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Architectural spaces in Motion Picture through liminality and the *Dérive*: Industrial and spatial alienation in David Lynch's *Eraserhead*

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ABSTRACT

Although the industrial period was one which allowed American cities to thrive economically for a time and flourish, many struggled to keep up with technological advancements which resulted in post-industrial neighbourhoods that were struck with poverty and decay. This article tackles spatial alienation caused by urban decay in the twentieth century through an analysis of the fictional film *Eraserhead* and director David Lynch's direct experience of a city that attempted to keep itself afloat towards the turn of the century. The article adopts a qualitative approach in its research by examining selected sequences from the film through a theoretical and historical lens to better understand the film's usage of space to convey its underlying core themes of anxiety and fear. This study ultimately demonstrates the effects that architectural ideas and societal changes can have on the well-being of people through fictional representations, placing importance on sustainable urban design and architecture.

Introduction

Sick, fear-ridden, and decaying; these are certainly terms that can be attributed to the dystopian world of David Lynch's 1977 debut feature film *Eraserhead*. The role of architecture within the horror genre of cinema is one which has often been analysed, from the relationship between Gothic architecture and the traditional haunted house to Kubrick's labyrinthine spaces in *The Shining* that amplify themes of confusion and fear. This relationship between Gothic architecture and the macabre in fiction is comprehensively examined by author Dale Bailey who analysed the development of the American haunted house formula and its roots in Gothic tradition (Bailey, 1999). Other notable writers include American author and professor Mark Edmunson who suggested that Gothic architecture was 'central to the social polemic of the best terror writing and filmmaking' (Edmundson, 1999, p. 54). However, how does Lynch's *Eraserhead* highlight a modernist shift from the norms of American horror cinema through its ambiguous plot and an unsettling atmosphere created by an environment that is so deeply embedded in Lynch's own experiences of a post-industrial Philadelphia? The potential for film's relationship with space has long been prevalent and well-documented, with

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early twentieth-century modernist filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov placing an emphasis on the camera's ability to reveal the 'truth', stating in his manifesto: 'I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it' (Vertov et al., 1984, p. 17).

Similarly, Le Corbusier also believed in the camera's ability to capture the world, having proclaimed in an interview that Sergei Eisenstein's films were 'shot through with the sense of truth, and bear[s] witness to the truth alone' (Cohen, 1992, pp. 48–50). How does *Eraserhead* explore its own 'truth' through architectural space to convey its core underlying themes?

This article's object of study centres around the film *Eraserhead* and aims to investigate Lynch's use of architectural space in the film as a framing device that lays the foundations for the film's overarching narrative of fear, anxiety, and alienation. The primary areas of research revolve around psychogeography and how walking and liminality have been utilised within the film to outline the fictional city's core issues which plague the story, drawing comparisons to Philadelphia's own neighbourhoods and how they have been reflected in *Eraserhead*'s oppressive metropolis.

Literature study

Eraserhead is an avant-garde surrealist independent horror film written, directed, and produced by Lynch in 1977 as his debut feature film. The premise follows Henry Spencer, an industrial printer on vacation, when he suddenly discovers he has become a father. The plot navigates around Henry's nightmarish struggles as he is left to take care of his baby in an industrial wasteland, confined to his apartment block. The film grapples with themes of anxiety surrounding parenthood in a world that is dominated by fear, and like Lynch's subsequent films such as *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*, it is just as trancelike in the execution of its narrative.

The surrealist, dark, and puzzling nature of Lynch's films has captivated many academics and film critics over the years; creating a style so distinctive that the term 'Lynchian' was coined in the early 1980s to describe such characteristics (Oxford English Dictionary [OED], 2023). This substantial interest in his work has also extended to architecture and the built environment, which this article will review to inform the research topic and evaluate gaps in current research.

The relationship between Lynch's works and architecture is extensively analysed in Richard Martin's book *The architecture of David Lynch* (2014), where he examines the use of architectural space from the scale of the city down to the single room. In the chapter titled 'Town and City', Martin briefly discusses how *Eraserhead* establishes its urban identity through walking, drawing references from Charles Baudelaire's and Walter Benjamin's philosophies of the flâneur and how Lynch illustrates the 'death and life' of the industrial city. The wider discussion of the film's use of space focused on Lynch's own experience of Philadelphia, where he first moved in 1966 to study painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), and how this is reflected in the early sequences of the film through its vast emptiness and isolation. Richard Martin further expresses how the surrounding architecture elevated this sense of alienation through its sheer size and how Henry Spencer, the protagonist of the film, is 'dwarfed by his surroundings' (Martin, 2014, p. 30).

While Martin places heavy emphasis on the portrayal of the urban wasteland shown during the early sequences of the film, Justus Nieland (2012) instead analyses the way that interior spaces in the film reflect the dystopian environment of *Eraserhead* as complimentary to its eerie and macabre atmosphere, dubbing the film Lynch's 'first great poem of interiority' (Nieland, 2012, p. 10). Both authors refer to Benjamin's theories on modernity, though where Martin mentions the flâneur, Nieland brings forward Benjamin's ideas on the dwelling as a 'receptable for the person' which 'encased him so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case' (Benjamin & Tiedemann, 1999, p. 220). Signifying that the

dwelling is a deeply intimate and personal space that reflects the people inhabiting them, where Nieland supports this idea on the intimacy of space through a comparative analysis of different scenes from the film and how they relate to the surrounding environment. One such scene is during the strange confrontation between Henry, his girlfriend Mary, and her mother, where he was informed of the news of his untimely fatherhood, and where a pipe is positioned within the frame between Henry and Mary. Nieland argues that the uncanny placement of pipes within Mary's home attributed to a 'violated interior' where 'what is proper to bourgeois privacy fails to stay inside' (Nieland, 2012, p. 14).

This amplifies the built environment's influences on both the characters within the film, as well as the interior spaces of dwelling and how they have been distorted to represent the state of the industrial world they live in.

Both authors provide great insight into the urban context of the film's setting and how it influences the characters within *Eraserhead*, deeply analysing the role of architecture and space in relation to the contents of the film. While both books focus on industrialism and its effects on the environment from a macro to micro scale, one aspect of the film which has not been so thoroughly researched is the role of architecture in the film with regard to transitional spaces and how the vast industrial architecture shown in the film can contribute to a sense of heterotopia in the cold, harsh world through which Henry finds himself navigating.

Research methodology

This article adopts a qualitative approach to its research, examining the way that liminality is represented within *Eraserhead* through 'walking' and how this relates to the context of Lynch's own lived experiences. This is supported through a case study of Philadelphia and how its urban industrialisation contributed to Lynch's perception of the city. This analysis of the relationship between architecture, history, and culture contributes to a better understanding of the context behind the film's sequences and how they explore themes of isolation in a changing city.

The concept of liminality and its definition is analysed in conjunction with psychogeography to understand the role of space within the film as a narrative device enriching the story, evaluated through a selection of sequences from the film and how they communicate urban dystopia via the role of the wanderer.

Discussion

Defining liminality

To understand how Lynch utilises architecture to represent the film's core ideas and abstractions, spatial 'liminality' must clearly be defined in this context. As a concept, liminality was introduced by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep in reference to rites of passage, breaking the ceremonial process down into 'preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)' (van Gennep, 1909, p. 11). The term referred to the transitionary phase during a rite of passage based upon the Latin word 'līmen', meaning threshold, implying the marking of an individual or group experiencing the rite as a separation from their previous environment and beginnings of transition into a new life. This 'transition' could range from coming of age to religious or cultural rituals and ceremonies. However, the concept by van Gennep narrowed the term down exclusively to the transitionary phase of a rite of passage. This was later expanded by anthropologists such as Victor Turner who defined liminality as 'a state or process which is betwixt-and-between' (Turner, 1979, p. 465), where one would be free from 'structural obligations'.

This indicates that 'liminality' could be characterised as a transitionary state of being that blurs the boundaries of the familiar and the unfamiliar in ambiguity as a threshold for transition. In an architectural context, liminal spaces in a contemporary setting can relate to

physical transitional spaces between one location and another, though the concept of liminality and its ambiguity is not lost.

Psychogeography

The use of liminal space as a narrative tool reflecting the dystopian world created by Lynch is most evident in the film's early scenes, featuring a four-minute journey sequence following Henry to his apartment. The scene opens with a cut of Henry walking away from the camera towards a tunnel (Figure 1).

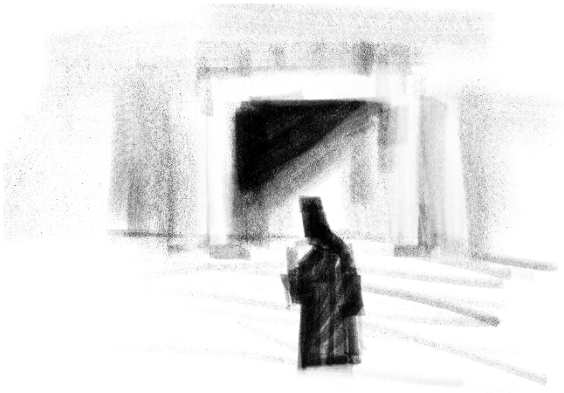

Figure 1. Henry walking towards a large tunnel (Author's own, 2025)

Key first impressions draw attention to the large white façade towering over Henry and the seemingly solitary atmosphere surrounding him. This minimalist design of the structure's façade is very different to the vast number of decayed industrial buildings shown throughout the film. Although the tunnel already contributes to an alienating atmosphere with its Brutalist features, once Henry passes through it serves its purpose as a threshold into the industrial wasteland that is the film's city.

Shortly afterwards, Henry is seen wandering atop mounds of rubble, supporting the idea of alienation caused by the industrial setting of the film as they represent remnants of human activity and the erosion of life in a post-industrial city. On the surface, Henry's meanders in these moments exhibit qualities of the flâneur as a wanderer of the city, and yet is just as anti-flâneur in the way that his journey is less urban curiosity and more that he is engulfed by his own surroundings.

Baudelaire defined the flâneur in his essay 'The painter of modern life' as an observer of the city, a 'passionate spectator' (Baudelaire & Mayne, 1995, p. 9) who wanders the streets, which Victor Fournel contrasted with the 'Badaud' as an idle wanderer who is 'absorbed by the external world' (Fournel, 1858, p. 263).

Rather than Henry being presented as the flâneur here, Lynch's representation of the city allows the viewers to mirror qualities of the archetype of the flâneur instead. While the concept of the flâneur has been widely discussed by authors such as Richard Martin, an aspect which has not necessarily been analysed is the role of psychogeography in the representation of the cityscape in *Eraserhead* and how Baudelaire's flâneur has been utilised as the model for a contemporary approach to psychogeography.

French theorist Guy-Ernest Debord described psychogeography as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment… on the emotions and behaviour of individual' (Debord, 1955, pp. 288–92).

A key element to understanding psychogeography was developed by the Letterist International (SI) through the conceptualisation of the *dérive*('drifting'), which Debord (1958, 2014) defines as a journey that involves an awareness of the psychogeographical effects of a given route or location where one would 'drop their relations, their work, and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action', instead letting themselves 'be drawn by the attractions of the terrain' (Debord, 1958, 2014, pp. 65–70).

This challenges the idea of walking the city and how a place can have a psychological impact on its inhabitants – these psychogeographical methods are also evident in *Eraserhead.* This is seen as mentioned earlier through Henry's journey across

an industrial site crowded with rubble and debris, signifying the core theme of alienation caused by an industrial landscape. As Henry is a printer at 'Lapelle's factory', he is also a participant and dweller of the city as a passive wanderer living through the nightmare that unfolds within. Although Henry himself may not be a flâneur, Lynch's surrealist representation of the protagonist's meanders through the city convey to the viewer a clear establishment of the film's identity in a way that reflects Lynch's own experiences as a student in 1960s Philadelphia as a place that evoked negativity in its inhabitants. In this instance, Lynch himself is the psychogeographer of *Eraserhead*'s world, inviting the viewer to explore the 'map' set out for them as the flâneur with Henry's journey across the city.

Through psychogeographical methods, Lynch sets the foundations for the setting of *Eraserhead* via walking and 'the *dérive*' to establish the urban identity of its location.

Industrial architecture

What precisely makes the landscape of *Eraserhead* the perfect catalyst for both liminality and psychogeography to collide in order to support the film's overarching themes of fear, anxiety, and alienation? While the central narrative focuses on the fear of fatherhood, the setting of the film greatly contributes to the uneasiness felt by the viewer throughout the film as it critiques a post-industrial Philadelphia, the most populated city in Pennsylvania. This influence is evident when Lynch referred to *Eraserhead* as 'my Philadelphia story' (Rodley, 2005, p. 56), linking the surrealist and distraught setting of the film to a real precedent. He also once described Philadelphia as 'the sickest, most corrupt, decaying, fear-ridden city imaginable', yet that was precisely what made it so 'fantastic' for him as a creative outlet (Olson, 2011, p. 26).

The effects of a post-industrial city on human psychology is perhaps best represented through Lynch's student work.. *'Six men getting sick'* is a 1967 animated short experimental film, as well as Lynch's very first film as a student, which draws a similar narrative to *Eraserhead* with its macabre qualities and imagery through a painting in motion of six abstracted figures grotesquely vomiting in a constant loop. This reflects the influence that Philadelphia had on Lynch's career and the experiences which the city offered through its industrial landscape and poverty, which were a great source of inspiration for his subsequent films right through to his final works.

One factor that would have led to this extremely negative perception of Philadelphia in the 1960s and the eventual displacement of the industrial sector in the city was its economic decline during deindustrialisation. Prior to this downturn, Philadelphia was an industrial powerhouse which consistently evolved and adapted for the future. This is evident in the city's gradual change during the nineteenth century from a primarily 'shipping centre to a manufacturing centre' that transitioned into higher end productions utilising locomotives and machinery (Gyourko et al., 2005, p. 17). However, this economic stability would not last for long as deindustrialisation was very hard-hitting for a vast number of the city's population, particularly those living in the city as opposed to the suburbs. Although Philadelphia had accounted for over 350,000 industrial jobs by 1950, the latter half of the century saw its workers struggle to keep up with technological innovations which eliminated and deposed many from the industry (Simon, 2017). In fact, in the 1970s alone the city's population had dropped drastically by 260,000 and manufacturing jobs had fallen by 40 per cent (Simon & Alnutt, 2007). As Lynch lived in Philadelphia during the late 1960s, it meant that he had experienced a changing post-industrial metropolis that was anything but the prosperous city it once was.

These failings did not mean that the entire population of Philadelphia was negatively affected. While the city's neighbourhoods deteriorated, Philadelphia's suburbs were much better off during the late twentieth century, as gentrification meant that often wealthier households would move out into the suburbs, while many migrants who were

less wealthy ended up moving into the city. This is most evident in the fact that by 1980 the unemployment rate among city residents was '50% higher than the regional average' with 20 per cent of the city population struggling to 'survive on incomes below the official poverty level' (Simon, 2017, pp. 395–444).

Lynch lived in an apartment on 13th and Wood Streets near the Old City Morgue which solidified the bleak nature of his surrounding environment and atmosphere (Rea, 2014). This street is located within the city's centre in an area unofficially named Callowhill, a place which would find itself attached to the nickname 'Eraserhood' in honour of the vast success of Lynch's career and legacy (Choudhury, 2025). The significance of Callowhill is that it is home to the Callowhill Industrial Historic District, a district considered to be so culturally substantial that in 2010 it was added to the United States' National Register of Historic Places (National Park Service, 2010).

This area encompassed numerous commercial and industrial buildings that were built from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2. View of the Old City Morgue on 13th and Wood Streets (Bruhin, 2010a)

Figure 3. View of the Lasher Building on Noble Street (Bruhin, 2010b)

These photographs emphasise the immense industrial environment and history of Callowhill and, alongside Philadelphia's deteriorating city neighbourhoods post-1950s, highlight Lynch's predominantly adverse and chilling experience of the city and how it influenced his career and filmography. In re-telling his experience, Lynch described how the city was 'full of fear' and how he and his wife at the time, Peggy Lentz, were robbed twice, had their car stolen, and windows smashed. 'There was violence and hate and filth. But the biggest influence in my whole life was that city' (Rodley, 2005, p. 49).

Although these experiences portray Philadelphia in a very negative light, the decaying industrial metropolis also served as the perfect catalyst for Lynch to represent the city in *Eraserhead*.

The research and discourse on the relationship between spatial liminality and industrial or functionalist architecture is currently a subject that is underexplored, though conversations about liminality and the industrial sector separately are vast. An important figure in modern industrial architectural design was Albert Kahn, an American architect who would come to be known as a 'pioneer in the design of the industrial building made of steel and concrete' for his contributions during the Second Industrial Revolution from the

late nineteenth century through to the early twentieth century (Custer, 1950, p. 26). Although he was based in Michigan, he also frequently designed buildings for western states such as Pennsylvania where he designed the Packard Motor Corporation Building in Philadelphia, also located within the Callowhill National Historic District.

Kahn advocated the use of reinforced concrete and steel in the construction of automotive factory designs and popularised the concept of the 'daylight factory', which utilised wider windows that resulted in industrial buildings that were better ventilated and well-lit with natural light (Hyde, 1996, p. 5). Kahn's philosophy behind his approach to factory design was very functionalist, as he stated in one of his later interviews: 'Architectural design of the exterior will be rational, interpreting the functions of the building and expressing, in matter of proportion, the romance of industry' (Bucci & Consonni, 1993, p. 116). Indicating that he strongly believed in architecture reflecting its function, and just like his modernist contemporaries, he opposed ornamentation, as stated in the same interview where he suggested that 'architectural beauty' was 'largely a matter of proportion and requires no ornament to enhance it' (Bucci & Consonni, 1993, p. 116). What purpose would these industrial buildings' aesthetic designs serve, however, if their functions have diminished and they have been abandoned?

Related to the Packard Motor Company building Callowhill, the Packard Automotive Plant in Detroit, completed in the early 1900s and designed by Albert Kahn, was revered for being one of the first to use reinforced concrete within industrial architectural design, though there have been many discrepancies regarding whether it was exactly the first of its kind within the automotive industry (Smith, 2019). When it was built, it was claimed to be the largest factory in the world. Today, however, it is the largest abandoned industrial ruin (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Abandoned Packard Automotive Plant (Duce, 2009)

Fundamentally, the abandonment of these factories post-industrialisation highlights an issue with Albert Kahn's philosophy and the effects of industrial design on cities in the long term. While he believed that industrial architecture's aesthetic appeal should complement its functionality, without a function it would ultimately have nothing to appeal to. As of 2025, although halted, the Packard Automotive Plant is currently undergoing demolition as it was declared a 'public nuisance' in 2022 by Michigan Judge Brian Sullivan, and a 'blight' by Mike Duggan, Mayor of Detroit (Reindl, 2022, para. 18). Although Kahn's buildings for Philadelphia's Callowhill National Historic District are not scheduled for demolition, the relationship between industrial architecture in a post-industrial city and urban failure is extensively explored within Lynch's *Eraserhead*.

Eraserhead encapsulates Lynch's interpretation of this post-industrial city not only to represent the state of the environment through liminal spaces but also the psychological effects that such places could have on their inhabitants; where in the film it is recorded in the form of fear, isolation, and alienation.

Returning to the film's early walk sequence featuring the protagonist Henry Spencer's journey to his apartment, in addition to the alienation felt by Henry as a passive wanderer of the city, he also walks past decayed industrial buildings that represent the state of the city post-

industrialisation. Having analysed Philadelphia's history and particularly the Callowhill National Historic District, the influence of Lynch's experiences on the film's setting is vivid and portrayed through vignettes that help establish *Eraserhead*'s urban identity. Not only does Henry pass these decayed industrial buildings, but his journey to his apartment also actively involves walking through areas dominated by industrial infrastructure, where he is surrounded by large mechanical components and pipes that loom above and around him. This reinforces the sheer volume of the industrial world that surrounds him. In the scene where he carries his groceries, we learn that this is a short journey from a local grocery to his home, where the industrialised city can be seen as deeply embedded in his lived experience of this fictional city.

This is further evidenced later on in the film when Henry makes his way to Mary's home where he turns the corner from an industrial environment straight onto her family's front garden, a space that should be private, but that is also invaded by smoke from the nearby factory, symbolising how the people of this city are both figuratively and literally living in the shadows of factories. This invasion of private space has also been explored by Justus Nieland as analysed in the literature review.

While the film visually represents the scale of the surrounding industrial landscape, sound design plays an important role in Lynch's films too, as he stated in an interview with The Paris Review: 'I think every director would realise it [sound] is fifty percent of the picture' (The Paris Review, 2014). The soundtrack was composed by Lynch in collaboration with sound designer and sound editor Alan Splet to create a unique and uneasy atmosphere for *Eraserhead* in a way that complements the film's narrative and makes use of minimal dialogue. This came in the form of low frequencies, industrial and rumbling sounds that accompanied both Henry's journey to his apartment through his tangible surroundings as well as the rest of the film where these low frequencies are still unrestrained despite being confined within interior spaces which puts the viewer in a position where they may feel just as anxious as the characters within the story.

What makes this intersection of industrial architecture and overwhelming spatial alienation liminal is how Lynch takes the viewer through this excursion around the city and in doing so creates an unsettling atmosphere that alerts them to the fact that something is amiss. It disorientates the viewer and removes a sense of normalcy with no clear purpose. This exclusion of purpose is even more apparent in the way that there seem to be no other humans around Henry, as if he were in a place devoid of life.

The industrial soundscape penetrating interior spaces also means that Henry's journey did not end as soon as he reached the doorstep to his apartment complex. As the sequence continues, the sense of liminality extends to domestic architectural interior spaces, right until Henry reaches his apartment room. This also blurs the boundaries between the inside and the outside, signifying that the threshold out of liminality has not yet been completed, and further complementing the surrealist and almost dreamlike nature of *Eraserhead*. Once he is inside the complex, as illustrated in Figure 5, Henry stands alone in a lift where he waits for its doors to close within an entrance lobby that is empty, almost devoid of human life or interaction with its empty furniture and a powerful one-point perspective composition that focuses entirely on Henry as he anxiously waits to be taken up to his apartment. While liminal space thus far has been analysed on a broad macro level, the lift (known in American English as the elevator) is also a space that can fall under this label on a much smaller micro level.

Figure 5. Henry standing in the entrance lobby lift (Author's own)

The lift was first introduced to the public as a mechanical marvel of verticality capable of transporting people to the skies, with architects such as Rem Koolhaas even remarking that they are a 'theatrical spectacle' (Koolhaas, 1994, p. 25). In his manifesto for Manhattan, Koolhaas describes the events that unfolded when industrialist Elisha Otis presented his design for the modern lift to the public; one which incorporated a safety device that prevented lifts from falling if their hoisting cables failed. Previously, lifts did exist, but they were deemed dangerous which made Otis's invention a hallmark of history for the cityscapes of the Unites States (Heathcote, 2009). An object of interest in Koolhaas's manifesto that particularly stands out is his statement regarding Otis's invention and how it had introduced a 'leitmotiv of the island's (Manhattan) future development' as 'an accumulation of possible disasters that never happen' (Koolhaas, 1994, p. 27). Nonetheless, although Eisha Otis cemented the modern lift as safer than ever before, it has become synonymous in fiction with disaster and fear. If horizontal journeys fit the description of liminal spaces, vertical movement ought to do so too as they are thresholds between two different floors, though a large difference lies in the fact that the movement is felt but generally cannot be perceived visually.

Lynch takes this technological marvel of the industrial age and presents it as a machine of claustrophobia and fear that further pushes the narrative of a post-apocalyptic industrial world that is 'fear-ridden' to the core, strengthening the impression that both the city and its inhabitants are greatly suffering and supporting the film's overarching themes of fear and psychological unease.

A frame of reference which encapsulates the sheer invasive nature of the industrial landscape is the scene where Henry is sitting in his room, his view out of his apartment a brick wall. This view is emphasised repeatedly throughout the film while Henry struggles to care for his newfound and unceremonious offspring.

Heterotopia

How does Lynch's experience of Philadelphia translate to film? With reference to Vertov's manifesto mentioned earlier, Lynch uses a wide variety of film techniques throughout *Eraserhead* to create both an objective and subjective portrayal of reality. Despite Lynch's inspiration of the film stemming from Philadelphia, it was filmed outside of Pennsylvania. The large white façade tunnel depicted at the start of Henry's journey, for example, was shot under the Fourth Street Bridge in Los Angeles, California. Although this goes against the principles of reality, Vertov also emphasised in his manifesto the architectural capabilities of 'montage'; a film technique and theory that was developed during the early twentieth century and heavily explored by other filmmakers at the time such as Sergei Eisenstein (Arsenjuk, 2017, p. 167). In Vertov's manifesto he states:

> I am a builder. I have placed you, whom I've created today, in an extraordinary room which did not exist until just now when I also created it. In this room there are twelve walls shot by me in various

> parts of the world. In bringing together shots of walls and details, I've managed to arrange them in an order that is pleasing and to construct with intervals, correctly, a film-phrase which is the room (Vertov et al., 1984, p. 17).

This usage of the camera's ability rings true with *Eraserhead* too, where the film was shot in various locations over several years to culminate in a work that is coherent and consistent while retaining its narrative fictional elements. In this regard one place that stands out in the latter half of the film is the theatre of the 'Lady in the Radiator', which makes use of the story as a fictional work of art to represent in a surrealist nature the deeper innate emotions of the protagonist through spatial heterotopia.

If utopias are places at their best and dystopias at their worst, heterotopias are places that are 'other' which both contradict their surroundings while simultaneously maintaining their connections to reality. French philosopher Michel Foucault elaborated on this concept of 'heterotopia' in 1967 (translated into English in 1986) by comparing it to the way that mirrors are 'placeless places', stating that they made 'this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through the virtual point which is over there,' (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 24). The stage of the 'Lady in the Radiator' in *Eraserhead* fits this description as it too encompasses a world within worlds; it is an alternate reality that sits within Henry's domestic radiator where it acts as a sort of paradise for Henry as he seeks to escape the responsibilities of fatherhood.

This segment of the film features a musical performance by the 'Lady in the Radiator' on a stage with chequered flooring, where she sings 'In Heaven, everything is fine'. which imbues the utopian nature of this alternate world, and yet, it is just as much a vulnerable place as it soon turns into a bloodied nightmare that shatters any dreams that Henry may have had as he is later seen cowering in fear and is ultimately decapitated before he returns to a dystopian reality. This again highlights the prolific nature of the protagonist's situation and how even in this haven he cannot seem to escape his responsibilities and the seemingly impenetrable industrial metropolis that the characters inhabit.

Comparatively, liminal spaces and heterotopias share many characteristics as both concepts refer to spaces that are 'in-between' and interconnect with each other. They are places that are ambiguous and exist outside of any established norms, which encapsulate both the eerie atmosphere of *Eraserhead* as well as the surrealist and almost dreamlike format of the 'Lynchian' trademark. Where the early sequences of *Eraserhead* focus on establishing the story's framework through psychogeographic mapping and transition, the latter half of the film emphasises distinct interior spaces and liminality through heterotopia while the surrounding industrial landscape is present in both and represents the main themes of the story of *Eraserhead* and Lynch's experiences of Philadelphia.

Conclusion

How did Lynch capture his own 'truth' of the world around him? The primary aim of this article has been to research and understand how contemporary filmmakers are heavily influenced by their urban environments, specifically in the way that the 1977 avant-garde film *Eraserhead* explored its urban identity through Lynch's own experiences of Philadelphia and the way it was presented throughout the film. This analysis heavily emphasised the notion of spatial liminality, its methods of application, and ability to convey core themes of fear and alienation as a foundation for the motion picture's overarching narrative. The rationale behind selecting this work as the topic of study was in its unconventional structure, having initiated the Lynchian style as a surrealist psychological horror film that greatly reflects the experiences of a clear precedent in recent history: post-industrial Philadelphia. Its attention to the

metropolis and architectural space on a greater scale likewise attracts attention as opposed to other films in this genre, where the focus on architecture is more modest, as briefly mentioned in the introduction.

The main discussion began by defining liminal spaces and introduced psychogeography, where the knowledge attained for both areas was then utilised to analyse select frames from the film's early sequences. A key takeaway from this section is that Lynch's usage of Debord's psychogeographic techniques through the '*dérive*' has enabled the audience to experience the urban identity of *Eraserhead* firsthand alongside the protagonist, which serves as an effective introduction to the film's narrative. This way the viewer, too, can experience the unsettling atmosphere that liminal spaces can create when used in conjunction with the post-industrial setting.

The section 'Industrial architecture' analysed the industrial setting of the film further through a case study of Lynch's experiences of Philadelphia, exploring how functionalist architectural philosophies have had an impact on cities. With *Eraserhead*, it takes and amplifies the negative effects that industrialisation has had on the city to convey a story that is as 'sick' and 'fear-ridden' as the city he had once lived in. A large limitation of this section, however, was that there was not enough research into the relationship between liminality and industrial architecture. Due to this, the history of Philadelphia and industrialisation were studied as separate case studies before combining the acquired knowledge to further analyse the film. This case study assisted in a thorough understanding of how *Eraserhead* conveys Lynch's interpretation of post-industrial cities and the way they often reflect urban decay, as well as the impacts they can have on the quality of life.

The final section of the article focused on the concept of 'heterotopia' and how even in utopian dreams Henry could not escape his fears or responsibilities. The section highlighted the shift in how architectural spaces are portrayed, where the first half of the film showcases liminal transitory spaces through psychogeography while the latter emphasises singular interior spaces, retaining the ambiguous nature of liminality.

Ultimately, the analysis of architectural spaces in *Eraserhead* draws attention to the significance of sustainable urban and architectural design as cities can have a profound impact on communities and cultural aspects of life. It also sheds light on the effects that the industrial revolution has had on the well-being of people living in American cities during and after industrialisation through fictional representations.

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