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## FROM TV TO FILM

# Cinematic Doppelgängers: *Twin Peaks* as a Case Study of a Cancelled Series' Transformation into Feature Film

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The adaptation of some series into feature films may be read as a sign of the series' success and enduring popularity. For a cancelled series, however, the transformation into film comes with the baggage of 'unfinished business' – a need to continue the story in another medium. On a formal level, such adaptations must negotiate between functioning as narrative structures in their own right while simultaneously being extensions of the series' storyworld and plotlines. When David Lynch revived the cancelled series *Twin Peaks* as the prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, both the popular and critical receptions were initially unfavourable. Indeed, the film has been read by many as a rejection of the TV series. In this article I will argue that *Fire Walk With Me* is neither a total rejection nor continuation of the series. While the film draws on the narrative components of the *Twin Peaks* storyworld, it reshapes them into a more bounded narrative structure – one organised around Laura Palmer's subjectivity and achieved through the marginalisation and exclusion of much of the *Twin Peaks*' community. In doing so, *Fire Walk With Me* certainly distances itself from the regenerative structural principles of its serial predecessor. Paradoxically, however, by inverting the series' structure the film also ensures that the storyworld of *Twin Peaks* remains open for potential future proliferation, rather than terminating its expansion as a typical series finale might do.

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## Introduction

Up until its revival on Showtime in 2017, *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990–1991) remained a prominent example of a series cancelled by the network before it had a chance to ‘wrap up’ its plotlines and character arcs. As Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (2016: 8) puts it, the ending of *Twin Peaks*’ second season ‘left us with a world broken’. He hypothesises that the ‘reboot’ will ‘be expected to answer some of the questions introduced by the inconclusive conclusions of the original series’. Yet the opportunity for closure had been available at least once before, in the other notable screen iteration of the *Twin Peaks* storyworld – the feature film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (David Lynch, 1992). That Weinstock, and many others, still looked to the new series for closure 25 years after the film’s release already hints at the complicated relationship between the original series and the film. For while the film draws on the narrative material of the series, it reshapes this material in a distinct fashion for its own purposes—to create a more bounded prequel organised around the subjectivity of a single character.

Since its release, *Fire Walk With Me* has been considered in a variety of ways in relation to the original series. In terms of critical reception, Antony Todd (2012: 104–5) neatly sums up the manner in which the film was initially dismissed as a ‘commercial exploitation’ of the series, while also being critiqued for its excessive levels of experimentation and consequent lack of coherence. Conversely, Lynch’s later biographers would try to reclaim the film as a ‘misunderstood (albeit potentially flawed) work of cinematic art’ (Todd, 2012: 106). Scholarly analysis, meanwhile, has often framed the film as a negation of the original television series. David Lavery (1995: 10) sees in the film a ‘rejection of television’; David Roche (2010: n. pag.) reads it as a ‘symbolic end to the series’; and Chris Rodley (2005: 156) states that ‘[i]n exposing the very heart of the TV series, Lynch was forced to accept that he was unlikely ever to return to the town of Twin Peaks again’. What emerges in all of these comments is a tension between the medium of film and the medium of television brought about through the adaptation process. While this tension may be explored from a variety of perspectives, including matters of reception, authorship, critical evaluation and the problem of fidelity, in this article I wish to focus on the differing narrative strategies

of the series and the film. Specifically, I will explore the formal tension between what Bordwell (1985: 4), following Jan Mukařovský, terms the 'aesthetic norms' of each medium, and how these intersect with the dual possibilities for both continuation and closure when a cancelled series is adapted into film. *Fire Walk With Me* uses the elaboration of Laura Palmer's backstory both as a motivation for the return to the storyworld created in *Twin Peaks*, and as a rationale for reorganising this world into a narrative with a finite (and largely predetermined) end-point.

For while television series are typically geared toward the indefinite proliferation of narrative, films are structured to be much more finite and self-contained by comparison. This generalisation, however, can become complicated when an ongoing series is transformed into a feature. The resulting film may be viewed (by both audiences and scholars) from the perspective of being a cohesive 'work of cinematic art' as well as a continuation of the television programme's serialised trajectory. The latter inclination may be especially strong when the series being adapted is a cancelled one. As Jason Mittell (2015: 321) remarks, the 'resurrection' of a cancelled series in a new form is seemingly motivated by 'having more stories left to tell and the freedom to tell them differently in another medium'. Indeed, unlike the adaptation of completed texts, the cancelled series seems to accommodate, even invite, such 'resurrection' more readily. The consequent dynamic between having *more* stories left to tell and the freedom (or necessity) to tell them *differently* creates a complex relationship between series and film: while the film may 'take over' the narrative work of the prematurely terminated series, it also retains its own distinct identity, linked to the aesthetic norms of its medium. But if a cancelled series leaves room for the continuation of its narrative trajectory in a subsequent film, it also prompts a separate but not unrelated process—the proper termination of this trajectory through closure. Consequently, the narrative strategies of such a film may become split between the demands of its role *as* a film, its ties to a serialised text and its potential function as a finale. Which of these roles will come to dominate, and which will become subordinated, depends on the particular circumstances of each adaptation. The case of *Twin Peaks* is interesting in this regard because *Fire Walk With Me* seems

to acknowledge all of these functions while simultaneously rejecting a total commitment to any of them.

*Twin Peaks* was famously launched with the image of Laura Palmer's dead body wrapped in plastic and washed up on a beach, whereas *Fire Walk With Me* went back in story time to chronicle the last seven days of Laura's life. On the one hand, then, the film reaffirms its ties with the series by revisiting some of its characters and plotlines. But by moving backwards and not forwards, and by taking as its subject a character who is already dead in the series' pilot, *Fire Walk With Me* also disallows any reading of it as a straightforward extenuation of the series' narrative trajectory. Indeed, the number of loose ends created by the series' cancellation would have been more than enough to generate two hours' worth of narrative for a feature film. David Lynch himself acknowledged that there was more story to be told, stating that the series' final episode is '*not* the ending. That's the ending that people were stuck with. That's just the ending of the second season. If it had continued...' (Rodley, 2005: 182). Nevertheless, although the need for closure is acknowledged in *Fire Walk With Me* in certain respects, in key ways it refuses to act as a finale for the series. These complexities suggest that while the film may initially appear to be a negation of the series, and in some ways it is, there are more nuances to explore in the relationship between the two. I would like to argue that although *Fire Walk With Me* subordinates components of the original series that are critical to ongoing narrative proliferation, by doing so it paradoxically preserves its 'serial self'. Instead of acting as a conclusion that precludes continuation, the film brings partial closure to one story while ensuring that the *storyworld* remains open for potential future investigations, a potential that we now know was exploited in *Twin Peaks: The Return* (Showtime, 2017).

Following Kristin Thompson's (2003: 23) approach to analysing storytelling across film and television, I want to utilise the comparison of the original series of *Twin Peaks* with *Fire Walk With Me* to investigate aesthetic differences between film and television, and specifically their different narrative strategies. Accordingly, in the first section of this article I discuss the ways in which *Fire Walk With Me* diverges from the series, paying special attention to the absence of much of the Twin Peaks community from the film, which instead centres on Laura's story. Then, in the second

section of the article, I consider the consequences of this absence for any potential closure that the film may provide. For it is this key difference between television series and film that reveals a crucial source of the former's narrative proliferation. It also helps to demonstrate how the film is able to create a narrative structure that is distinct from the series, thereby keeping the series' own structure open for further proliferation.

### **Mirror Images, Inverted Narratives**

*Fire Walk With Me* opens with an image of destruction: a television set, playing nothing but static, is smashed with a forceful hit of a lead pipe. A woman's screams are heard somewhere off-screen. It is only later in the film that the image is put fully into context for the audience as part of the violent murder of Teresa Banks, the first victim of BOB/Leland Palmer. It is precisely this image that Lavery (1995: 10) describes as an announcement of the film's 'rejection of television'. The interpretation appears all the more compelling when we consider that this opening shot has its inverted double in the season one finale of *Twin Peaks*. Towards the end of the episode, Bobby Briggs is being attacked by Leo Johnson. Wielding an axe, Leo corners Bobby in the living room and strikes him across the face. Bobby falls back onto a television set which up until now has been playing only static. The TV, however, is revived by Bobby's fall and the image changes from static to an episode of *Invitation to Love*, the soap opera enjoyed by many Twin Peaks locals. Leo swings the axe one more time, but before it can strike Bobby—and in the process the TV—a gun is fired from outside the window. The bullet hits Leo and knocks him back onto the couch, allowing Bobby to escape. As Leo lies bleeding on the couch, staring ahead at the TV, he sees an image of his own reality: a gun is fired in a dramatic close-up, a male character on *Invitation to Love* is shot, slowly slinking down to the floor as he stares off-screen. Thus, if the opening image of *Fire Walk With Me* symbolises a rejection of television, then this scene acts as a self-conscious affirmation of the series' links to the soap opera. And while *Invitation to Love* certainly has a comedic and parodic function within *Twin Peaks*, it nonetheless serves as a reminder of the show's participation in the serial tradition of television. The opening half-hour of *Fire*

*Walk With Me*, however, seems to delight in subverting the fundamental components of this tradition as it distances the viewer from the recurring spaces and most of the recurring characters of *Twin Peaks*.

This prominent departure from the storyworld of the series is presented as a succession of inversions of familiar imagery from *Twin Peaks*. Moments after the destruction of the television, a medium close-up of FBI Chief Gordon Cole shows him standing against a vista of pine trees bordering a lake—a *mise-en-scène* familiar to viewers of the series, in which such settings feature frequently. But the next, wider shot of Cole reveals the vista behind him to be a fake: a reproduction in the form of a large photographic print covering the wall behind his office desk. The reveal seems to suggest that any similarities between the film and the series cannot simply be accepted at face value. Indeed, as the investigation of Teresa's murder in Deer Meadow commences, the town is continually contrasted with Twin Peaks through a subversion of the series' motifs. Lavery (1995: 10) describes the film as 'a kind of photographic negative of the series', listing some of the reversals that take place in its early scenes:

[I]nstead of Agent Cooper and Sheriff Truman's immediate cooperation, we get the angry antagonism of the FBI agents and Sheriff Cable; instead of the pleasant atmosphere of the Double R, we have the wretched Hap's Diner; instead of the great coffee available everywhere in Twin Peaks, we have the wretched "Good Morning America" served by Carl Rodd at the Fat Trout Trailer Park. (Lavery, 1995: 10)

All of these images taunt the viewer with a return to the world of *Twin Peaks* whilst simultaneously problematising such an enterprise. But it is when the film moves to familiar territory (literally) that arguably the most significant narrative difference between it and the series becomes evident. As the plot of *Fire Walk With Me* shifts from the investigation of Teresa's murder in Deer Meadow to the last days of Laura Palmer's life in Twin Peaks, the inverted images and motifs of the film's opening give way to an inversion of the series' narrative structure itself. The subsequent portion of the film may represent a return to the storyworld of *Twin Peaks*, but it is also a remodelling of it—a

reshaping of the series' narrative components around Laura's newly present subjectivity, which results in the notable absence of many of Twin Peaks' locals and their stories.<sup>1</sup>

While the cinematic medium did allow Lynch some new freedoms, like the 18-certificate rating that contributed to the film's darker tone, it also brought with it new concessions. Notably, Lynch mentions being limited by the running time of the film, stating that many scenes were shot that could not be included in the final cut (Rodley, 2005: 185).<sup>2</sup> And the components that were excised were precisely scenes of other members of the Twin Peaks community aside from Laura. 'They're part of the picture, they're just not necessary for the main story', states Lynch (ibid.). The comment points to an obvious but primary distinction between a television series and a feature film. Namely, the number of plotlines and characters that can be included in the former cannot be accommodated by the duration of the latter. And although *Fire Walk With Me* is an unconventional film in numerous respects, it is not immune to some of the unifying tendencies typical of many narrative films. For example, discussing the formulation of the classical style in Hollywood cinema, Kristin Thompson (1985: 170) traces the influence of the short story, which 'dealt with fewer characters than the novel or drama. To gain the maximum effect, one or two central characters were held to be ideal'. This strategy was adopted by Hollywood filmmakers and continues to be popular to this day, with a limited number of central characters used to propel the causality of the 'main story'. So too with *Fire Walk With Me*, in which most of the narrative threads are drawn into a central plotline

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<sup>1</sup> There is an interesting tension in the film between Laura as an existing character and as a new subjectivity. Whilst viewers of the series would be familiar with her as a character, having spent two seasons piecing together her secrets, this knowledge is mainly gained from second-hand accounts of her life or, at best, her own records such as her two diaries and the tapes she made for her psychiatrist. Visually, she is primarily a static image, seen either as a corpse, a photo or a paused frame of a video. The film, then, reanimates her, letting her move and talk. In this way, it introduces the viewer to Laura as if for the first time.

<sup>2</sup> The difference in running times contributes to the treatment of time itself in series and film. *Twin Peaks*, while packed full of events and plot twists, moves at the average pace of one day of story-time per episode (45 minutes), while *Fire Walk With Me* condenses story-time and covers one week of Laura's life in less than two hours (if we exclude the prologue in Deer Meadow). For a detailed analysis of the film's emphasis on the passing of time, see Roche (2010).



dominated by Laura.<sup>3</sup> But the difference between the series and the film is more substantial than just being a question of quantity. Rather, the broad issue of narrative capacity points to the more specific matter of how narratives are structured in each medium. It is not simply the multiplicity of plotlines and characters in the series that is important: it is the way in which this multiplicity of characters is used to *generate* a multiplicity of plotlines. While the film has one 'main story' to tell that centres on one main character, the series, typical of many television narratives, has structural principles that are much more fluid and designed to generate an indefinite amount of narrative material.

Lynch describes the way that he and Mark Frost approached the narrative of *Twin Peaks* thus:

Mark Frost and I had this idea. The way we pitched this thing was as a murder mystery but that murder mystery was to eventually become the background story. Then there would be a middle ground of all the characters we stay with for the series. And the foreground would be the main characters that particular week: the ones we'd deal with in detail. (Rodley, 2005: 180)

Although Lynch and Frost apparently disagreed on how long to keep the murder mystery in 'the background' (Thompson, 2003: 129), that this narrative strategy was employed at all is in itself highly significant. While the mystery certainly provides suspense and some structure to the series, it is not its sole source of narrative content. Instead, the mystery is used to draw the viewer (and Dale Cooper as their proxy) into the community of *Twin Peaks*, which subsequently becomes a source of further plotlines. And as these plotlines change, so too does the relative dominance of the various characters.

These narrative strategies, while employed by Lynch and Frost in unique ways in *Twin Peaks*, are by no means unique to *Twin Peaks*. Instead, they draw on existing formal principles of serial television, and especially the soap opera. Lynch states

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<sup>3</sup> I do not wish to diminish some of *Fire Walk With Me's* experimental qualities with this comment, nor to deny that there are moments in which the film rebels against such unity; the aim is rather to highlight the differences between series and film. Roche (2010), for example, highlights the lack of balance between what he defines as the film's four unequal parts.

that the various plotlines of *Twin Peaks* emerged out of having 'a certain type of community' (Rodley, 2005: 162), a comment that has a scholarly counterpart in the work of Christine Geraghty (1991: 84), who writes about the 'construction of a community' in British soap operas. For Geraghty this collective entity is a 'unifying factor' (1991: 85) that nonetheless does not come 'at the expense of individual characters' (1991: 89). Instead, the community embraces the individuality of its members. This tethering together of many distinct individuals is significant not only from an ideological perspective, but from a narrative one as well. For as Geraghty (1991: 16) notes: '[s]oaps can survive major changes because the audience's commitment is engaged across a range of characters and stories'. Indeed, Frost's experience as a writer on *Hill Street Blues* (NBC, 1981–1987) links him to a show frequently lauded for its innovative implementation of soaps' narrative techniques in a prime-time drama (Thompson, 1997: 35). Following on from this lineage, *Twin Peaks* equally embraces the opportunities that come with having a diverse group of existing characters to draw on for novel storylines (Rodley, 2005: 162).

Furthermore, Geraghty's discussion of community can be seen as a particular iteration of a more general observation made about television narratives, namely that they are dominated by 'characters and their interrelationships' (Kozloff, 1987: 53). For as Mittell (2015: 22) notes, '[n]early every fictional television series has a serialized storyworld and characters'. Consequently, the 'survival' and success of television narratives depend heavily on the way in which a recurring group of characters, both distinct in and of themselves and grouped into 'communities' of various sizes, is configured in order to generate plot. This does not mean that television series cannot have main characters, but their structural function in the narrative is not identical to their cinematic counterparts. Aside from potentially being the subjects of important plotlines and hence the (partial) drivers of narrative causality, television protagonists also act as 'anchors' for a group of recurring characters who possess their own potential to produce plot. The point is well illustrated by Thompson's analysis of how *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (The WB & UPN, 1997–2003) was adapted from a feature film into an ongoing series. A key difference that Thompson (2003: 91) notes is Buffy's acquisition of a group of friends in the series, a change that results in 'considerably wider possibilities for plot generation than in the film'. Thus

both versions of the narrative have a protagonist, but the series makes sure to turn the relative loner of the film into the centre of a group of outsiders.

This very practical consideration of the way in which television narratives use recurring characters to proliferate themselves becomes intrinsically linked to the structural possibilities available to them. A useful framework in this regard is Mittell's (2015: 222) distinction between two modes of what he terms narrative complexity—centrifugal and centripetal complexity. What is interesting about Mittell's definitions in the context of television to film adaptation is the manner in which they echo influences from each medium. Mittell (ibid.) defines centrifugal complexity as that in which 'the narrative pushes outward, spreading characters across an expanding storyworld', noting that such programmes have no 'single narrative centre' and instead stress the interconnectivity between characters. This description has much in common with the 'decentred' narrative structure typical of soap operas (Geraghty, 1991: 17). In the case of centripetal complexity, on the other hand, 'the narrative movement pulls actions and characters inward toward a gravitational centre, establishing a thickness of backstory and character depth that drives the action' (Mittell, 2015: 223). Here, in turn, there is a parallel with Thompson's (1985: 170) description of the classical film which centres on the actions and psychology of one or two protagonists. Admittedly, stand-alone films cannot achieve the same 'thickness of backstory' that is produced by the build-up of multiple seasons. Comparatively, however, centrifugal complexity is even more rare in individual features since the outward expansion that such narratives require is difficult to achieve in the course of a single film's running time.<sup>4</sup> Conceptualising centripetal and centrifugal modes of storytelling as a spectrum of possibilities, we can then note how *Twin Peaks* and *Fire Walk With Me* gravitate toward each end of this spectrum, informed by the practical considerations and aesthetic norms of their respective mediums.

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<sup>4</sup> An interesting exception might be sequels and film series such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy or the *Harry Potter* films. Even more fascinating in light of this journal's focus on series-to-screen adaptations is the way in which serial television can give rise to a series of films, such as with the *Star Trek* franchise.

The series of *Twin Peaks* aligns more closely with Mittell's definition of centrifugal complexity, informed as it is by the heritage of the soap opera and the prime-time dramas of the 1980s that were in their turn influenced by this genre. Or, one could be more specific and describe *Twin Peaks* as a series that begins with an absent centre in the form of Laura Palmer and subsequently moves outward to expand its storyworld. Todd McGowan (2016: 155) makes a similar point from a different theoretical context, describing Laura as the 'privileged fantasy object' of *Twin Peaks*, whose disappearance 'unleashes fantasies that were hitherto confined to her'. In narrative terms, then, this disappearance allows a network of characters and plotlines to emerge. Indeed, it is the very process of trying to 'fill in' the absent centre by putting together the pieces of Laura's story that spawns the increasingly centrifugal structure of the show. To return to Lynch's description, the mystery gives way to a 'middle ground' of characters who are used to generate narrative.

In the film, this process is reversed. Instead of Laura's absent subjectivity being used as a device to generate multiplicity, her embodied presence in *Fire Walk With Me* absorbs it. Thus, the series' fluid 'middle ground' of recurring characters that act as narrative potential is replaced in the film by their reduced function as a fixed background to Laura's story. This is then exacerbated by the fact that Laura's story is one with a predetermined ending and thus is already de-limited. The film, appropriate to the norms of its medium, becomes a finite space allotted to this ill-fated character. Unlike the protagonists of television narratives, Laura's presence doesn't corral other characters around her in order to ensure narrative proliferation. Rather, it seems to crowd them out as if greedily aware of the limited space allotted to it, both in the diegesis and the discourse. This only emphasises the fact that the ongoing lifespan of the series was predicated on the cessation of Laura's life. Paradoxically, the opening half-hour of *Fire Walk With Me*, which seems to delight in inverting the imagery of the series, has more in common with it on a structural level as it begins to introduce a new network of characters only to abandon them and focus on Laura. Thus Laura's subjectivity is repeatedly constructed as one that exists through (and because of) its extreme isolation. Indeed, Laura spends much of the film's screen time either emotionally distancing herself or physically running away from those few recurring

characters that did make it into the film's final cut, such as Donna, Bobby, James, Harold and Shelly.

To be sure, these narrative strategies of the film may be seen as highly productive from a variety of theoretical perspectives. McGowan (2016: 155), for example, describes *Fire Walk With Me* as 'Lynch's corrective' for keeping Laura's radical position as the only subject who 'invests herself in fantasy and completely abandons the blandishments of symbolic identity' out of the series. The film's omissions may also be interpreted as aiding a connection between it and the audience. In *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, Thomas Leitch (2007: 18) proposes that we think of adaptations not in terms of what they reproduce, but what they leave out. Drawing on Wolfgang Iser's notion that communication between text and reader begins when the reader bridges the 'gaps' in the text, Leitch (ibid.) argues that it is the 'very process of supplying omitted material' that 'draws each reader closer to the story, its world, and the process of world making'. From this perspective, *Fire Walk With Me* seems an exemplary adaptation. Since so many of the series' characters are absent in the film, viewers familiar with the original are required to rely on their memory in order to fill in the 'gaps'. Indeed, this same process of meaning-making may enrich the film's exploration of Laura Palmer's psyche, as *Twin Peaks*' viewers will bring to the film knowledge they have acquired about Laura through the investigation of her murder in the series.

But when viewed from the point of view of narrative structure, and the way in which it relates to narrative proliferation, it may seem that *Fire Walk With Me* is less productive than it is destructive, a 'symbolic end to the series' (Roche, 2010: n. pag.). Indeed, the film certainly does differentiate itself from the series, both through the inverted images and motifs of the first half-hour and the inverted narrative structure of the rest of the film. Considered in the light of the above discussion of television narratives, it is not only the absence of many of the series' characters in and of themselves that is significant, but the way in which this absence signifies a detachment from *Twin Peaks*' serial tendencies. But this differentiation should not be immediately conflated with destruction. Indeed, by subordinating those narrative components of *Twin Peaks* that are crucial for the show's proliferation, *Fire Walk With Me* paradoxically safeguards the potential of the show's seriality. Although a

continuation of the series may not have been planned when *Fire Walk With Me* was released, the film ensures that such continuation is structurally possible. To better understand this distinction, it is helpful to compare *Fire Walk With Me* with television finales that *are* truly destructive or, more precisely, deconstructive.

### Deconstructive Dénouements

Writing about closure in poetry, Barbara H. Smith (1968: 4) states that ‘the sense of closure is a function of the perception of structure’. Following Smith, we might therefore expect that the significant structural differences between *Fire Walk With Me* and *Twin Peaks* will have an impact upon the former’s ability to provide any closure for the structure of the latter. On the one hand, the film’s resistance to closure seems obvious: acting as a prequel, it leaves unresolved the multiple cliff-hangers created by the series’ cancellation. On the other hand, as I have already noted, *Fire Walk With Me* has been read as a *kind* of ending for the series: a marker that the film would likely be the final iteration of *Twin Peaks*’ storyworld. While the multiple inversions in the film certainly help to create this impression, on a formal level they preclude total closure precisely because of the disconnect they create with the series’ structure. Perhaps more than even the dangling plotlines left by the second season’s ending, it is the structural differences between series and film that preserve the possibility of a return to a serialised *Twin Peaks* after *Fire Walk With Me*.

Indeed, the fact that *Fire Walk With Me* is a prequel to *Twin Peaks* may appear to obviously and immediately discount the film as a possible conclusion to the series. But this is not necessarily true. To illustrate this point, it is useful to note that there are series finales that have returned to their show’s beginnings in order to mark the end. For example, *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, 2004–2012), *The Newsroom* (HBO, 2012–2014) and *Glee* (FOX, 2009–2015) all employ, to varying degrees, flashbacks to events preceding the pilot. *Desperate Housewives* uses the device briefly, devoting one scene at the start of the episode to Mary Alice’s first day moving in on Wisteria Lane where, years later, her act of committing suicide would spark the start of the series. *The Newsroom* makes use of flashbacks more consistently throughout its finale, showing us events that occurred just before the first episode—detailing the

circumstances that would bring key characters together at the show's start. *Glee*, meanwhile, devotes the first half of its double-episode finale to a continuous flashback depicting events surrounding the pilot, elaborating on the way in which characters came together to form the Glee Club. What differentiates these finales from *Fire Walk With Me* is the function that their flashbacks perform in creating a sense of closure. To understand this function we must reflect upon the precise nature of television finales.

Seeking to emphasise the 'temporal and dynamic qualities that poetry shares with music', Smith (1968: 4) defines the structure of a poem 'as consisting of the principles by which it is generated or according to which one element follows another. The description of a poem's structure, then, becomes the answer to the question, "What keeps it going?". Regarding structure in this way, explains Smith, 'allows the possibility of a corollary question, namely, "What stops it from going?". Smith's definitions of structure and closure are equally useful in the study of television narratives, a medium that has its own 'temporal and dynamic qualities'. The question 'What stops the narrative from going?' can also highlight the difference between film and television storytelling. In a classical film, the answer will usually be connected to plot: once the action initiated in act one is resolved in act three and the protagonist's goal is achieved, the story can end. Of course, this type of narrative closure may be applied to certain television series as well. Strictly episodic programmes can achieve it in almost every episode, while some serialized narratives do in fact include a plotline that stretches from the beginning to the end of the entire show. However, to grant one overarching plotline in a series the same narrative significance that it has in a film is to diminish some of the unique properties of long-running television. As the above discussion indicates, individual plotlines may be concluded and replaced in ongoing series because of the privileged role recurring characters play in proliferating such narratives. In his analysis of *Twin Peaks*, Marc Dolan links the series to this tradition of storytelling. He argues that despite opinion to the contrary, the series' second season was a 'far greater achievement in terms of televised serial form' (Dolan, 1995: 32) precisely because the second season was probably designed 'as a specifically open-ended story, intended (like all continuous serials) to replicate itself endlessly if need be' (Dolan, 1995: 43).

But such 'endless replication' makes closure all the more difficult to achieve. Consequently, closure that motivates why a television series should end typically includes more than the conclusion of a particular plotline. It becomes rooted in the deconstruction of the series' very storyworld. Sometimes this deconstruction takes the form of literal dissolution, as character interrelationships crucial to plot proliferation are disbanded within the diegesis. In other instances, the deconstruction may occur on the level of discourse. The three series I have cited—*Desperate Housewives*, *The Newsroom* and *Glee*—use their flashbacks to this precise effect. Each show moves backwards in story-time to explicate how key characters came together in a shared space to form that series' 'community'. *Desperate Housewives* and *Glee* then combine this with diegetic partings, as the characters go their separate ways. Both shows also flash-forward to reveal their characters' futures, while in *The Newsroom* characters speculate about continuing future struggles through dialogue. On the surface, *Fire Walk With Me* shares with these finales a rather fluid treatment of time, intertwining events from the past, present and future, albeit *Fire Walk With Me* is much more experimental in its approach. The film goes backward in story-time to review the events of Laura Palmer's last days, thus counting down to the events of the series' pilot, while simultaneously pointing forward to the events of the series' final episode and beyond.<sup>5</sup> However, the key disparity between *Fire Walk With Me* and these other finales arises from the different way in which the film organises the storyworld it adapted from the original series. While *Twin Peaks* shares with these otherwise diverse shows an emphasis on community, *Fire Walk With Me* does not grant this community the same privileged status in any processes of closure that it has to offer.

Because the community established in *Twin Peaks* is largely absent from the film, the crucial function it performs in proliferating the narrative can neither be fully acknowledge nor deconstructed. A more detailed comparison with the *Desperate*

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<sup>5</sup> To cite an example from the film: in *Fire Walk With Me*, Annie Blackburn, a character introduced in the series' last six episodes, appears to Laura Palmer in a dream. Wearing the same outfit as she had been in the series' final episode, and bloodied from Windom Earle's attack, she tells Laura that the 'good Dale' is in the Black Lodge and he cannot leave. Thus, the events of the series' concluding episode are intertwined with events that occurred before the series' inception.



*Housewives* finale can help elucidate the point, as *Twin Peaks* and *Desperate Housewives* share some noteworthy parallels. Both series begin with the deaths of apparently upstanding, happy members of the community (Laura Palmer in *Twin Peaks*, Mary Alice in *Desperate Housewives*); both series concern themselves with uncovering their secrets; both narratives quickly begin to spread outward, revealing that the entire community is in fact defined by secrets; and in both shows new plotlines eventually take over once the initial mystery has been solved. Although the *Desperate Housewives*' finale acknowledges the role Mary Alice played in the series' inception (as discussed above), it also works to answer the question of why the series as a whole must stop. It does this by having the show's four protagonists—Mary Alice's friends—move off the street where they all met, became friends and formed a community. Thus the narrative components key to the show's regenerative structure are disassembled, establishing why no new plotlines can follow this ending. *Fire Walk With Me* replicates the first part of this move toward a conclusion, dedicating most of its screen time to an acknowledgement and exploration of Laura Palmer's role in initiating the plot of *Twin Peaks*. But unlike the *Desperate Housewives* finale, and the finales of many other series, it leaves its broader community untouched. There seems to be no narrative reason why the stories of *Twin Peaks*' community could not go on being told.

Marianna Torgovnick (1981: 6) states that 'effective closure' relies on the 'appropriateness of the ending's relationship to beginning and middle, not the degree of finality or resolution achieved by the ending'. Viewed in this light, it is not the unresolved loose ends of *Twin Peaks*' second season that are most problematic when considering the closural force of *Fire Walk With Me*. Rather, it is the way in which the film departs from the structure of the series' beginning and middle. While Laura Palmer's murder—and hence her absence—was the kernel from which the narrative expanded, expand it did. And the resulting interconnected system of character relations acquired a storytelling momentum of its own. *Fire Walk With Me* scrutinises Laura's previously absent subjectivity, working to immerse the viewer in the world as it existed from her point of view, tempting with the promise of getting to the core of her fears and anxieties. And it does, indeed, bring some closure to *her* story, as we see Laura acquire some peace, if only after her death. But the stories—and storytelling

potential—of *Twin Peaks*' other inhabitants remain open precisely because they are absent from or relegated to the periphery of a storyworld reshaped around Laura Palmer.

### Connections Between Two Worlds

*Fire Walk With Me* does indeed open with an image of destruction. But although the television set may have been destroyed by the lead pipe, the image it was playing at that moment—static—continues to haunt the film. Significantly, the static appears super-imposed over scenes depicting the supernatural characters of the Black Lodge. The static thus becomes the marker of a connection—tenuous but not broken—between two worlds: the world of characters like Laura Palmer, and the mystical realm of the Black Lodge. But perhaps we can interpret this recurring static as a symbol of another unstable, but enduring, connection: that between series and film. The example of *Twin Peaks* demonstrates that a series and a film can utilise the same narrative material and organise it into distinct forms—forms that are predisposed to serve different functions. Analysing the nuances of such adaptations can aid a better understanding of the aesthetic norms of each medium, even as these norms are subject to change. Indeed, I would argue, *especially* when these norms are subject to change. For if we are to comprehend the impact of seriality on films,<sup>6</sup> and the tension between unity and fragmentation in serialised television,<sup>7</sup> then understanding the preceding tendencies of each medium becomes key. The transformation of a series into a feature film can highlight the formal tension that may emerge when a storyworld designed for indefinite proliferation is reworked to fit into a much more finite screen space.

In the case of *Twin Peaks*, the opening half-hour of *Fire Walk With Me* teases with the possibility of leaving the established storyworld of the series behind altogether. But the film nonetheless returns to this familiar terrain, only to make it strange by presenting it from a perspective previously missing from the series. As a result, the components of *Twin Peaks*' storyworld are reshaped into a different structure in

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the close relationship between serials, sequels and series of films, see Thompson (2003: 98–105).

<sup>7</sup> Elliot Logan (2016: 1–26) provides an overview of this tension before applying these ideas to an analysis of *Breaking Bad*.

*Fire Walk With Me*, one that revolves around Laura's story while marginalising the rest of the town's inhabitants and their narrative potential. By doing so, the film partially distances itself from the series, not just through the subordination of the latter's content, but through a subordination of the serial opportunities afforded by a recurring community of characters. Instead, *Fire Walk With Me* uses the aesthetic norms of its medium to tell a different kind of story, one defined by isolation and delimitation, not interrelationships and proliferation.

But while this proliferation—of characters, of plotlines—is subordinated, its possibilities are not destroyed. Like the static from the smashed TV, the serial potential of *Twin Peaks*' storyworld remains intact, poised for another 'resurrection'. By telling Laura's backstory and by engaging with viewers' memories of the series, the film retains a link with its predecessor. But it also demonstrates that Laura's role in the series' narrative is different to the role granted her in the film. Bringing some closure to her story, while potentially rewarding in its own right, is not enough to close off the serialised structure of *Twin Peaks*. Of course, we now know that this serial potential would indeed be tapped into once more, with *Twin Peaks: The Return*, not just through the show's engagement with some of the loose ends created by cancellation, but also in its renewed interest in creating complex interrelationships between a vast number of characters. This new iteration of the *Twin Peaks* narrative will undoubtedly bring with it further considerations of the relationship between the original series, the film and the new show. Indeed, just as *Fire Walk With Me* took the narrative components of the original series and reshaped them into a distinct form, *Twin Peaks: The Return* takes the material introduced by the film and reshapes it yet again, to new ends and with different effects. 'It is happening again', as the famous line from the series goes. But each time it happens, it happens differently—our attention drawn to the differences precisely because of the promise of return.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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