's performances of the songs in *Twin Peaks*.

Initially, we can identify *crying* as a trope which follows Cruise's performances at the Roadhouse in *Twin Peaks*. Narratively speaking, our first diegetic encounter with Cruise occurs in the film *Twin Peaks - Fire Walk With Me*, in which we have a wired Laura Palmer entering the Roadhouse to find Cruise singing "Questions in a World of Blue", an ostensibly innocent song about lost love. As the lines "How can a heart that's filled with love / Start to cry?" are sung, Laura herself begins to cry as her friend Donna watches unseen from the other side of the bar, just prior to the moment when the barman signals to two of his male customers that Laura's services as prostitute are now available for the evening. This sudden shift from the lost loves of youth to the harder-edged issue of prostitution (threatening and tragic, not least since Laura, 17, is also the victim of incest, forced bondage, rape and murder) cuts through the saccharine quality of the song to reveal a disturbing juxtaposition of innocence and violence. Furthermore, we have the fact that prior to Laura entering the Roadhouse, the Log Lady stops her, places her hand on Laura's forehead and prophetically announces: "When this kind of fire starts it is very hard to put out. The tender boughs of innocence burn first and the wind rises and then all goodness is in jeopardy." It is indeed the jeopardy in which innocent teenage love finds itself in the fires of lust and violence which is powerfully captured in this first Roadhouse scene.

Again, in episode fourteen of the *Twin Peaks* television series ("Lonely Souls"), well after the murder of Laura by the evil incubus spirit Killer Bob, we find a juxtaposition of several apparently autonomous social scenes while Cruise first sings "Rockin' Back Inside My Heart" and then, most ominously, "The World Spins". During the first track, in which

⁴ Lynch, p.130.

Donna mouths the lyrics of the chorus to James, Laura's ex-lover, Agent Cooper enters the bar with Sheriff Truman and the Log Lady. During Cruise's performance of "The World Spins", however, Cooper has a prophetic vision - Cruise and the band fade from the stage, to be replaced by the Giant, who tells Cooper, "It is happening again. It is happening again". At this point, we cut to Laura's father, Leland, grooming himself in a mirror at home. While he does so, we see his reflection flicker between his own and that of Bob. As Maddie, Laura's lookalike cousin comes down the stairs to see her uncle, he, Leland, possessed by Bob, assaults and murders her to the accompaniment of an avant-garde influenced electronic soundtrack. Once the murder is over, however, we cut back to Cooper in the Roadhouse, staring at the Giant still on the stage, and suddenly aware of the potential meaning of the Giant's cryptic statement. At this point, the Giant fades and Cruise returns, still singing "The World Spins". At this moment, Donna spontaneously begins to cry, while on the other side of the bar, another of Laura's ex-lovers, Bobby, begins to look profoundly uneasy as some form of recognition of the events appears to glimmer at the back of his mind. In this context, Lynch's ostensibly innocent and stock-clichéd lyrics to the song such as "Love / Don't go away / Come back this way / Come back and stay" take on an altogether different resonance from their apparent saccharine and banal quality.

Clearly, in both of these scenes, Cruise's singing at the Roadhouse functions as either some form of catalyst of the events upon which the central narrative thread is based, or some form of intuitive oracular mechanism by which their meaning can be divined. As Lynch's interviewer, Chris Rodley has commented:

The music also becomes important as far as the narrative is concerned. It's often when Julee Cruise is singing that other things start to happen. It's as if the music generates events or certain realisations, such as when the Giant appears and tells Cooper that 'It's happening again.'⁵

Clearly, despite Lynch's characterisation of these songs as "banal in a way", it is their contextual *mis-placing* within the overall narrative structures which imparts particularly serious meanings to them. Yet their force as moments which either bring into being or reflect upon weighty moments of narrative transition places the general figure of music, and more particularly *song*, in a specifically functional position. The presence of the prophetic figure of the Log Lady in both scenes provides us instantly with a clue, as does, moreover, the occurrence of Cooper's vision during Cruise's singing. The Log Lady in general is presented as an individual who has some form of obscure knowledge of the parallel reality from which the incubus Killer Bob emerges. Cooper himself has insight into this crossing between the worlds of the mundane and the paranormal, as the vision of his occasional guide in such matters, the Giant, indicates.

Of course, music, and song in particular, has long been associated in folklore with the power to transgress the boundary between this world and the Otherworld. Many traditional narratives recount the exploits of various musically-gifted heroes who enter the Otherworld and return with varying degrees of success, from the ancient Greek pagan myth of Orpheus, to the medieval Lowland Scots ballad of Thomas the Rhymer. In a more contemporary context, and writing of the figure of Hollywood dance (and thus, implicitly of the popular music - and *song* - which facilitates it), Gilles Deleuze has commented of Vincente Minnelli's films such as *Brigadoon* that:

The plurality of worlds is Minnelli's first discovery, his very great position in cinema. But how, then, do we pass from one world to the other? This is the second discovery; dance is no longer simply movement of world, but passage

⁵ Chris Rodley, in Lynch, p.171.

from one world to another, entry into another world, breaking in and exploring. It is no longer a matter of going from a world which is real in general to particular dream-worlds... In Minnelli, every world and every dream is shut in on itself, closed up around everything it contains, including the dreamer... Dance is now no longer the movement of dream which outlines a world, but now acquires depth, grows stronger as it becomes the sole means of entering into another world, that is, into another's world, into another's dream or past.⁶

Transposing Deleuze's comments specifically onto the figure of popular song within Lynch's work, and particularly the Julee Cruise songs in *Twin Peaks*, it is clear that it operates at the gateway between this world and the Otherworld of the Black and White Lodges, perhaps invoking the movement from one to the other, perhaps facilitating it. In this, Cruise herself takes on a more ominous role than that of the sweet, diminutive and highly feminised figure which she and her songs ostensibly sign at first hearing. It is worth noting here one of the motifs which appears in Lynch's take on *Twin Peaks*, a fragment of text written one day in the mundane, everyday world while on his way to work:

Through the darkness of future past the magician longs to see. One chants out between two worlds, 'Fire - walk with me.'⁷

In this chanting which is performed between this world and the Otherworld, the space between them, and which normatively divides them, becomes *mis-placed*, allowing the two world-spaces to flow into each other and produce remarkable events. Moreover, we should recall the comments of the mysterious Man From Another Place, the midget who, at the end of the narrative structure of *Twin Peaks*, "twenty-five years later" (and yet presented at the end of the trailer episode), speaks cryptically to Cooper in the transitional Red Room, of the fact that:

Where we're from, the birds sing a pretty song and there's always music in the air.

At this point, of course, the Man From Another Place, begins to demonstrate this music from the "other place", the Otherworld, by dancing in somewhat disjointed fashion to Badalamenti's "Dance of the Dream Man", inconclusively rounding off the structure of the narrative before it has even fully begun - an indication of music as a point of disjuncture, a figure of the mis-placed, a transition between this mundane place and the Other place. In this, the question of banality takes on a different hue.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Athlone, 1989), p.63.

⁷ Lynch, p.165.