Chapter 8

David Lynch Constrained on *Dune*

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INTRODUCTION

David Lynch's third feature film *Dune*, a filmic adaptation of Frank Herbert's sprawling set of science fiction novels, found itself subject to a full gamut of reviews written at the time of its release in 1984 ranging from "raves to scathing condemnation."[1] Though *Newsweek*'s David Ansen described the film as towering over exiting science fiction movies, "a dark, spellbinding dream . . . richer and stranger than most anything that commercial cinema has to offer," the influential Roger Ebert had decided after just nine minutes of the film's running time that the "movie is a real mess, an incomprehensible, ugly, unstructured pointless excursion into the murkier realms of one of the more confusing screenplays of all time."[2] In academia Vivian Sobchak described the production as a "schizophrenic text" which "plunges fatally into the absolute space of postmodern and breaks down into a heap of fragments.[3] As time passed, these dismissive voices found more traction than *Dune*'s celebrants and the film has subsequently found itself entrenched in a reading of epic failure.

Lynch concretized this perspective on *Dune* his film with his own commentary, frustrated by changes to his vision of the film and a multitude of versions in a production plagued by issues around the age classification, "studio bankruptcy [and] convoluted rights."[4] He later described himself as having died two times on the film stating that he had "sold out on that early on, because I didn't have final cut, and it was a commercial failure."[5] He has referred to the film as a critical

moment in determining career, conceding that—in large part—this was the last film he made for "the producers, not for myself."[6] As Matt Armitage notes, "Lynch seems to consider *Dune* his biggest failure, and rarely talked about it afterwards."[7] Despite the director's own dismissal of it, and his expression of having "zero interest" in watching the Canadian director Denis Villeneuve's interpretation of Herbert's novel released in 2021,[8] the 1984 production is indicative of many of the themes that have come to determine Lynchian filmmaking in the forty years since the film's release. With Villeneuve returning to Herbert's source material throwing light back onto Lynch's version, the film is due reconsideration.

This chapter explores how *Dune* presents an exemplar of the evolving Lynchian universe, but also how this universe can collapse in on itself. The film foreshadows many themes that recurred throughout the director's later work in its focus on the impact of industrialization and exploitation, of familial conflict, uncertainty, identity and—perhaps most significantly—the search for the mystical unknown, where supernatural shifts between dimensions of time and space fuel a fanaticism that errs toward self-destruction. We argue that this was not entirely invoked by the actions of a studio, executive or a production company, as Lynch has suggested in later interviews, though these no doubt remain important factors. Instead, it is some of Lynch's creative choices, compounded by the constraints of his having retained the integrity of the sprawling source material of Herbert's novels, and the film's drive to explain the science of the fiction through exposition and voiceover, where ambiguity and obfuscation better served the director's form in later work.

A FLAWED MASTERPIECE

Herbert's *Dune* (1965) "has been regarded by many as one of the most accomplished science fiction novels to come out of the twentieth century. . . . *Dune* set a new benchmark in its genre for richness of invention, narrative vastness and world-building."[9] Critics have noted that "Herbert delivers a poignant examination of religion, mysticism, politics, ecology, science sociology and humanity through the futuristic lens of a feudal interstellar society that exists thousands of years into the future" and that "'Dune' creates for the reader a complex, fully-realized universe."[10] Whilst admiring the book, others have tried to contain and contextualize it. Will Collins suggests that it "is a science-fiction classic in part because it's such a brilliant pastiche. Drawing inspiration from the mid-century United States' nascent environmental movement, European feudalism, Middle Eastern oil politics, and Zen Buddhism, Herbert created a universe that is at once exotic and familiar."[11] Roger Luckhurst, on the other hand, notes that, although "Herbert's ecological science is rigorous . . . the plot of *Dune* uses all the apparatus of heroic fantasy," going on to argue that the book is "a sort of New Wave subversion of Golden Age [science fiction] narrative and iconography."[12] Adam Roberts notes that "Herbert uses the desert setting to explore the two great 'desert' religious traditions: the Islamic human saviour . . . and the Judaic-Christian divine messiah," suggesting that "[t]he book shares with most mainstream SF a dialectical understanding of the relationship between the techno-rationalist and the mystical."[13] Lynch himself simplifies this even further: "*Dune* is a quest for enlightenment."[14]

Chris Bateman commends how the novel can be understood in many ways, suggesting that "[t]hematically, *Dune* works on many different levels as a political drama, an adventure story, a future history of the downfall of empires and an ecological allegory."[15] Daniel Immerwahr observes that: "The further you read, the

more disorienting *Dune* gets."[16] Elsewhere, in a reflective conversation with Will Self, author J.G. Ballard reflected upon *Dune*'s literary relationship to the New Wave of science fiction, noting that a "whole new raft of science fiction writers had come along who had read their Kafka, their James Joyce; they were aware of the larger world of the twentieth-century experimental novel."[17] On the surface, *Dune*, published in 1965, seems to have little to do with and have been published too late for the New Wave; it initially appears an old-fashioned science fiction epic or saga. Yet, as well as presciently highlighting ecological themes it also contains the use of psychedelics (for space travel, divination, and prophecy) and genetic manipulation, along with numerous Zen and Islamic philosophical and religious ideas common to the style which moved away from pulp magazines.

Whatever one's take on the book, its publication made its mark on 1960s readers and the (counter)culture:

> Science fiction has always been geeky, but *Dune* made it trippy. After *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Planet of the Apes* hit screens in 1968, young directors rushed to realise the countercultural possibilities of space. *Dune* was their unscalable Himalayan peak. The Chilean surrealist Alejandro Jodorowsky tried . . . Ridley Scott then stepped up before becoming overwhelmed . . . Eventually, David Lynch made *Dune.*[18]

Ben Child notes how "Frank Herbert's sprawling sci-fi saga completely defeated Alejandro Jodorowsky in the 1970s, while David Lynch hates his own compromised 1984 version"; Daniel Snyder acknowledges that the adaptation "was met with near-unanimous derision"; and Simon Guerrier concurs that whilst *Dune* was neither a box-office success and that "critics jeered its complexity and strangeness," he acknowledges that "those elements—which at the time put off a general audience—

are exactly what made the film linger in the memory," stating that the film "necessarily narrows the scope of the sprawling, 556-page book and focuses on the psychology.[19]

Screenwriter and director David Lynch was drawn to the story's "meditations on consciousness,"[20] whilst actor Kyle MacLachlan suggests that:

Ultimately, there was no way to flesh out the intricacy of the world Frank Herbert created, because there are just too many things going on in the book. But I can watch *Dune* and enjoy it for the sheer impact of the visuals and the fact that David was able to imprint that material with his vision. . . . I call it a flawed masterpiece.[21]

This notion of a flawed masterpiece is common to its critics, despite presenting many different points of view: "*Dune*'s very language makes the movie almost impenetrable"; "Plot and structure are the primary failures of Lynch's *Dune*, with important lore left unexplained whilst other mundane concepts are hammered home"; others highlighting what they saw as thematic and visual successes.[22] Nils Gollersrud claimed that "[d]espite its narrative inadequacies, Lynch's film succeeds with its cinematic artistry and vision. He imagines the world of *Dune* with a twisted and nightmarish vision, capturing the unconventional and even archaic aesthetic the source material evokes."[23] Even Snyder tempers his charge of impenetrability with his suggestion that "[i]f the movie's goal was to create, like the book, a world that felt utterly alien, then Lynch and his surreal style were the right choice. . . . It seeks to put the viewer somewhere unfamiliar while hinting at a greater, hidden story."[24]

The film's defenders have been drowned out by the negative commentary but have stood firm in their vindication of the film over forty years. Frank Herbert himself stated soon after the film's release that "*Dune* is a film addressed to your audio-visual

senses in a unique way, forcing you to participate with the best of your imagination."[25] A number of commentators have suggested that it is in fact Herbert's source material, and Lynch's desire to realize a filmic world that held true to the book's intricacies and complexity, that was the true cause of the alienation of some sections of the audience. As Kenneth Kaleta argues, "it is the convolutions of the story, Herbert's narrative on the screen . . . not Lynch's film, in which the audience has lost faith."[26]

In fact, as the years pass, more commentary acknowledges Lynch's *Dune* as an artistic success, despite its financial problems and directorial disappointments. Immerwahr contends that the film "possesses an ethical complexity," Gollersrud adds that it is "a brutal, terrifying and mystical vision of the novel with more visual and tonal imagination than you might expect for a studio film of the era."[27] Louis B. Scheuer recognized that the film's "cult status is not completely unfounded; beneath unconvincing effects, a monotonous structure, and what feels like an incomplete narrative, is a science fiction achievement parallel to the works of Stanley Kubrick or Ridley Scott," whilst David Llewellyn finds success and distinctiveness in the science fiction canon through its failures: "*Dune* is in my opinion, the greatest Large-Scale, Noble Failure Science Fiction movie of them all. . . . It stands alone in its strangeness and daring."[28]

Mark Beaumont suggests it is a precursor to and enabler of later science-fiction films:

Dune . . . aimed at depth, intricacy, and wider socio-political meaning in what was becoming a fairly shallow, effects-led cinematic genre; to use science fiction to echo the complexities of our world. Not escape them. In that sense it helped pave the way for more thoughtful and ambitious sci-fi epics . . . It did what Herbert's novel intended it to do—it widened the sci-fi scope.[29]

Herbert was adamant that "David's film of *Dune* will also be alive and well long after people have forgotten the potboilers that come out of corporate boardrooms," noting that "David Lynch and I hit it off because I understood film to be a language different from English. He spoke it and I was a rank beginner."[30] This is somewhat contradicted by Raffaella De Laurentiis, who claimed that "The biggest mistake we made was trying to be too faithful to the book. . . . We felt, like, my God, it's *Dune*—how can we fuck around with it? But a movie is different from a book, and you have to understand that from the start."[31]

Contrary to De Laurentiis' claim it is clear that Lynch did understand this, and it was in part the producers' lack of confidence in his ability to realize the story where contradictions arose. The director had wanted his film "to challenge, and though its stumbling attempts to pontificate on religion and ecology may have been its downfall, those attempts also produced some of the film's most resonate moments."[32] It is these "resonant moments," "ethical complexity," and "its strangeness and daring" that mean *Dune* should not be ignored or dismissed as a critical part of Lynch's filmography. As Andrew Stimpson argues,

I see no reason whatsoever why Dune should be enjoyed any less than the director's other, even more unfathomable but still outlandishly brilliant work. As a Lynch fan it affords a heaven-sent opportunity to see him grapple with massive sociological themes, shoot futuristic visuals on 70mm and coordinate the talents of cinematographer Freddie Francis . . . For the discerning viewer, one unconcerned with mainstream appeal and hungry for sensation, David Lynch's *Dune* is a glimmering idiosyncratic success.[33]

LOCKED IN THE CORRAL

Tony Todd acknowledges *Dune* as having been perceived "as least Lynchian" of the director's work and identifies this as being proved most problematic for the filmmaker's biographers.[34] He cites Martha P. Nochimson's observation that "*Dune* is the only Lynch film about which there is valid general agreement that it doesn't work."[35] The persistent idea that this specific film is perceived as an anomaly or misstep in Lynch's filmmaking comes in part in that it is so strikingly different to both the shorts and the two feature films that preceded it, *Eraserhead* (1977) and *The Elephant Man* (1980), and Lynch's next feature film *Blue Velvet* (1986), a radical departure released just two years later to considerable critical (and audience) reception, and the film that firmly set the characteristics of Lynchian filmmaking.

The difference, to some degree, is that *Dune* is a direct adaptation of an existing text, rather than the entirely original work of *Eraserhead* or a script that draws upon an historical figure in *The Elephant Man*. Of course, this does not run entirely contrary to the notion of the auteur in film—where so much work in cinema is born of adaptation of existing work—Lynch had succeeded in adapting the book into a filmable screenplay where a string of filmmakers had failed, precisely through his Lynchian approach. Arthur P. Jacobs, Ridley Scott, and Alejandro Jodorowsky had all tried to get on top of the novel before abandoning the project, the latter's attempt gloriously detailed in Frank Pavich's documentary *Jodorowsky's Dune* (2013). Lynch's film by comparison, seen through the prism of Thomas Leitch's definition of the key to auteuristic distinctiveness of literary adaptation in Hitchcock's work, was successful in the manner with which it managed to "wrest authorship . . . away from another plausible candidate: the author of the original property."[36] Lynch had worked closely with Herbert who had script approval—an allowance eventually made by the producers to the director when his initial script drafts with Eric Bergen

and Christopher de Vore had "deviated so much from the source novel."[37] In his final three drafts, written without Bergen and de Vore, Lynch "devised a kind of spiralling structure, described by him as circular; in which all the information to understand the story is given from the start rather than doled our progressively."[38] Though some critics balked at this approach in their response to the theatrical release in *Dune*, it is an approach that Lynch has continued in much of his later work with considerable success. The Palme d'or-winning adaptation *Wild at Heart* (1990) and the original screenplay for *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992) are exemplars of this approach to non-linear form. Lynch explains his process: "I just went by feelings. Once I started working on my own, I wrote seven drafts. The only people who saw them were Dino and Raffaella De Laurentiis. The only problem with my earlier drafts was length. Clarity. Sometimes, I went off more into dreams and strange things, but now there's a balance."[39]

A second distinction from Lynch's earlier and later work was his lack of final cut on the film, made evident in the manner with which *Dune* was released through several theatrical versions. In a special TV release, Lynch's name was omitted entirely—pointedly listing himself as Judas Booth as screenwriter and Allen Smithee as director in the titles, this second pseudonym one provided by the Director's Guild of America for directors who satisfy a set of criteria that a film was taken out of their control.[40] Lynch's experience on *Dune* came in sharp contrast to his earlier films, specifically *The Elephant Man* where Mel Brooks had an uncredited executive producer role through his Brooksfilms company and had described Lynch expressing to the producer when doing the deal with him that he "would rather not make a film than make one where I don't have final cut."[41] During the editing process of this earlier work, Brook's reportedly defended Lynch's choices in a meeting with

Paramount studio executives advising them that: "We screened the film for you, to bring you up to date . . . do not misconstrue this as our soliciting the input of raging primitives."[42]

Unfortunately, *Dune*'s producer Raffaella De Laurentiis granted no such power to its director. Lynch reported that a string of events in the run up to release led to his perception that *Dune* was not fit for his signature as director—citing his lack of final cut specifically in a dispute over the PG rating pursued by the film's financiers, in addition to a time limit that had been imposed on the length of the film. Simon Guerrier suggests that it was this creative interference that further diminished *Dune*'s power and Lynch's distancing himself from the project, arguing that the addition of voiceover narration undoes the potential of the film to allow an audience to come to its own decisions about how "what characters really want and feel plays against their apparent desires."[43] This is contested by some critics, with Michel Chion presenting Lynch's use of character's inner voices as an innovation, what he describes as a thinking voice that reflected its use in Herbert's novel, and distinguishing it from the more common voiceover exposition added later and much denigrated as a studio imposition, perhaps most famously in the US theatrical version of *Blade Runner* (1982) where it was removed in a later director's cut.[44] Lynch later admitted to Chris Rodley that the requirement to add additional exposition through voiceover came from the producers in order "to nail things that they thought people [the audience] wouldn't understand."[45] Rather than presenting as being true to Herbert's novel and Lynch's directorial intent, critics noted that the number of voices and the abundance of unnecessary exposition, with character voiceovers describing events being relayed visually, got in the way of, rather than greasing the wheels of the narrative.

Ironically, considering the time limit imposed on the cinema release—of which there are at least two different releases, one of which was recut for European censors—the MCA-TV telecast for syndicated television drew from the raw footage to add over 50 minutes to the film's overall running time.[46] The theatrical release and extended telecast material was further bastardized into what is referred to as the Channel 2 Version that screened on KTVU in San Francisco in 1992, and included on an Extended Edition DVD in 2005. As Lynch explained, "A while later they wanted to cut a television version of *Dune* and asked me to do it, but I said no. I've never seen the cut they did and never want to see it—I know they added some stuff I'd shot and put more narration on it."[47] This account is disputed by those involved in the MCA-TV version, the producer Harry Tatelman outlining how he would ordinarily work with a director on these projects from the original footage but that Lynch had not been available to contribute.[48] Tatelman also contested that Lynch had not seen the longer edit, stating that the director had both seen the revised cut and "commented that the new, expanded version was not the film I envisioned."[49]

The sense of a director under duress was subsequently lamented by Lynch as feeling constrained by the production. He explained that ultimately he had "never carried anything far enough for it to really be my own. I had the feeling that Dino and Raffaella wanted something, and then there was Frank Herbert's book, and trying to be true to it. So you're already locked into a specific corral."[50] More recently, he explained to Seth Abramovitch that his lack of final cut resulted in *Dune* becoming "not the film I wanted to make. I like certain parts of it very much—but it was a total failure to me."[51]

The repeated perception that fuels this fire is that, in part due to his striking debut feature and distinctive later work, Lynch had been hired for *Dune* precisely to

impose his uniquely artistic vision onto a high budget science fiction blockbuster. Tony Todd argues that this is unfair noting that, unlike Mel Brooks draw to the director and service as defender of Lynch's vision with *The Elephant Man*, Dino and Raffaella De Laurentiis had been attracted to Lynch not "as an artist so much as an artisan that made him an appealing choice for the film's producers."[52] Perhaps significantly Dino and Raffaella had seen *The Elephant Man*, weighed down by its eight Academy Award nominations including for Best Director, but not the more difficult to characterize—but undisputedly more distinctly Lynchian—*Eraserhead* before they employed him as director. Dino and Raffaella were clearly hoping Lynch would transcend from the art house to the commercial blockbuster, while presumedly Lynch felt his directorial vision would survive this transition and establish him in what David Amadio has described as "an aesthetic middle world, wedging him between the midnight movie and mainstream," a place he later came to firmly occupy with the critically and commercially successful *Twin Peaks* (1990-2017).[53] So taken were the De Laurentiis' on Lynch, his contract bound him personally to direct two successive *Dune* sequels, freeing him to leave some elements out of the first film or use some of the material captured in its filming within a second film, and committed Dino De Laurentiis to help him produce *Blue Velvet* and the still-unrealized Lynch project *Ronnie Rocket*.[54] Sadly, in the production, this support of the director was undermined in the producer's management of other departments and the decision to shoot *Dune* concurrently to a second de Laurentiis production, *Conan the Destroyer* (1984), in and around Mexico's Churubusco Studio complex. Michel Chion describes how shooting on each film was disrupted as lighting and camera equipment was moved from one production to another. Chion also notes that Raffaella de Laurentiis had ignored the advice of colleagues to have visual effects produced in Mexico, the

resulting work contrasting sharply when reinserted into the live action shots, a repeated criticism of the film at the time of its release.[55] Similarly, the construction of sets had created issues with lighting the interiors limiting options for the shoot and resulting in an incoherent style some distance from Lynch's earlier or later work.[56]

Despite this context, drawn from a negative critical reception at the time of the film's release, film scholarship's dismissal of the work within the Lynch canon coupled with the director's own distancing of the film from his broader body of work—the picture having "cut me off at the knees"—there is plenty to celebrate in *Dune*.[57] David Amadio's search for the Lynchian draws upon a pool of plentiful touchstones evident in *Dune*, finding plenty of examples of Lynch's "authorial expressivity." He cites the repeated motifs of the "grotesque, interiority and the unconscious mind" and suggests that, if critical and commercial audiences did not connect with *Dune*, that was precisely *because* of its Lynchian qualities. "Lynch's freakery, that quality that cemented his cult status after the release of *Eraserhead*," Amadio argues, "is on full display in his third feature . . . bigger, wilder, less cowed."[58] Add to that the many recurrent themes of what have come to define the Lynchian—a focus on character psychology and transgression, the grotesque and the uncanny, the specter of violence, the grandness of the sublime, ideas of consciousnesses, and a distinctive visual and sonic aesthetic—of gothic decay, a darkness to the mise-en-scene, the visual recreation of dreams as symbolism, and sound as a significant subverter of narrative.[59]

As in so much of Lynch's work from *Eraserhead* onwards, audio is a prominent worldbuilding device with Alan Splet's sound design bringing to life the extensive locations and characters, in addition to being foregrounded in the narrative through the manner with which characters use their supernaturally enhanced voices as

a weapon. The film foreshadows many themes that recurred throughout Lynch's later work in its focus on the impact of industrialization and exploitation, of familial conflict, uncertainty, identity and—perhaps most significantly—a search for the mystical unknown, where supernatural shifts between dimensions of time and space fuel a fanaticism that errs toward self-destruction.

In this reframing or reconsideration of the film, it is interesting that the recently—and rapturously received—version of *Dune* realized 26 years after Lynch's release by the French-Canadian director Denis Villeneuve in 2021, retains so much of Lynch's cinematic realization of Herbert's book. Amadio determines clear connections between Harkonnen's grotesque character and the lesions that marked *The Elephant Man*, details how the world of Giedi Prime calls back to *Eraserhead*, and explains how Lynch had drawn upon the wider world of the novels as he began work on a screenplay for Herbert's second book of the series, articulated in the wormlike strangeness of the Spacing Guild Navigators, characters that Villeneuve had deliberately held back for the second part of his proposed trilogy due for release in 2024.[60]

In a more positive light this experience of a director "corralled" by his producers in part provided the catalyst for *Blue Velvet*. Rodley argues that De Laurentiis had financed Lynch's fourth feature precisely as a payoff for the director's experience on *Dune*, though adds that the director had agreed to cut both the proposed "budget, and his fee, in half before the project could go ahead."[61] Although distributed again by the De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, the film was produced this time by Fred Caruso, Lynch thus benefitting from a working relationship with a veteran who had worked with Sidney Lumet and Brian De Palma on distinctly auteuristic films rather than straight genre pictures. Indeed, Caruso enjoyed a more

lasting legacy in Lynch's work, both through his unusual credit for *Blue Velvet*, having provided the ear from which the severed ear prosthetic was cast, but more significantly through his introduction of the director to what would be prove to be a longstanding collaborative relationship with composer Angelo Badalamenti.[62]

A LACK OF CONTROL

According to Herbert, one of Lynch's problems was that "David had trouble with the fact that *Star Wars* used up so much of *Dune*. We found sixteen points of identity between my novel and *Star War*s."[63] This appears to have closed off certain possibilities for making an epic blockbuster in the mainstream Hollywood tradition and is also the reason why "*Dune* movie audiences, fans and newcomers, wanted more."[64] The author's statement suggests a desire for more spectacle, extravaganza, special effects; perhaps even more Lynchian elements. This, even though *Dune* "had one of the biggest budgets in Hollywood history, and its production staff was the size of a Caribbean nation, and the movie involved lavish and cutting-edge special effects."[65]

Lynch has said that "[e]very time I hear sounds, I see pictures. Then, I start getting ideas" but the director could not use sound as a starting point for his film of Herbert's pre-existing story, nor could he completely indulge in the perverse visual and visceral fascination as he has in many of his other films.[66] As David Foster Wallace observes, "Quentin Tarantino is interested in watching somebody's ear getting cut off; David Lynch is interested in the ear."[67] Although "Lynch has endeavoured to provide some of the most visually and sonically engaging movies over the last twenty five years," when it came to *Dune* he "had trouble making cinematic sense of the plot, which even in the novel is convoluted to the point of pain."[68] Lynch notes that:

Everyone finds it hard to get into the first 60 pages. But after that, it begins to work on you. Because it's such a long book, the problems are inherent—you try to be true to the book, but you still lose stuff. The things you lose are the key to everything, and what you do with what's left to make it cinematic is another thing. Sometimes, cinema works real well for condensing words. One line of Frank Herbert's would make a whole bunch of images.[69]

None of this helped Lynch make *Dune* as a commercial move, although he has continued to assert the importance for him of that while the film is "true to Frank Herbert. It's not *the* book, but it's true to it." Whereas, as Wallace argues, "Lynch's movies seem to be expressions of certain anxious, obsessive, fetishistic, oedipally arrested, borderlinish parts of the director's psyche, expressions presented with little inhibition or semiotic layering, i.e., presented with something like a child's ingenuous (and sociopathic) lack of self-consciousness."[70] Wallace further affirms:

[c]ommercial film's goal is to "entertain," which usually means enabling various fantasies that allow the moviegoer to pretend he's somebody else and that life is somehow bigger and more coherent and more compelling and attractive and in general just way more entertaining than a moviegoer's life really is.[71]

According to Llewellyn, "[i]mages of burning flesh, dripping water, and unborn baby in utero, and Duke Leto's poisoning, green gas pouring from the gaping hole in his cheek" along with "its ominous industrial drones and howling winds" make *Dune* "a very Lynchian film," and Lynch "imagines the world of Dune with a twisted and nightmarish vision."[72] Gollersrud states that "Lynch's film succeeds with its cinematic artistry"—this only helps evidence the fact that "[y]ou almost never get from a Lynch movie the sense that the point is to 'entertain' you, and never that the point is to get you to fork over money to see it."[73]

It is not only the Lynchian elements that were anti-commercial. Daniel D. Snyder argues that "the movie relies on a flurry of voiceover and breathy exposition" and that "Dune's very language makes the movie almost impenetrable," going on to add that "[w]ithin the first 10 minutes, the film bombarded audiences with words like *Kwisatz Haderach*, *landsraad*, *gom jabber* and *sardaukar* with little or no context."[74] Wallace suggests that other problem were that "one of the unsettling things about a Lynch movie: You don't feel like you're entering into any of the standard unspoken and/or unconscious contracts you normally enter into with other kinds of movies"[75] and the director himself. As Wallace argues:

> *Dune*'s direction called for a combination of technician and administrator, and Lynch, though technically as good as anyone, is more like the type of bright child you sometimes see who's ingenious at structuring fantasies and gets totally immersed in them and will let other kids take part in them only if he retains complete imaginative control.[76]

You could say that a commercial movie does not try to wake people up but rather to make their sleep so comfortable and their dreams so pleasant that they will fork over money to experience it—the fantasy-for-money transaction is a commercial movie's basic point. An art film's point is usually more intellectual or aesthetic, and you usually have to do some interpretative work to get it, so that when you pay to see an art film you are actually paying to work."[77]

CONCLUSIONS

Kaleta observes that Lynch's *Dune* asks both "Herbert's questions, adds film questions, but doesn't answer—or more conspicuously, doesn't really address—either set."[78] The critics' response to the narrative complexity is central to the perception of

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the film as a failure, but is essentially Lynchian—after all, what answers does Lynch present to the questions he sets up in his later and perhaps increasingly byzantine work—*Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Inland Empire* (2006) and *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017)? *Dune* contains many of the signatures of the Lynchian—a beautifully-realized and cinematic aesthetic where an unsettling approach to character design and art direction and a complex relationship between sound and picture all operated in a kind of dream state. The world building brings to life the epic core of the novel and although impacted by some poor visual effects choices certainly takes the audience into the four distinct worlds of *Dune*.

Ultimately Lynch realized a complicated novel, he chose not to provide gallons of exposition which, despite being added back in by nervous producers, did not alter the still poor critical reception of Harry Tatelman's TV version and its offspring. With the reported synergy between Herbert's novel and Lynch's screenplay we can only speculate as to the industrial machinations which knocked the director away from their vision in the film's transition from script to screen, the edit suite to theatres in a realization of the film burdened by a clumsy exposition not evident in any of his work before or after, a compromise with the producers that caused much misery for a director.[79]

Like another Lynch work dismissed on release, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, as time has passed there has been a subsequent reconsideration of *Dune* in scholarship and criticism. As Erica Sheen and Annette Davison note, the consequence of its continued dismissal by many critics, academics, and Lynch himself, is that "almost nothing of consequence has been written about it."[80] Sheen and Davison read much of the discussion of the film to date as focused primarily on its production and argues that the film is indicative of a breakdown of the relation between a filmmaker

and Hollywood—or, in McGowan's words, "Hollywood swallows Lynch, and the result is a Hollywood failure."[81] In no small part this discourse has comes about in the way Lynch himself framed the film following his issues with the production company around the releases. The director has repeated a number of times the issue of final cut and specifically the problems imposed by the restricted length of the film, and subsequently what was lost in the theatrical cut, explaining to Chris Rodley that "a world of stuff had to go."[82] The continuing fascination with the film is precisely due to it being an anomaly. Whether it is Lynch's name in the credits or a pseudonym, *Dune* presents a key point in the development of the filmmaker and a catalyst of what was to come—both in the stories he chose to tell, their scale and his collaborators, as well as his working practices and contractual agreements. McGowan argues that the film is Lynch's "most overly political film."[83] In some ways it is also his most powerful through the manner with which the director's command of ideas of dreams and fantasy, once coupled with the source material of Herbert's book, allow David Lynch to build a world where his ability to realize dreams and the fantastical through cinema explicitly shows the power of fantasy as a representation of hope, which in *Dune* leads to fundamentalist uprising and, ultimately, revolutionary change.

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