

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 CLAIRE MAGEE