



'The grainy, staticky noise of *Eraserhead*.' | LISA CLAIRE MAGEE

DARKNESS AUDIBLE:

Sub-bass, tape decay and Lynchian noise

FRANCES MORGAN

Noise is the forest of everything. The existence of noise implies a mutable world through an unruly intrusion of an other, an other that attracts difference, heterogeneity and productive confusion; moreover it implies a genesis of mutability itself.

—Douglas Kahn¹

DREAMING IN THE BLACK LODGE

In the interests of research, I undertake a *Twin Peaks* marathon, from the iconic first eight episodes to the end of season two. Afterwards, I dream I am lost in a dark, airy house, populated with indistinct presences. Like Dale Cooper making his multiple ways in and out of each curtained alcove, I become increasingly confused, roaming through

FEATURING

Death
Dread
Drone
Distortion
Doom metal

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¹ Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (MIT, 1999), p.22.

long rooms that change in shape and size. I can hear a voice, distorted, slowed down and incomprehensible: as the register sinks lower, the house's darkness becomes more oppressive. Fear hums like a vast machine that operates almost below audible range but whose vibrations are felt in the feet and chest; death and decay take aural shape in rumble, static and hiss.

This is not the actual sound of David Lynch's Black Lodge, of course. *Twin Peaks*' sound design reflects the restrictions imposed by television, which has a smaller dynamic range than film, and the series' abiding sonic impressions, for most, are the constant presence of Angelo Badalamenti's score, followed by the creative use of the voice, such as the backwards/forwards dialogue used by characters in Cooper's dreams or visions. My own dream, while inspired by *Twin Peaks*' final episode, is more like a composite of Lynchian sound realisations: the dense, machine presence of *Eraserhead* (1976), the abject, humming mid-range evil of the underrated *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992),² the oppressive domestic drone of *Lost Highway* (1997) and the ominous rumble of much of *Inland Empire* (2006). It is also drawn from music: from the amplifier worship of Sunn O))), the disintegrating tapes of William Basinski, the enraged, overdriven voices of Whitehouse, or the dystopian bass quake of Kode9 and the Spaceape's album *Memories of the Future*.

The registers of sound where the listener both hears and feels the limits of their sonic perception are places explored by most kinds of extreme music. The attraction of low-end, distorted or heavily layered sound for musicians is obvious and manifold: it can be violent and disorientating; melancholy and ecstatic; used to illustrate or induce psychological disturbance or summon occult presences. But while noise-based music can often be filmic, and influenced by film – long form, atmospheric, ambiguous but with a sense of narrative – in film, noise is used less often than we might think in any way other than illustrative: a sound may be enhanced or exaggerated, but it

2 Another reason to reappraise this film is that Lynch himself took control of the sound mix, giving *Fire Walk with Me* much of its perverse atmosphere and resulting in key musical scenes like Laura and Donna's visit to the Roadhouse.

usually corresponds directly with a visual analogue, *the thing that made the sound*. This is true even of the most ‘atmospheric’ horror or supernatural films: a drip of water, for example, can be amplified for uncanny effect, but it still is what it is; it is still water. Noise’s mutability, to use Kahn’s description, does not correspond well to cinema’s definite visions, outside of the most abstract art film.

Yet David Lynch, while creating iconic, successful films, with particularly influential musical soundtracks, is one director who has often approached noise in this more abstract way, using noise both on its own and interwoven with, or augmenting, more ‘traditional’ music to create atmospheres of disquiet and liminality. Death, memory, decay and the existence of other, darker worlds within and around this one are themes central to his vision: this undertow is realised most effectively in carefully constructed passages of low-end, haunting noise. His films, and their sonic landscapes (not necessarily, but sometimes also, their soundtracks), should, I would argue, be part of any account of underground music of the last three decades.

David Lynch’s very first feature was a noise film, to the point where it feels sometimes – for example, in the surreal, slow-moving opening sequence – like a music video, so clearly does the sound, on which Lynch worked closely with noted sound designer Alan Splet, appear to generate or propel the visuals. This seems a superficial way to describe the synthesis of *Eraserhead*’s low-lit, black and white cinematography with its thrumming, chugging, hissing and clanking electro-acoustic soundtrack, but, to contemporary eyes and ears, the rhythmic interdependence of sound and image suggests music video form as much as it nods, in its visual aesthetic, to classic silent film. *Eraserhead* uses noise in a similarly ‘classic’, early- to mid-20th-century way too, though: its clear references are the concrete music of composers such as Pierre Schaeffer or Pierre Henry; its placing of industrial sound and rhythm as musical score an echo of John Cage’s assertion of the musical validity of all sounds. Its parallels with industrial bands such as Cabaret Voltaire and Einstürzende Neubauten are more coincidental than intentional (although the film’s status as a cult ‘midnight’ movie in the late 1970s and early

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1980s makes it likely that a good many underground musicians were among the audience). Low-end sound – drones and more disrupted, white-noise textures – represents not only the relentless process of the industrial setting, but voids and recesses, cosmic and sexual, of the human body and mind. *Eraserhead*'s analogue warmth, and our nostalgia for the organic and inventive means by which film sound was made before computer technology, has perhaps detracted from the story's nightmarish body horror over the years, but its noisescape is still its most memorable element.

After the release of *The Elephant Man* (1980) and *Dune* (1984), both of which feature Splet's sound work, Lynch would state: 'People call me a director, but I really think of myself as a sound-man.'³ Over 25 years later, with the director's own intense sound realisation of *Inland Empire* as evidence, the much-quoted assertion holds up remarkably well. It also prompts film sound theorist and composer Michel Chion, in his key book on Lynch, to write insightfully of the aural quality of Lynch's films, in which 'it is from the inside of the narrative and even of the image that Lynch's cinema is transformed by the central role allotted to the ear'.⁴ In writing of the 'acoustic impressions' of Lynch's films, Chion refers in this instance to the registers of characters' voices. However, the sonic assault of *Eraserhead* aside, it is Lynch's recognisable and idiosyncratic musical soundtracks, his work with composer Angelo Badalamenti and the use of haunting pop music, that capture many viewers' and critics' imaginations more immediately than the subtler layers of timbre, tone and texture that permeate the sound design of his films. This is not surprising: not only is 'Lynchian' music distinctive to the point of being adjectival, but his music and sound design are inextricably linked. We don't hear the tune of, say, Badalamenti's opening theme to *Mulholland Dr.* (2001), and then observe in isolation its use of low instruments and sympathetic recording techniques to induce the film's simmering, lush and portentous darkness; atmosphere and

3 David Lynch, quoted in Michel Chion, *David Lynch* (BFI, 2006), p.159.

4 Chion (2006), p.159.

mood are created by the combination of these elements, not their separation.

This essay is not an attempt to survey all the music and sound of Lynch's films,⁵ nor will it endeavour to exhaustively connect it to the history of noise throughout the 20th century. Rather, it is meant as a suggestion to re-listen to the soundtrack beneath the soundtrack; an attempt to explore a sonic point at which I feel certain ideas, feelings and atmospheres of fear, death, memory and decay are located: to tentatively plot together certain currents in extreme music, in the changing technologies that make, record and disseminate sounds, and in the work of one of our more prominent extreme filmmakers.

It is inspired most directly by Lynch's most recent film, the sprawling and rumbling *Inland Empire*, but its genesis is really a memory of an earlier film and of myself as viewer of it.

PRE-MILLENNIAL TENSION

In 2007, American band Dirty Projectors released an album called *Rise Above*, a loose cover version, from start to finish, of Black Flag's 1981 album *Damaged*, otherwise referred to as a 'reimagining' after frontman David Longstreth claimed he had not listened to *Damaged* in 15 years; the project was an attempt to interpret his memory of the album based on his listening to it on cassette as a teenager. 'I wanted to retroactively smudge my own existential/teenage angst with Black Flag's, so I couldn't remember which was which,' he explained.⁶

On finding that *Lost Highway* is not the easiest film to locate on DVD – it is currently deleted in the UK – I toyed briefly with the idea of doing the same thing: writing about the film's sound with only my memories of 1997 for guidance. In the time it took to track down a used copy, this made for an interesting exercise: while my memories strove for some accuracy, they filled in the blanks left by

5 Philip Halsall's essay, 'The Films of David Lynch: 50 Percent Sound' (British Film Resource, www.britishfilm.org.uk/lynch, 2002) is a good musicological summary of Lynch-music from *Blue Velvet* to *Mulholland Dr.*

6 Interview with Sean Moeller, www.daytrotter.com, May 2007.

what sound
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the lack of actual product with peripheral impressions, drawing a partial map of my listening around the period of *Lost Highway*'s release. I did not have to search my mind for *Lost Highway*'s sound, the sound was what I remembered the most: not only was it 'the one with Trent Reznor' and 'the one with Rammstein', it was also, crucially, the one with the video and the drone. It was the one with all the low end. It was the time with all the low end: my memory of sitting in the cinema, excited and scared in equal measure by the psycho-sexual angst and lowering, ominous sonics of *Lost Highway* was filed next to one of emerging from an East London club in the early hours of a morning, ears pummelled by frantic drum and bass, and seeing a meat lorry unload its wares for the next day's market, chilled carcasses steaming in the dawn air. Clangs, drones, beats, flesh, sub-bass, darkness all permeate my memories of that time.

In 1997, my attention was shifting away from songs and towards how music was built texturally. My pre-millennial teenage music tastes – US indie, post-rock, mildly left-field electronica, trip-hop – would expand over the next few years to include louder, deeper and darker sounds: industrial music, doom and black metal, austere electronic composition, minimal techno, harsh noise. Concurrently, I developed the fondness that most young film and music obsessives have for David Lynch, after a double bill at the Everyman Cinema allowed me to experience the grainy, staticky noise of *Eraserhead* and haunted jukebox songs of *Blue Velvet* for the first time on the big screen.

Not too long after watching *Lost Highway*, I visited a short-lived club night called Harder Louder Faster, which played industrial music, gabba, jungle, breakcore, techno and grind. Leaning against a wall that seemed to literally pulse with the low frequencies was, hackneyed as it sounds now, revelatory, opening up my understanding of what sound could do on a physical, visceral level, and expanding the impressions I was forming of my still-new home city and the sound I could make there, mirroring the never-ending hum of its pulses and energies. *Lost Highway* was, in a way, the inverse of the noise club, but a direct and perfect inversion; the shadow side to noise, the noise that is always there, even during

silence: what Lynch, talking about *Eraserhead*, calls ‘presences – what you call “room tone”. It’s the sound that you hear when there’s silence, in between words or sentences’.⁷

Lost Highway’s first chapter tells the story of a couple, Fred (Bill Pullman) and Renee (Patricia Arquette), who wake to find a series of videotapes on the doorstep of their ultra-modern LA home. The first tape shows the exterior of the house; the second, the interior and Fred and Renee themselves, sleeping. They are not a happy couple; they are distant with one another, Fred possessive and frustrated. There is something sinking and decaying at the heart of their relationship, and this is mirrored in both music and sound. Badalamenti’s orchestral score swells and groans like a foundering ship; during a strange, disconnected sex scene, low strings and muffled timpani pulse like slowed heartbeats. The effect of the orchestral music is not only engendered by its composition, which puts the timbre of the instruments at the forefront: the recording sessions with the City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra saw Lynch experimenting with homemade effects and oddly placed microphones locked to plastic tubes of varying sizes and dropped into wine bottles and jars.⁸ Noise sequences devised by Nine Inch Nails’ Trent Reznor accompany the couple’s viewing of the videotapes; and throughout, there is a low hum of bass (generated by one channel of the film’s sound mix going through a sub-woofer) that presses on the ears and the conscience, the claustrophobic, rotten heartbeat of a domesticity turned to nightmare.

If I had, like David Longstreth with *Damaged*, reimagined *Lost Highway* without seeing it again, it would consist mainly of this first part of the film. The second, in which Fred, imprisoned for murdering his wife – an act that he does not recall, but sees on the final delivered videotape – somehow transforms into an entirely new character, Pete (Balthazar Getty), left less of an impression. Sound-wise, it eschews the suggestive textures of the earlier part of the film for a more song-based soundtrack; for the modish songs

7 Chris Rodley ed., *Lynch on Lynch* (Faber and Faber, 2005), p.73.

8 Rodley (2005), p.240-1.

by Marilyn Manson, Rammstein *et al* that make this film one of Lynch's least timeless. Time has not been too kind to these very specifically '1990s' elements of *Lost Highway*, which echo the films that Lynch (as David Foster Wallace puts forward in his essay, 'David Lynch Keeps His Head'⁹) might have unwittingly inspired – the Tarantinos and the Oliver Stones and the various other ironic, stylised, sexy killing spree movies of the time – and it's fair to say that its soundtrack has something to do with this.

Watching *Lost Highway* now, it is not just the duality between the two 'halves' of the story that stands out. Another duality occurs: it is as if the film had its official soundtrack, and then a shadow soundtrack, one that exists in the space where music and sound effects meet, which Lynch describes as 'the most beautiful area'.¹⁰ For example, the 'Videodrones' (as they are collated on the soundtrack album¹¹) make use of the sound of the video itself – interference, white noise, the slow whirr of the tape spools – but not as sound effects in any normal sense: aesthetically they are equal to the low bassoon or bowed bass strings that also lurk within the drone, or the low-end digital tones created by synth or sample. The glitches and crackles in the tape are musical; the creaking of the video playback echoed in the rumbling of the house. What also distinguishes this sound from sound effect is its place within the overall sonic narrative. Structurally, what strikes you about the sound and music in perhaps all of Lynch's films is their constant presence: sound and music do not just appear at intervals for effect (that is, it is not a 'sound effect', or an explicit musical directive to 'feel this now'), and can be listened to more like an album or a

9 David Foster Wallace, 'David Lynch Keeps His Head', *Premiere Magazine*, www.lynchnet.com/lh/lhpremiere.html, September 1996.

10 Rodley (2005), p.242.

11 On *Lost Highway*'s official soundtrack album, Trent Reznor as producer saw fit to edit these impressive ambient sequences into less than a minute's worth of sound, interspersed with fragments of dialogue from a sex scene, presumably to make the album a more commercial, song-based release. Ironically, I suspect many listeners in 2010 would happily sacrifice the Smashing Pumpkins track he includes in full in favour of a few more 'Videodrones'.

long piece with motifs and recurring themes than excerpts from a film soundtrack.

The ‘borderline’ that Lynch speaks of, this distinction between music and sound effect, is one made very much from a filmmaker’s point of view. From the perspective of music criticism, the difference had already become blurred. Lynch goes on to say in the same 1996 interview that he sees this as a direction in which things are ‘going’. He was both right and wrong: noise music had existed long before *Lost Highway* and before Trent Reznor’s drone pieces – an explicit reminder of this is the appearance of another name on the sound credits of *Lost Highway*, that of Throbbing Gristle and Coil’s Peter Christopherson, by then a veteran creator of industrial and dark ambient music.¹² However, Lynch is right that the final years of the 20th century were a confident, and fruitful, time for extreme music and electronic music. It is not surprising that such a sonically aware director picked up on this, making use of, not only popular extreme bands (as did almost every horror director during nu-metal’s peak years), but also of the sample-heavy, cinematic beats of Barry Adamson. *Lost Highway*’s post-industrial noisescapes, perhaps unconsciously, echo those created by underground noise artists such as Merzbow, Masonna and Pan Sonic, all of whose work achieved greater prominence and appeared on larger, more commercial labels in the latter part of the 1990s.¹³ *Lost Highway*’s atmospheres of unease are balanced with the soundtrack album’s harsh confidence,

12 If Throbbing Gristle made what many consider the paradigmatic industrial music – which as a genre emerged contemporaneously with *Eraserhead* – Coil’s music mined more esoteric territory, applying the industrial preoccupations with strength, power and control to occult ritual, emphasising the role of transgressive sexuality in achieving altered states. A much filtered – and heterosexual – version of this aesthetic can be heard in the music of Nine Inch Nails and other hugely successful industrial and metal acts.

13 Noise musician Jessica Rylan remarks in *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Tara Rodgers, Duke University Press, 2010, p.151-2) that the signing of extreme Japanese artists Merzbow and Masonna to metal label Relapse in 1996, followed by a US tour, was particularly influential; in the UK, Masonna took part in the 1998 Meltdown festival, performing at London’s Royal Festival Hall.

a certainty that we are still in control of sound. The videotape that is so important to the story signifies horror in its subject matter, but tape itself has not yet come to symbolise ghostliness and decay. In its mixture of control over, and abandonment to, sound's possibilities, *Lost Highway* is perhaps the ultimate pre-millennial noise film.

ATTACK/DECAY/SUSTAIN/RELEASE

In the summer of 2001, composer William Basinski was revisiting tape loops that he had originally constructed in 1982.

'I (...) went to the kitchen to make some coffee and came back and after a few minutes I started realising that the tape loop itself, as it was going around on the deck, was starting to (...) disintegrate. Recording tape is a plastic medium. It has glue and iron oxide, rust basically, that holds the magnetic recording. So the glue loses its integrity and the iron oxide starts turning to dust again (...) Over the period of an hour this loop disintegrated right there in the studio so I just let it go for the full length of the CD and then faded it out.'¹⁴

Basinski released a series of albums entitled *Disintegration Loops* the following year. The cover of each was illustrated with a still from video footage, filmed from the roof of his New York studio, of the site of the September 11 attacks, which happened shortly after Basinski began the project. The explicit connection of obsolete and literally decaying technology with death and mourning was immediate for listeners: *Disintegration Loops* is Basinski's most successful work to date.

Decay has a musical or sonic meaning: the time it takes for a note or sound to die away, having reached its peak volume. *Disintegration Loops* reminds you that sound can also literally decay, and can signify decay through physical processes. These reminders of transience and a sense of nostalgia are common to much noise and

¹⁴ Interview by Kiran Sande, *Fact*, www.factmag.com/2009/05/28/interview-william-basinski, May 2009.

extreme music of the last decade, almost in riposte to the confidence of the preceding period.

The year of *Disintegration Loops* saw a return to the basic fascination of sound vibrating air, fetishising low end and high volume via the music of Sunn O))) and the revitalised doom metal scene. Throughout the middle of the decade, metal's image changed subtly. Terms like 'avant-doom' and 'post-metal' appeared in music criticism, and long, mostly instrumental tracks adhered to doom's monolithic riffs, but with a new awareness of texture, timbre and sound as an element in its own right, both in newer bands such as Nadja, Asva and Isis, and rejuvenated older ones such as Neurosis and Earth. A new melodicism was also present in metal that, to my ears, kept coming back to a familiar source: the sweeping, deceptively simple compositions of Angelo Badalamenti.¹⁵ Electronic music hinted at powerlessness, not futurity: Norwegian electronic musician Helge Sten, aka Deathprod, credited the brooding compositions he created with his armoury of antiquated, modified equipment to an 'audio virus': a description that implied mutability and helplessness rather than control. New networks and organic processes (voice, tape, circuit-bent and home-made instruments: laptops almost disappeared from stages, to be replaced by cassette decks and FX pedals) resulted in a number of scenes that seemed to multiply despite – or perhaps through – the atomisation of the music industry in the internet age. Separate from the vibrancy of the actual music-making, the obsolete and almost obsolete technology produced an elegiac effect not dissimilar to that generated by Basinski's more 'composed' *Loops*: an attempt to assert the 'human', as well as an exploration of sonic memory; a quest to locate ghosts in these increasingly dusty machines. Noise's process has become its content, in a way its subject matter.

15 This is not the essay that surveys the influence of *Twin Peaks* on US underground music of the 2000s, but the minor intervals of 'Laura's theme' crop up as a melodic imprint, an unspoken influence, so often that perhaps there should be one.

In 2006, a needle drops onto a record and David Lynch's *Inland Empire* begins. The first sonic event after the brooding, monochromatic opening credits is this crackle of vinyl, a fuzz of analogue interference through which words can be heard indistinctly, like recordings of EVP (electronic voice phenomenon, the accidental simulation of voices in radio static, sometimes interpreted as 'spirit' voices). This is followed by a sequence in which a young woman watches a videotape – and it is clearly a video, not a DVD. Two obsolete technologies are thus shown within the film's first few minutes, despite its setting in the present day, and the much-noted fact that *Inland Empire* is shot entirely on digital video; Lynch is reported to have said, at the time of its release, that he will not work with film again: 'Film is like a dinosaur in a tar pit. People might be sick to hear that because they love film, just like they loved magnetic tape.'¹⁶ *Inland Empire*'s sound design is therefore also a digital production, yet it feels pointedly 'analogue', its textures deliberately as organic as Alan Splet's on *Eraserhead* – in which of course Henry (Jack Nance) uses a crackly record player in a key early scene. It has a sense of being 'about' analogue sound processes (in the way the visual narrative is 'about' the making of a film), using them illustratively.

Inland Empire's horror and unease are frequently located aurally rather than visually. Intentionally referential to Lynch's previous work – not least the other 'LA' films *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, with which it forms a loose trilogy – *Inland Empire* seemed to me less involving, more fragmented and overlong than its predecessors, until I listened to it. (Ironically, given its format, my first viewing was on a quiet laptop: Lynch might have embraced the digital with gusto, but his films often fall down without a decent set of speakers.) An aural reading of *Inland Empire* suggests it to be as 'post-noise' as *Eraserhead* or *Lost Highway* are 'noise', reflective of the uncertainty of much of this decade's extreme music. It

16 David Lynch, *New York Times* interview, 2007, quoted in Zoran Samardzija, 'David Lynch.com: Auteurship in the Age of the Internet and Digital Cinema', *Scope*, www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/article.php?issue=16&id=1171, 2010.



'Fear, out of sight, but within earshot.' | LISA

also mitigates the need to find ‘meaning’ in what is a deliberately mysterious, elusive narrative: hearing accommodates, in fact welcomes, ambiguity more than seeing.

The film’s narrative trajectory roughly follows a downward path. Actor Nikki Grace (Laura Dern) is cast in a film that she learns is a remake of a Polish production regarded as cursed after the murder of its lead actors. She then seems to enter a series of collapsing realities in which she merges identities with her character in the film; we are uncertain as to whom the increasingly dark events that unfold are happening. A parallel narrative takes place in a 19th-century Polish city; a chorus of young would-be actresses or prostitutes appear in choreographed sequences throughout the story; there are short excerpts from an imagined TV series featuring a family of rabbits in human clothing who utter gnomic phrases over grainy synthesiser chords. What is clear is that things get worse, and that the film’s menace increases exponentially, and that this is signalled by sound as well as action. The vinyl crackle at the beginning is echoed in odd touches of sound – unrelated to events in the film – that flicker through scenes. An ominous, queasy rumbling effect that feels like thunder just out of earshot surfaces throughout the film. It is similar to the sub-bass in *Lost Highway*, but less specific, and even further abstracted from direct visual analogues. It appears almost randomly at first, but then more frequently, until we realise it signifies fear: perhaps out of sight, but within earshot.

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The depth of *Inland Empire*’s sonic range is the most noticeable aspect of its sound design: throughout, it is an unquestionably bassy film. Bass has a physicality that is not shared by other registers: it is this that makes it comforting, immersive, pleasurable, as it mirrors natural rhythms and processes. It can also be alienating and dehumanising – low-end sounds can make you aware of your physical fragility, make you feel sickened, disorientated and crushed. Bass can also be profoundly sad, suggestive of vast, lonely space. Lynch’s low end in *Inland Empire* seems to mine all its uses: in the sultriness of the scene in which the young women discuss a shared lover, set to Lynch’s song ‘Ghost of Love’ (a *Twin Peaks*-ish bluesy composition that uses that most contemporary of devices,

Autotune, on the director's voice); the simmering menace of a scene between Nikki/Sue and her husband; and the melancholic plateaux of Lynch's own instrumental tracks.

Lynch's 'Woods Variation' and 'Call from the Past' sound naïve at first, sub-Badalamenti: synthesised strings create mournful intervals, there is maximum sustain on everything, and the shimmering melody hovers upon an undertow of sub-bass that's almost out of hearing range. But the overall effect is one of huge regret, not dissimilar to British musician – and former extreme noise artist¹⁷ – James Leyland Kirby's 2009 *Sadly, the Future Is No Longer what It Was*, three instrumental albums that used samples, fragile synths, piano and tape-like textures to create atmospheres of loneliness and decay. Abstract as Kirby's work is, it does not fight emotion, with nakedly personal titles, and Lynch's music is likewise emotionally vulnerable, for all its glacial electronic tones. The fear and pain in *Inland Empire* are as 'real' as the film's appearance is stylised, and it is the film's sound that reinforces these emotions, taking us into a place where we are afraid for our own selves.

Likewise, an extract of Krzysztof Penderecki's 'Als Jakob Erwachte' (also used in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* [1980]) reinforces the fear in the scene it soundtracks, in which Nikki, following her on-screen death as the character Sue, confronts the 'Phantom', a threatening man whom she has encountered once before, and sees a distorted, terrifying version of her face superimposed onto his. Penderecki's use of extended string techniques gives the orchestral piece the quality of electronic music: the deep swells of brass support a high note more like sine wave than violin. The sense of atmospheric interference comes partly from Penderecki's innovative use of the orchestra as sound source, partly from Lynch's sound mix, and partly from our own expectations, which by this point in the film are of uncertainty: we no longer know who is alive or dead, or where the sound 'comes from'.

17 As V/VM, a pranksterish noise alter ego given to brutalising and mashing up pop records, Kirby appeared on the cover of *The Wire* under the sub-heading 'Harder! Louder! Faster!' in 1998.

David Lynch has always used sound, and particularly low-end sound, to indicate danger and fear: at this latest point, it has moved inward, from the industrial landscape of *Eraserhead*, to the muted bedroom nightmare of *Lost Highway*, into *Inland Empire*'s existential dread. As in the extreme music that has run parallel with his films, it has become clear that there is not just one noise, that noise is multiple and vulnerable and not as powerful as perhaps was once thought. It does not provide answers; it is full of questions. Those of us who seek out the low end, the outer reaches of sound, in music and in film, also seek out not-knowing, and resonate with Michel Chion's beautiful image of the cinema screen as a 'fragile membrane with a multitude of currents pressing on it from behind'.¹⁸ ■