

FM 302: Bad Dreams and Beautiful Nightmares: The Films of David Lynch

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 13.30 – 15.00, or by appointment

Course Times: Monday, 19.30 – 22.00 (film screening), Tuesday, 15.45 – 19.00

Course Description

David Lynch (1946 – 2025) was one of the last true American *auteur* filmmakers, an explorer of the dark side of our dreams, of postmodern visual culture and of surrealist worlds that are "*wild at heart ... and weird on top*". We will visit the strange and yet immersive cinematic universe of Lynch, beginning with his early short films – *Six Men Getting Sick* (1967), *The Alphabet* (1968) and *The Grandmother* (1970) – to his last feature film, the experimental, multifaceted conundrum *Inland Empire* (2006). Other films that constitute Lynch's memorable work of dreamlike and mysterious representations of the uncanny and the sublime, oneiric visions and disturbing echoes of human anxieties and desires are *Eraserhead* (1977), *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Wild At Heart* (1990), *Twin Peaks – Fire Walk With Me* (1992), *Lost Highway* (1997), and *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

Please note / Content warning: Some of the films we will watch and discuss contain disturbing stories and topics, graphic images, explicit and offensive language, themes of mental disorder, strong violence, sexuality, sexual violence, abusive relationships, murder, and implications of suicide.

Requirements

Basic knowledge of film history, film theory, and film analysis. Readiness to do independent research and to present in class.

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Students are expected to come to seminars and film screenings punctually and prepared, to participate actively in the class discussions and to do all the course assignments on time.

*** Please, do not use laptops, cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!**

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

I expect everybody to do their own work and to write their own papers, including correct MLA citation. **Plagiarism or the use of AI are no options**; they are an absolute no-no. Anybody who cheats will fail that particular assignment and may, depending on the severity of the case, fail the class.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A

student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

More than two absences will affect the grade for the course.

Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence.

Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class.

Please, do not use laptops, cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings! When you are in class, you need to be there (and not leashed to or distracted by electronic devices). Please turn your phones off before class.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assignments / Assessment

Individual presentations in class (including written outline), based on individual research and the film screenings, starting in week 5.

Mid-term essay (1500 words), due in week 7, Friday, March 13, 2026, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

The topic of the mid-term essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed in the first seven weeks of the course.

Final essay (3000 words), due in week 15, Thursday, May 14, 2026, midnight

* **Please note: Graduating students** – Final essay due in week 14, Monday, May 4, 2026, midnight.

The topic of the final essay will be a film analysis/interpretation, based on one of the films screened or discussed throughout the semester.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation: 25 %
Presentation: 25 %
Midterm Essay: 25 %
Final Essay: 25 %

If one of these components is graded F, the final course grade cannot be higher than C-.

If two components are graded F, the final grade will be F (i.e. the whole class will be failed).

Schedule

* Tentative schedule depending on organization of individual presentations and intensity of class discussions

Week 1:

Introduction: David Lynch – "Postmodernism", "Letting go" or "the tension between reason and the subconscious" (Martha P. Nochimson)

Basic Modes of Film Interpretation (1)

No film screening in week 1!

Week 2:

Short Films:

Six Figures Getting Sick / Six Men Getting Sick (1967), The Alphabet (1968), The

Grandmother (1970), The Amputee (1974), Dumbland (2002), Darkened Room (2002), Boat (2007)

Basic Modes of Film Interpretation (2): Auteur Theory

Week 3:

David Lynch: The Art Life (2016, Jon Nguyen, Rick Barnes and Olivia Neergaard-Holm)

Basic Modes of Film Interpretation (3): Psychoanalytical Film Theory and Interpretation

Week 4:

Lynch's favorite: *Sunset Boulevard* (1950, Billy Wilder)

Week 5:

Eraserhead (1977)

Week 6:

The Elephant Man (1980)

Week 7:

Dune (1984)

Midterm essay (1500 words) Deadline: Friday, March 13, 2026, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

Week 8:

Blue Velvet (1986)

Week 9:

Wild At Heart (1990)

Spring Break: March 30 – April 6, 2026

Week 10:

No Film screening on Monday, April 6, 2026!

Twin Peaks – Fire Walk With Me (1992)

Week 11:

Lost Highway (1997)

Week 12:

The Straight Story (1999)

Week 13:

Mulholland Drive (2001)

Week 14:

Inland Empire (2006)

"I like to remember things my own way ..." (Fred Madison)

Final essay (3000 words) – **Deadline for graduating students:** Monday, May 4, 2026, midnight

Week 15: Completion Week (May 11 – May 15, 2026)

Final essay (3000 words), Deadline Thursday, May 14, 2026, midnight

* **Please note:** **Graduating students** – Final essay due in week 14, Monday, May 4, 2026, midnight.

Literature

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Devlin, William J., and Shai Biderman (eds.). *The Philosophy of David Lynch*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011.

Dowd, James J. *Social Life in the Movies: How Hollywood Imagines War, Schools, Romance and Social Inequality*. London/New York: Routledge, 2021.

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Essay Deadlines

Mid-term essay (1500 words): Week 7, Friday, March 13, 2026, noon (i.e. 12:01 pm)

Final essay (3000 words): Week 15, Thursday, May 14, 2026, midnight

* **Please note: Graduating students** – Deadline for final essay: Week 14, Monday, May 4, 2026, midnight.