This first photograph is the view one sees as they drive down into Sylva from Asheville. Instead of seeing a mountain landscape, people are greeted by a developed landscape that is “FOR LEASE.” Anyone can by it, if they have the money. Don’t have the money? Well, if you’ve got collateral, that’s not a problem. The landscape is a commodity to buy and sell, rather than one with which we connect or feel any resonance with.
This second image is also from Sylva. The store depicted was constructed with little thought given to the aesthetic preferences of the humans who would have to work their or shop there. Even the appliances for sale are devoid of any beauty or thought to the lives of the people who will have to use them.

This third image is of a Chinese restaurant depicted here is located in a strip mall in Sylva. From the outside, it could almost be any kind of business. The location is so generic and non-descript, in part because businesses come and go at places like this. There is nothing here to invite people in or make them feel welcome.
Here, another store again appears uninviting and cold. The sign on the wall indicates that those who are not here to purchase something are not welcome. This space is for consumers only.

The fifth picture is part of a carnival that was set up near the highway. It was part of a charity fundraiser. The dirt and gravel contrast with the attempt at being whimsical one sees in the “fun house.” The bright colors and cartoon figures are out of place in this desolate environment.
This image shows again how the natural landscape has been bulldozed over to create a “developed” environment. However, this building is abandoned as are the other buildings surrounding it. They don’t serve a purpose, other than as a canvas for the creative expression of others, something which is deemed illegal by our society.

Here is a hotel in Sylva. A home away from home for weary travelers. They’ve even put out rocking chairs for the enjoyment of their patrons. However, everything else about this environment is off-
putting. The cold, harsh lighting, and the almost entirely unnatural landscape (are those shrubs all that natural?) lend a sense of strangeness to the scene.

Here is the lobby to the hotel. The proprietors have again attempted to create an inviting feel by placing a pumpkin sticker on the wall, a seasonal decoration. There are even some leaf stickers on the window. However, those small tokens of warmth do not overrule the sterile feeling of this environment.

This image was so strange to come upon. A pair of discarded underwear in a parking lot on the outskirts of town. How did they get there? I was unable to come up with a scenario that wasn’t disconcerting. Although it isn’t inherently an alienating image, it resonated strongly with what I had read about David
Lynch and seemed to tie in with *Blue Velvet* in particular in that it is an object found in an unexpected environment that hints at some darker side to things, like the ear Jeffrey finds in the field.

This is the location for taking standardized tests in Asheville. It is one of the most alienating and disconcerting landscapes I have experienced in some time, although I was not able to photograph the interior of the building. Here, however, this sweeping skyscape is interrupted by aesthetically unpleasing architecture in what is described as an “office park.” A park is typically a site of recreation, but here that distinction is lost as recreation is discarded in favor of the working life.
These two bridges in Asheville are so consuming. They dominate the landscape and in spite of the warm sunset lighting, they lend a sense of foreboding to the viewer. The dwarf the freight train that slowly passes underneath.

Here again is the carnival. Elvis and his rock’n’rollercoaster are bizarrely out of place in this landscape. The colors are unnatural and make the ride uninviting.
Another Lynchian image, the sign is partly burnt out. Although it is most likely intended to be an inviting sign, the colors and half-darkened nature of the sign make it instead foreboding.

The backs of businesses are particularly alienating aspects of the landscape. Not intended for the public eye, they do not give any consideration to pleasure. The trash and discarded metal parts appear menacing in this light, and one does not feel welcome here.
This strip mall restaurant has changed hands a number of times in the past few years, but now is vacant. What type of restaurant or business would be at home here? This is a cheap building with as little character as possible. It does not invite people in or please the eye or serve any purpose other than to “develop” previously undeveloped land and to make money for the person who owns it in the form of renting it out to businesses.
This image of trash and an abundance of refrigerators is right in the heart of Sylva. The landscape has been plowed over to store surplus stuff. Stuff that will most likely not be used again. The unpleasant refrigerators will not decompose for who knows how long; rather, they will just sit there in what is someone’s yard.

Again, here are two overpasses which dominate the landscape and cut across the river. The landscape wasn’t convenient enough for the traveler, so a massive bridge has been created to cross over the inconvenient landscape.
Here again is a close-up of the strip mall store which sells appliances. This image emphasizes the products for sale in the windows, as well as the products advertised by the neon signs. They are nondescript and entirely manufactured with no human touch to them; they are not lovingly made by a craftsperson.

This landscape of overgrowth surrounding this abandoning building emphasizes the superfluity of many of the buildings in our landscape. As a result of the desire to keep developing, keep building, some of the already built structures fall into disuse, as we move ever towards the new, the better. Although nature is slowly reclaiming this area, it is still an unsightly structure filled with cut and processed trees rather than live ones.
This wall has a sinister feel to it, particularly with the cold florescent lighting. The shadows cast by the pipe and the ladder lend create a sinister feel in this back alley.

Here is another scene of the landscape reclaiming the environment, but it is still not an inviting one. The trash has just been left here to decompose by the river. This image underscores, like the one of the
television and refrigerators, just how much stuff we have really created for ourselves. We have more stuff than we know what to do with, more stuff than we can handle.
“One of the things I like about photography is the machine of the camera.

It’s really a fantastic thing.” – David Lynch

In *Lynch on Lynch*, David Lynch expresses his passion for photography and its ability to force viewers to see moments in a new and different way. In particular, he describes his interest in industrial landscapes, which he sees as rotting like corpses. The idea of decaying landscapes inspired each of these images. Although they were all taken in Western North Carolina, predominantly in Sylva, the lush mountain landscapes make only a passing appearance. None of these pictures are taken outside of urban areas; rather, they are all but a few minutes from the heart of their respective towns.

In class, we have talked several times about the increasing ugliness on the road to Sylva from Cullowhee. However, it was not something to which I had previously given a lot of thought. I’m usually a passenger in the car rather than the driver, so this observation (or lack thereof) startled me somewhat. I think it was because it never occurred to me that there were other possibilities.

In preparing for this project, I spent time looking at the art work of David Lynch in media other than motion film. I also read about his use of aesthetics to explore philosophical themes in “The Thing about David Lynch: Enjoying the Lynchian World” by Russell Manning. He discusses how Lynch uses the mise-en-scene and framing of the films to create a nightmarish feel, which “disturbs us at a fundamental level” (74). I tried to capture that feeling in my images by photographing at night, and by photographing scenes that were devoid of any people.
Although the landscapes featured here are primarily on Main Street in Sylva, the buildings contained therein have been given little thought “for the client’s comfort,” as Adorno put it when he described the American highway system in 1951 (qtd. in Cantor 153). Although concerned for different reasons, Adorno was right. Although these landscapes are passed by thousands of people every day, it seems as if no thought has been given to the humans who must interact with them. It also did not seem to occur to the developers and planners to consider building in conjunction with the natural environment. Instead of bulldozing down the mountains (or in some cases, blowing them up), consideration could have been given to the existing landscape.

Although these sites are passed daily by thousands of people, as Adorno puts it, “what the hurrying eye has seen merely from the car it cannot retain” (qtd. in Cantor 153). The photos here present scenes which are largely seen only in passing as they are located on the side of a highway. By presenting them in a still format, it is my intention to make clear the alienating effects of such landscapes. They are not created with human pleasure in mind; rather, they are created to serve the minimal function of keeping us alive and moving us through our day with as little effort as possible. And although these images were all taken within city limits, they are devoid of any inhabitants. The occasional car or moped is the only indication of human life. The buildings and other structures featured in the photographs underscore the emphasis of our culture to not think consciously about our lived experiences. They do not encourage us to be present in the moment or to consider whether or not we are happy driving past them every day.
Cantor, Paul A. “Film Noir and the Frankfurt School.” *The Philosophy of Film Noir*. Mark T. Conrad, ed. Kentucky: U P of Kentucky, 2006. 139-162. Print. In this essay, Cantor explores how Ulmer’s film *Detour* shares similar ideas about the American life and landscape with Horkheimer and Adorno. Cantor breaks down the film and compares its different parts with their writings. He also discusses the European influence on film noir and how it might be less American in origin than previously believed. In particular, I focused on Adorno’s descriptions of the American landscape from his book *Minima Moralia* (1951) as quoted in Cantor to get a better understanding of the alienating effects of the American highway landscape.


Manning, Russell. “The Thing about David Lynch: Enjoying the Lynchian World.” *The Philosophy of David Lynch*. William J. Devlin and Shai Biderman, ed. Kentucky: U P of Kentucky, 2011. 61-76. Print. In this essay, Russell discusses how Lynch’s narrative and cinematic style should not be considered using the framework of typical Hollywood films. Instead, viewers should understand Lynchian cinema as trying to challenge this paradigm by trying to capture the sublime, or the “Thing” as explained by Freud and Žižek. Particularly useful to my project is his discussion of Lynch’s aesthetic choices and how he uses them to express existential and other philosophical themes.