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FROM TV TO SCREEN

Between Two Worlds: *Twin Peaks* and the Film/Television Divide

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In 1992, the year David Lynch's cult television series *Twin Peaks* was pulled off air, Lynch released the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, a prequel to the television series which filled in some of the gaps left from the series finale cliff-hanger. The film was received with unanimously negative reviews from critics and fans alike, condemning both its subtle and obvious deviations from the series and its inclusion of the character Laura Palmer, whose absence was a crucial narrative device at the centre of *Twin Peaks*. In film form, the *Twin Peaks* narrative suffers from thematic inconsistencies and aesthetic deviations. The scope of *Twin Peaks* seems much more capable in the setting of television and its gradual, episodic set-up. In recent years, however, with the announcement of a revival of the series, retrospective analysis of *Fire Walk with Me* has become more positive, and the film has also become an integral part of the overall *Twin Peaks* canon. Nevertheless, the transition from television to film in the case of *Twin Peaks* has remained a point of fan and scholarly controversy, with issues of continuity, narrative and aesthetics between the two different mediums continually being addressed and compared. In light of the news that the new season of *Twin Peaks* is set to be released in 2017, this article examines the significance of *Fire Walk with Me* as a cinematic counterpart and prequel to the original series, and how this has helped shape – whether positively or not – the overall narrative of *Twin Peaks*.

TV Auteurism

In his work *Understanding Media* (1964), media theorist Marshall McLuhan makes an observation about the limits of TV as opposed to film. In particular, he considers its two-dimensional quality, a quality which McLuhan sees as significant to the viewing experience: 'For the TV camera does not have a built-in angle of vision like the movie camera' (McLuhan, 1964: 273). While McLuhan's views are noticeably outdated where television is concerned, they are useful in showing how distinct cinema and television are generally seen to be in the creative industries, and how much has changed in the medium of television in recent years. Not only did the 1990s witness a gradual shift in the status and quality of American television, with *Twin Peaks* (1990–1), *The X-Files* (1993–2016), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and later *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) transforming the uses, techniques and reception of the medium, but David Lynch in particular imbued television with remarkable three-dimensional space that has since made it one of the most influential television shows in the twentieth century and beyond.

Indeed, what separates *Twin Peaks* from other television shows, as various critics note, is that it was seen as the first instance of cinematic television, with Lynch as a televisual *auteur*. As Newman and Levine note in their work *Legitimizing Television* (2012), *Twin Peaks* was 'downright revelatory', thanks, in part, to the 'involvement of the "auteur" Lynch' (Newman and Levine, 2012: 26). Lynch's distinctive cinematic style helped propel the medium of television forward into a new realm of entertainment and experience. As Andreas Halskov notes in *TV Peaks* (2015): 'The cinematic use of filters, long takes, low-angle shots, expressive sound and music were all attributed to David Lynch as an arthouse director, and *Twin Peaks* was highlighted as an early example of a director migrating from film to television' (Halskov, 2015: 13). Much like Lynch's films, particularly *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Twin Peaks* possessed a distinctly 'Lynchian' vibe in both sound and visuals, where previously television lacked such directorial innovation and aesthetics. As Halskov elaborates: 'In 1990, the move from film to television was fairly unusual, but in 2015 the concept of *TV auteurism* is a well-known phenomenon', and that *Twin Peaks* 'helped legitimize television as

an art form' (Halskov, 2015: 13; author's emphasis). Moreover, *Twin Peaks* marked a crucial point between the mediums of film and television, allowing Lynch and other directors to have more artistic control as directors. As Stacey Abbott writes, 'the manner in which *Twin Peaks* drew attention to the director within a medium traditionally associated with the writer/producer, marked a transition in the perceived importance of the director as well as signalling greater flexibility for directors to cross back and forth between film and television' (Abbott, 2016: 189).

Yet before I delve into my analysis of *Twin Peaks*, the notion of 'cinematic television' must first be discussed. Matt Zoller Seitz and Chris Wade argue that the term 'Cinematic TV' is thrown around quite often, usually attributed to shows that are 'big' and 'expensive', such as *Game of Thrones* (2011–). Camera work and cinematography play a role, but, they argue, there is more to cinematic television than simply good camera work: 'Cinematic value doesn't automatically equate to scale or expense [...] sometimes great cinematic direction is a matter of tone and rhythm' (Seitz and Wade, 2015: n. pag.). Discussing shows such as *Mad Men* (2007–15), *The Knick* (2014–), *Quantico* (2015–), *The Leftovers* (2014–), *Fargo* (2014–), and *True Detective* (2014–15), Seitz and Wade argue that truly cinematic television exercises a certain level of 'ingenuity'. For them, truly cinematic television 'creates beauty, mystery, [and] poetry. It creates a little movie within the larger movie that is the episode or the season. And it gets right to the heart of what a moment means' (Seitz and Wade, 2015: n. pag.).

While many twenty-first century shows qualify as cinematic television, *Twin Peaks* was arguably the first American television series to experiment with the medium of television by imbuing television with cinematic elements. As Newman and Levine note, *Twin Peaks* 'appeared as a model of a kind of small screen art cinema' (Newman and Levine, 2012: 40). *Twin Peaks* was the brainchild of both David Lynch and Mark Frost, but was a particularly short-lived television series, airing from 1990 to 1991 before it was cancelled due to poor ratings. However, the series was initially met with much praise and has since garnered a lively and enduring cult following. The show opens with the death of the character Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), who washes up on a rocky beach, wrapped in plastic. Palmer is a well-known, predominantly well-liked

young high school girl, whose death unnerves the inhabitants of Twin Peaks. Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) of the FBI is sent to the town of Twin Peaks to investigate after another missing girl – Ronette Pulaski (Phoebe Augustine) – is found crossing state lines, half-naked with her wrists bound and suffering from exposure. After he begins his investigation, Cooper uncovers a vast array of secrets about the town's residents. He befriends the town's sheriff, Harry S. Truman (Michael Ontkean), and develops friendships with many of the townspeople, including Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn), the town's vixen and 18 year-old high school student who develops a crush on Cooper.

Because of its contrasting elements and combination of genres, *Twin Peaks* is often considered exemplary of postmodern television, having brought necessary experimentation with format, narrative and technique to the medium of television. The overall tone of the show, in postmodern fashion, was replete with ordinarily-conflicting elements and tone; as a parody of the detective genre, the show featured both light and dark comedy, melodrama in the fashion of a soap opera, supernatural elements and sincere familial issues. In his discussion of postmodern television, Marc O'Day writes that postmodern television cannot ignore the impact and influence of *Twin Peaks*. He argues that the show's use of genre-mixing, specifically moving between detective fiction, science fiction and melodrama, made it truly innovative. Further, he notes that the show's marketing 'employed modernist and romantic strategies by focusing on David Lynch as auteur and *Twin Peaks* as quality television' (O'Day, 2002: 119). Amy Taubin similarly called *Twin Peaks* 'an early example of what is now referred to as "auteurist TV" – meaning that Lynch brought his signature cinematic vision to the TV screen' (qtd in Rapfogel, 2014: 36). Television, she writes:

...is not only a writer's medium, it is also an aural medium in every way, much more than it is a visual medium. The fetishistic lure of series resides in the opener—that combination of music and sound effects that is exactly the same for every episode, no matter how much the plot and the characters change. (Taubin in Rapfogel, 2014: 37)

Twin Peaks also deliberately challenged the ordinary pace of television shows of the time in which it was produced, operating at a slower pace. As Kinny Landrum argues about 90s television: 'This was the time of MTV, and everything had to be so quick. A shot couldn't last more than a second or so. *Twin Peaks*, though, had a different and more interesting editing style, and David would often linger on different shots' (Landrum in Halskov, 2015: 76). Similarly, Newman and Levine note that *Twin Peaks* was seen by many critics to be the 'antithesis of much TV' (Newman and Levine, 2012: 26), chiefly due to the reduced time devoted to commercial breaks when the series was first aired by ABC. As with cinema, seamless continuity was paramount in the delivery of a compelling and successful drama, with fewer commercial interruptions producing a more cinematic quality to the delivery of *Twin Peaks*. As Newman and Levine note: 'In these respects, *Twin Peaks* fit with the standard logic of the cultural legitimisation of television, in that it was distinguished, first and foremost, from TV itself, and especially from its commercial aspects' (Newman and Levine, 2012: 24). They also argue that 'the discourses of validation surrounding *Twin Peaks* both kept with and diverged from the discourses of television's legitimation that had circulated previously' (Newman and Levine, 2012: 26).

The Rise and Fall of Twin Peaks

What made *Twin Peaks* such an initial success was not only its cinematic quality, but the series' impact beyond the show itself, with Lynch's use of transmedia storytelling expanding the *Twin Peaks* universe and subsequently the show's fandom. Significantly, *Twin Peaks* benefited from embracing new formats of sharing and consumerism. Halskov explains that when *Twin Peaks* first came out, the kind of transmedia storytelling familiar with shows such as *The Walking Dead* (2010–), *Fargo* and *Better Call Saul* (2015–) 'was relatively uncommon' (Halskov, 2015: 14). Tie-in books such as *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* (1990) by David Lynch's daughter Jennifer Lynch, and *The Autobiography of Special Agent Dale Cooper* (1991) and *The Secret History of Twin Peaks* (2016) by brothers Scott and Mark Frost respectively, among other fan-based enterprises enabled *Twin Peaks*' influence to stretch

across multiple platforms and mediums. As a result, *Twin Peaks* became 'a complex phenomenon including many different stories and media' (Halskov, 2015: 14).

In spite of these innovations, Robert Thompson notes that the medium of television provided a finite atmosphere for exploring narratives, arguing that this is what befell Lynch. He suggests that, ultimately, 'series television is incapable of sustaining constant innovation', and that Lynch 'could no more have continued to deliver the original concept of *Twin Peaks* season after season than James Joyce could have continued to write additional chapters of *Ulysses*, ad infinitum' (Thompson, 1997: 158). He furthermore argues that:

Twin Peaks introduced an exciting new style and a bizarre new world to network TV, but it couldn't stay bizarre and exciting forever. At the foundation of the show's "difference" and its "art" was its rejection of television norms, including those of the ongoing series. (Thompson, 1997: 158)

But as much as this was the case for *Twin Peaks*, it cannot be said that television is incapable of sustaining constant innovation. Along with *The Sopranos*, shows as varied as *Seinfeld* (1989–98), *The Wire* (2002–8) and *Breaking Bad* (2008–13) are often cited as shows that maintained a steady momentum, undermining Thompson's assertion that the medium of television cannot sustain compelling narratives across an episodic format. Alan Sepinwall's book *The Revolution was Televised* (2012), for instance, looks at the shows that have redefined the medium of television. Among the shows he discusses, Sepinwall describes *The Wire* as the Great American Novel for television and notes that it is difficult to see quality television before *The Sopranos*. However, he lists a number of shows which paved the way for more contemporary work, including *St. Elsewhere* (1982–8), *thirtysomething* (1987–91), and *Twin Peaks*: 'Nothing quite prepared audiences for *Twin Peaks*, a baroque mix of murder mystery, soap opera, '50s movie melodrama, and the 100% pure weirdness that comes from any project from the show's co-creator, David Lynch' (Sepinwall, 2012: 18). Sepinwall writes that although the show was perhaps the most bizarre thing people had yet seen on television, it managed to become a hit: 'For a few weeks in the spring of 1990,

viewers went nuts over who killed Laura Palmer [...] It helped that all the quiriness was married to a sense of real forward momentum for the investigation and all the personal drama in the town' (Sepinwall, 2012: 18–19).

But Sepinwall, like Thompson, observes that the show's finite storyline of Palmer's murder made it difficult to keep things fresh: 'When the show's success led to an unexpected second season, Lynch and Frost had no idea what to do other than to dial up the weirdness at the expense of the plot, and everyone lost interest long before we found out that BOB had murdered Laura while controlling the body of her father' (Sepinwall, 2012: 19). Following this revelation, audience interest began to dwindle, as haphazard plotlines failed to sustain the show's appeal. The show was cancelled after its second season failed to garner the same ratings as its suspenseful and cryptic first season. Various executive decisions are said to have contributed to its downfall: ABC's pressure on Lynch to reveal Laura's killer earlier, which many viewers felt was too soon, arbitrary and lacklustre plotlines, and the unfulfilled relationship between Cooper and Audrey. Regarding the latter, MacLachlan was said to have objected to the proposed (and assumed) union due to what he claimed was Cooper's strict moral code that would influence the character's decision not to become involved with a high school student. Yet the network brought in Heather Graham as Cooper's new love interest, Annie Blackburn, in the second season, who, as Fenn pointed out, was even younger than herself. In recent years rumours circulated that MacLachlan's real-life partner Lara Flynn Boyle, who portrayed Donna Hayward in the show, was angry and jealous about the amount of scenes MacLachlan and Fenn had together, and persuaded MacLachlan to object to the relationship. As Fenn stated to the *A.V. Club* in 2014:

...what happened was that Lara [Flynn Boyle] was dating Kyle [MacLachlan], and she was mad that my character was getting more attention, so then Kyle started saying that his character shouldn't be with my character because it doesn't look good, 'cause I'm too young. Literally, because of that, they brought in Heather Graham – who's younger than I am – for him and Billy Zane for me. I was not happy about it. It was stupid. (Harris, 2014: n. pag.)

Both critics and fans shared Fenn's views: Greg Olson, for instance, states that 'stacks of letters from eager viewers reinforced Frost and Peyton's conviction that the Cooper-Audrey union would bring robust life to post-Leland Palmer Twin Peaks' (Olson, 2008: 364).

Because of these issues, the series was not picked up for a third season, despite the finale ending on a cliff-hanger. The series' last episode, 'Beyond Life and Death' (E22.S2), follows Cooper as he journeys into the Black Lodge to rescue Annie who has been kidnapped by Cooper's former mentor, Windom Earle. Inside he encounters his doppelgänger, as well as both BOB and Earle. After Earle asks for Cooper's soul in exchange for Annie's life, BOB retaliates by killing Earle and taking his soul. After being inside the Lodge for hours, Cooper emerges at night with Annie, both unconscious. When he wakes up in his room back at the Great Northern Hotel, it is revealed that Cooper is now possessed by BOB; in the bathroom, Cooper sprays an entire tube of toothpaste down the drain, before smashing his face into the mirror and asking in a maniacal voice: 'How's Annie?', just as the credits start to roll. The fate of a number of other characters is also left unanswered, such as Audrey who is in a bank explosion, and the character Leo Johnson, a captive of Windom Earle's. Because of the drop-off in ratings, the finale was watched by a substantially smaller audience, meaning that the majority of fans did not witness Cooper's possession by BOB. Yet in the years following its cancellation, the show remained, however modestly, ingrained in the popular imagination, its influence noticeable in subsequent shows such as *The X-Files* (1993–2002) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) with their fusion of comedy and the supernatural. Moreover, as Abbott notes: 'Lynch opened the door for many other directors – such as Frank Darabont on *The Walking Dead*, Martin Scorsese on *Boardwalk Empire*, and Len Wiseman on *Sleepy Hollow* [...] by taking creative control over a television series by filming the pilot and therefore establishing a stylistic blueprint for the show' (Abbott, 2016: 189). As a television show, *Twin Peaks* thus became a revolutionary creation for the medium of television. Despite the lacklustre reception for the show's second season, it has ironically received greater reception over the last twenty years than the prequel film that followed it, released in an effort to fill in some of the unanswered questions brought on by the finale. The

show's cult following compared to the film's negative reception suggests that the natural habitat of the *Twin Peaks* narrative is television.

Twin Peaks at the Cinemas

When *Fire Walk with Me* was first released, critics not only unanimously vilified the film, but it also received a resounding stream of booing and hissing at its screening at the Cannes Film Festival. *New York Times* film reviewer Vincent Canby famously described the film as: 'not the worst movie ever made, it just seems to be' (Canby, 1992: n. pag.); while Janet Maslin, also writing for the *New York Times*, declared: 'Mr. Lynch's taste for brain-dead grotesque has lost its novelty, and it now appears more pathologically unpleasant than cinematically bold' (Maslin, 1992: n. pag.). Maslin points out that a significant problem with the film, aside from the length (clocked at over two hours), is the absence of the characters from the television series. Yet Maslin also noted that '[a]t his news conference, Mr. Lynch had the good sense to bring along Angelo Badalamenti, whose music is the only remaining aspect of "Twin Peaks" that has much appeal' (Maslin, 1992: n. pag.). Badalamenti's famous and much-loved *Twin Peaks* theme does appear in the film, showing the extent to which continuity is an important factor in sequels.

For certain commentators, the film dampened the overall reception of Lynch's work as a whole. Quentin Tarantino was one of the critics who not only criticised *Fire Walk with Me*, but also saw it as the film that ruined Lynch's reputation as a great director. In a now-famous interview, the director states: 'After I saw *Twin Peaks – Fire Walk with Me* at Cannes, [I felt that] David Lynch has disappeared so far up his own ass that I have no desire to see another David Lynch movie until I hear something different. And you know, I loved him. I *loved* him' (Tarantino in Taylor, 1998: 48). Such sentiments were widely shared following the film's release. Discussing Lynch's breadth of work, Eric G. Wilson argues:

The cause of this doubt is my re-watching of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, a movie that I still find to be, I'm ashamed to say, less interesting than Lynch's other films. What I see as the weak elements of this picture – including Lynch himself playing an FBI agent with a hearing problem

– have made me begin to question my high estimate of Lynch's other work.
(Wilson, 2007: 26)

In his work *The Impossible David Lynch* (2007), Todd McGowan highlights one of the salient issues that disrupts the transition between the show and the film: the contradictory nature of its main character, Laura Palmer. In the original series, Laura's death is the catalyst for the entire series, whose murder shakes the small town of Twin Peaks and gradually exposes the secrets of all of its inhabitants. She is already dead in the pilot episode, washing up on a rocky beach wrapped in a plastic bag. She is only ever seen alive in brief flashbacks and dreams, but predominantly functions through the verbal recollections of the other characters, who discuss her life and personality frequently. As a result, she exists as an ethereal object whose death is more important than her life, at least for the purposes of the series. As McGowan notes, in the television series Palmer 'serves as a structuring absence that organises the desire of the other characters and the spectator' (McGowan, 2007: 130). Laura's character remains, as McGowan argues, 'a mystery to be solved. Insofar as she exists just outside our grasp, she embodies the impossible object' (McGowan, 2007: 130). Indeed, Greg Olson notes that in *Fire Walk with Me*:

...all eyes would be on Sheryl Lee, the young Seattle actress who became world famous playing the corpse of Laura Palmer in the *Twin Peaks* pilot, and did a solid job of portraying Laura's unworldly cousin Maddy. For *Fire Walk with Me* she would have to carry the full, harrowing emotional weight of Laura's tormented existence. (Olson, 2008: 371)

It is in Laura's absence that the narrative of *Twin Peaks* finds its existential stability, for Laura propels the story forward without ever really appearing alive. The film *Fire Walk with Me*, however, deviates from this approach by not only including Laura in its narrative, but by making her the main character in the film. *Fire Walk with Me* is considered both a prequel *and* a sequel, with the film set in a time shortly before Laura's death, but also containing revelations regarding the series' finale and the fate of its characters.

McGowan argues that the film purposefully breaks from the television series at the very beginning, with footage of an axe plunging into a snowy television screen signifying, for McGowan, the death of television: 'The violent death of Teresa Banks in this scene is simultaneously the violent death of the *Twin Peaks* television series (McGowan, 2007: 129–30). The opening scene, McGowan states, 'announces that the prequel to the series will be fundamentally different in structure and theme. The difference manifests itself most directly in the perspective from which we experience the town of Twin Peaks' (McGowan, 2007: 130). Indeed, Laura's absence/presence dichotomy is the most crucial differentiating point between the series and the film. Where *Twin Peaks* was essentially defined by the narrative gesture of Laura's absence, it becomes unceremoniously interrupted in the subsequent film, the tantalising mystery of Laura's unknown character suddenly spoiled for viewers with a character that, for many, appears less enticing than her absence initially suggested. Richard Martin describes this as Lynch's symbolic gesture of the superiority of film over television, stating that '[h]ere, Lynch follows in the footsteps of Sirk and Fassbinder in reminding his audience that cinema is the superior medium' (Martin, 2014: 81). Martin further claims that 'Lynch not only prefers to work in cinema; he also imbues his filmic homes with a theatrical spatial arrangement' and that '[Lynch's] films feel like three-dimensional, multi-lane structures full of pathways, parallel streams of traffic, and tense junctions' (Martin, 2014: 81, 119).

Various critics similarly note that Lynch is more comfortable working in cinema than he is in television. As Olson argues: 'In the early 1990s, after every show he'd ever launched on TV had been cancelled, he declared that the medium was "a joke" and swore he'd never work in it again' (Olson, 2008: 490). Yet, in 2015, Lynch released the following statement on Twitter: 'That gum you like is going to come back in style', referring to a well-known quote from the original series. It was then announced that Lynch would reboot the series, which is currently set to air in 2017. Halskov argues that the revival of *Twin Peaks* 'metaphorically point[s] to the general *sequel-itis* of today's film and television industries' (Halskov, 2015: 14; author's emphasis). Because of the contemporary boom in sequels and prequels in film and television, from *Star Wars* to the *X-Files*, critics have also levelled accusations against

Lynch for purportedly exploiting the popularity of *Twin Peaks* for commercial gain. Antony Todd notes that the ‘hissing and booing’ that accompanied Lynch’s entrance into the *Fire Walk with Me* Press Conference at Cannes tells us something ‘about our horizons of expectation for cinematic artwork and their authors’ (Todd, 2012: 104). Todd writes that many critics saw the film as simply a work of ‘commercial distortion’, while others ‘thought that Lynch had contravened the rules of comprehension of commercial cinema’ (Todd, 2012: 105). For Todd, then, the ‘journalistic critic will see it as a requirement of the true auteur to rise above commercial obligations, while remaining respectful of their audience’ (Todd, 2012: 105). Yet, he also notes that in their reassessment of *Fire Walk with Me*, ‘not one of Lynch’s biographers entertained the accusations of “cashing in” on the television show’s popularity’ (Todd, 2012: 106). Contrastingly, he observes that ‘these sources [show] a pattern that *reclaimed the film* as something of a misunderstood (albeit potentially flawed) work of cinematic art’ (Todd, 2012: 106; author’s emphasis).

Strange Fascinations

In recent years, particularly in the wake of Lynch’s announcement of the *Twin Peaks* reboot, analysis of *Fire Walk with Me* has steadily gained greater enthusiasm. Simon Brew featured the film in his list of the ‘25 most underappreciated films of 1992’, stating: ‘Certainly, the film didn’t deserve the near hysteria that greeted it on initial release, and *Fire Walk With Me* has since undergone something of a reassessment, with no lesser authority than [film critic] Mark Kermode emerging as one of its champions’ (Brew, 2013: n. pag.). Kermode, whose twice-weekly video blog *Kermode Uncut* is aired by the BBC, reviewed *Fire Walk with Me* in 2012, praising it as a ‘much maligned, but marvellous’ film. He argues:

Looking back at *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* from 20 years’ distance, that hostility which initially greeted it is all the more baffling because on a simply technical level the film is really well made. It looks fabulous, it has a crisp, clear visual sense like all of Lynch’s best work [and] it easily straddles the divide between suburban and the surreal. (Kermode, 2012: n. pag.)

Like other critics who have reconsidered the film's status in popular culture, Kermode also gives glowing praise to Sheryl Lee's performance as Laura, which, he notes, is one of 'operatic intensity'. Further retrospective analysis of the film similarly applauds the inclusion of Lee, often citing her performance of Laura as heartbreaking and necessary for the entire *Twin Peaks* project. As Robbie Collin writes: 'Far from cheating viewers, this fresh perspective offered them a new way to decode the entire *Twin Peaks* mythos, with Sheryl Lee's extraordinary, soul-tearing performance shaking the franchise out of its cherry-pie-munching reverie' (Collin, 2014: n. pag.).

Following the graphic opening of the film, *Fire Walk with Me* follows two special agents of the FBI, agent Desmond (Chris Issak) and agent Sam (Kiefer Sutherland), as they investigate the murder of Teresa Banks in the town of Deer Meadow. The agents, escorted by Gordon Cole (David Lynch), the hearing-impaired FBI detective who also appeared in *Twin Peaks*, encounter Lil, a strange clown-like woman, dressed in a red dress with elaborate red hair and even more elaborate, somewhat grotesque gestures. She has a blue rose attached to her dress, the significance of which is not revealed. Cole instructs the agents via these elaborate gestures, with the agents interpreting the various hand and feet movements for their assignment. In *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime* (2000) Slavoj Žižek notes that this 'strange scene' is one of the supreme examples of Lynch's use of 'extraneation' (Žižek, 2000: 21). He makes several connections between Lynch's bizarre work of dream-like confusion and the nightmarishly confusing world of Franz Kafka, a connection frequently observed in Lynch studies. Analysing the scene with Lil, Žižek questions whether the scene can truly be read as expressing Cole's inability to communicate, 'reducing the feminine body to a cartoon-like two-dimensional puppet' in order to get the message across. For Žižek, such a reading fundamentally misses the 'Kafkaesque quality of this scene, in which the two detectives accept this strange instruction as something normal, as part of their daily communications' (Žižek, 2000: 22). Žižek also notes that the source of much consternation is the issue of 'what is to be taken seriously and what is to be taken ironically in Lynch's universe' (Žižek, 2000: 19). In *Twin Peaks*, the agent through whom we experience the intricacies of the small town, Dale Cooper, is buoyant, friendly; though

undeniably strange in his devotion to the mystical and the arcane. Agent Desmond, on the other hand, has neither Cooper's well-known pep nor his stalwart moral code. Discussing the place of the law in Lynch's worlds, Žižek argues that in Lynch's work: 'the law is enforced through the ridiculous, hyperactive, life-enjoying agent' (Žižek, 2000: 19). This description aptly suits Cooper, but not the other agents in *Fire Walk with Me*. Cooper enforces the law through precisely these means. As Cooper himself notes in the ninth episode of the second season, 'Arbitrary Law' (E9.S2): 'I have employed Bureau guidelines, deductive technique, Tibetan method, instinct, and luck'. One of the essential elements in *Twin Peaks*, then, is Cooper's noticeably hyperactive mannerisms that keep the show light, quirky and humorous.

Just as with *Twin Peaks*, the film begins with an investigation of murder, yet it lacks both the ominous feel of the opening scenes of *Twin Peaks* and the more upbeat, jazzy score that accompanies Cooper on his way into the small town of Twin Peaks. In comparison to the film, the series *Twin Peaks*, it appears, does not expect audiences to take it too seriously (according to O'Day one of the only ways we can take it is ironically [O'Day, 2002: 119]). With their comparatively shorter time frame, Lynch infuses the episodes of *Twin Peaks* with a more fast-paced narrative than the film, complimented by snappy music (quite literally with Angelo Badalamenti's instrumental 'Dance of the Dream Man', which features continuous clicking of the fingers). Contrastingly, in the film's bid to be taken more seriously, it partly abandons the irony that sustained the series in the first place. Although *Twin Peaks*, as previously noted, possesses very cinematic qualities (the pilot episode running the cinematic length of one hour and thirty-four minutes), *Twin Peaks* is not inherently of the cinematic world, but adheres to the serial format of the television programme while containing elements familiar to cinema. When Cooper finally appears in the film, the audience is reacquainted with a well-known face in an unknown environment. This is one of the more crucial elements that defines the prequel. Like all prequels (more so than sequels), there is a sense of disruption to context, with the familiar placed in the unfamiliar, most notably apparent when Cooper appears in the Philadelphia office with Cole, looking cautious and on edge. This at once

connects the viewers but disconnects them as well. Effort is placed on the viewer to accommodate the new environment of a familiar character. Moreover, Lynch's interests in corridors, explored in the television series where Cooper runs around the corridors of the Red Room, is examined here once more. Cooper walks down a corridor and sees a camera staring at him, which projects his image onto a computer screen in another room. Cooper attempts to see his image on the computer screen when walking out of the hallway, when long-lost Detective Jeffries (David Bowie in a brief cameo) appears, walking out of the elevator and down the hallway. Cooper manages to catch himself staring at the camera while Jeffries passes through. Cooper's appearance in the film is welcome but detached, as he takes on the role of the more serious special agent, rather than the agent the audience came to know in the series. After Cooper speaks into his familiar recorder, cataloguing the events, the scene then jumps to one year later, opening with the most well-known image of the Twin Peaks welcoming sign, before we see Laura Palmer very much alive, walking along a sunlit suburban street.

Other familiar elements continually appear in the film, notably the well-known extra-dimensional Red Room from *Twin Peaks*, a strange space in which good and evil seem to converge. As Wilson writes: '*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, though it appears to feature a dualistic struggle between good and evil, is really a weird fable on the inevitable interdependence between evil and good, transgression and charity' (Wilson, 2007: 25). First appearing in the second episode of the television series, the significance of the room is re-examined in *Fire Walk with Me*. As in *Twin Peaks*, the Red Room appears only briefly in *Fire Walk with Me*. As Martin notes, the Red Room actually appears on screen for a brief amount of time, in spite of how famous it has become. In appearing in the second and last episodes of the series, and for three short scenes in *Fire Walk with Me*, he argues that:

These appearances at the beginning and end of the project confirm its special status, while avoiding over-familiarity. What is more, among *Twin Peaks'*

diverse collaborators, Lynch alone directs sequences in the Red Room, implying a particularly personal relationship with the space. (Martin, 2014: 152)

In *Twin Peaks*, the Red Room contains The Man from Another Place, who speaks backwards and dances, as well as a woman who looks 'almost exactly like Laura Palmer'. The Red Room resides in the Black Lodge, and contains evil elements, notably through the manifestation of BOB. In the series' last episode, Special Agent Dale Cooper enters the Red Room, while his evil doppelganger emerges in the real world. *Fire Walk with Me* thus offers partial closure following the TV series' end; in one scene Laura is in bed, seemingly dreaming, when a bloodied Annie Blackburn appears beside her, informing Laura that the 'good Dale' is still trapped inside the Black Lodge. Of what little footage of the Red Room exists, it is certainly cinematic in design, structure and scope, the red curtains and unique carpet design symbolic of the cinematic experience. As Martin states: 'The Red Room's flooring also recalls the terrazzo sidewalk patterns that architects such as S. Charles Lee placed outside movie palaces to entice spectators, so that cinematic design spilled into the street' (Martin, 2014: 153).

Other familiar scenes or phrases pop up during the film: the letter extracted from underneath Teresa's nail, creamed corn linked to the character Mrs. Tremond, and the phrase 'Let's Rock' written in red on Desmond's windshield, a phrase originally uttered by the Man from Another Place in the Red Room. All of these familiar elements depend on the viewers' awareness of the show to be effective, meaning that *Fire Walk with Me* finds difficulty in standing on its own as a singular film. As Noel Megahey argues in his review of the Collector's Edition DVD: 'As a film, *Twin Peaks Fire Walk With Me* looks like an almost complete mess. Although nominally a prequel, it's one that relies heavily on you already knowing what happens in the TV Series' (Megahey, 2005: n. pag.). He also notes that the film 'often makes elliptical jump cuts to scenes in the middle of dialogues', which 'works partly to the film's advantage, particularly in the Laura Palmer sequences of the film, correlating with a life that is going off the rails' (Megahey, 2005: n. pag.). Megahey further contends, however, that this technique:

...makes no concession for a viewer unfamiliar with the characters and the information that needs to be known about the direction their lives are going to take. Such scenes as a bloodied Annie Blackburn (Heather Graham) appearing in Laura's bed during a nightmare or references to the "Bad Dale" in the Black Lodge, will be meaningless or at least less effective to anyone unfamiliar with events of the TV series. (Megahey, 2005: n. pag.)

Fire Walk with Me therefore suffers not only under the weight of its televisual predecessor, but also under the weight of both narrative and stylistic separation. Although many fans and critics dismissed the film for its deviation from the original series, ironically it also relied too heavily on familiar tropes, characters and plot points, rendering it a somewhat parasitic creation that failed to exist in isolation.

Domestic Cinema

One of the obvious focal points of *Twin Peaks* that is overlooked in the film version is the town of Twin Peaks itself. While the characters move the story along with their respective secrets, they are all tied to the small town which, as Sheriff Truman later tells Cooper in the third episode 'Zen, or the Skill to Catch a Killer' (E3.S1), is different than other towns: 'There's a sort of evil out there. Something very, very strange in these old woods'. Andy Burns makes the salient point that 'unlike shows like *Dallas* or *Beverly Hills, 90210*, where actors' images and clips from episodes are given the most screen time, the opening credits to *Twin Peaks* set the mood by showing us the town – the sawmill, smoke emanating from its stacks; a Welcome to Twin Peaks sign; a river tinged with dark water calmly running' (Burns, 2015: 15). He also notes that 'the credits take their time, a minute and a half, to transport viewers into the strange town in a visually memorable calling card, a gateway into the world that David Lynch and Mark Frost have created' (Burns, 2015: 15). While the film is still primarily set in the town of Twin Peaks, it lacks the mythology that is attached to the town in the series; we are taken instead to Deer Meadow and Washington, before being taken back to the beloved yet eerie town. Moreover, where *Twin Peaks* as a series focuses on the inhabitants of the town in a distinctly soap-operaish manner, jumping from

one family or character to another and showing how they potentially interact, *Fire Walk with Me* focuses more intimately and disturbingly on true domestic life and the unspoken evil of incest that is only alluded to briefly in *Twin Peaks*:

Considerations of community are primarily addressed by the television series rather than the film. *Fire Walk with Me* bypasses many sites and characters to concentrate on domestic drama. In *Twin Peaks*, though, the town and its inhabitants are the series' true subjects. (Martin, 2014: 45)

Hence while they are considered to belong to the same thematic project, essentially *Twin Peaks* and *Fire Walk with Me* exist somewhat separately, insofar as they focus on different themes. As a prequel, *Fire Walk with Me* depends on *Twin Peaks*, while *Twin Peaks* can exist with or without the prequel.

One element that was considered more positive about the film was its supposed realistic approach to, and depiction of, father-daughter incest. The now iconic image of the ceiling fan in the Palmer household, which featured frequently throughout the show, finds its symbolic significance in the film version. As Martin writes, within the film, 'the importance of the ceiling fan is revealed' (Martin, 2014: 90). It is, he argues, 'a symbol of recurring domestic abuse, the sign that Leland is breaking the boundaries of normal familial relations. Leland's journey across the landing reflects his move from the vertical axis of a father-daughter relationship to the horizontal line of lovers' (Martin, 2014: 90). In *Lynch on Lynch* (2005), Chris Rodley notes that following the release of the film, Lynch received many letters from young girls who had been abused by their fathers. They had considered the film's depiction of incest quite accurate: 'They were puzzled as to how [Lynch] could have known exactly what it was like. Despite the fact that the perception of both incest and filicide was represented in the "abstract" form of Killer Bob, it was recognised as faithful to the subjective experience' (Rodley, 2005: xii). In its greater focus on the actual relationship between Laura and Leland, *Fire Walk with Me* offers something substantially more than the television series that initial reviewers overlooked. Laura's physical absence from the television series leaves a gap in our understanding about the complexity

regarding her and Leland's relationship; the film shows both a loving father-daughter relationship, but also a more sinister one of rape and incest that gives the television series more dimension in terms of narrative symbolism and undergirds the emotional severity of the film itself. As Olson writes: 'Lynch includes a few precious moments of loving tenderness between Leland and Laura in the film, thus poignantly giving us a measure of how much emotional treasure BOB has stolen from the Palmer family' (Olson, 2008: 390). Indeed, in these touching father-daughter scenes, that are notably absent from the series, Lynch emphasises the true despair of the situation: that of the destruction of the family.

Another notable difference between the TV series and the film is its treatment of, and approach towards, sex and violence. *Twin Peaks* does, of course, boast moments of sexual promiscuity, yet it is predominantly hinted at, through the sultry movements of Audrey Horne, the illicit, passionate kissing of all forbidden couples, and the double-entendres uttered by various inhabitants. But *Twin Peaks* just barely skims the surface of the desirous nature of its residents, while *Fire Walk with Me* takes it further, showing a full-frontal nude Laura Palmer and Donna Hayward (played in the film by Moira Kelly), as well as several sex scenes – elements of which are absent in the series. As Martin puts it: '*Fire Walk with Me* is, accordingly, much more explicit, in terms of sex and violence, than its televisual partner' (Martin, 2014: 82). Laura's death is brutal and bloody; she screams manically and bares her teeth like an animal as BOB thrusts a blade into her body in the infamous train car. For viewers familiar with the show, the significance of the events in the train car in the first episode of the series is suddenly given flesh, in quite a literal manner.

But it isn't merely the explicit nature of the violence and sex that sees *Fire Walk with Me* deviate substantially from its original source; the acute despair of its central character is the main focal point of the entire film, and as a result *Fire Walk with Me* not only takes on darker elements but also lacks the humorous touch so loved by fans of the original series. Some quirkiness is present, but it is unaccompanied by Lynch's trademark wit. Lynch is said to have wanted to focus more on the 'broken heart and endangered soul of *Twin Peaks* [and] the final seven days of Laura's life'

(Olson, 2008: 366), while Mark Frost, who politely declined being involved in the project, believed that 'the audience hungered for the story to move forward and tie up loose ends' (Olson, 2008: 366). *Fire Walk with Me* is therefore a darker, more despairing depiction of the events in *Twin Peaks*. As Olson puts it:

It is a measure of Lynch's commitment to his artistic vision that, in *Fire Walk With Me*, he strips away all the user-friendly, trademark *Twin Peaks*-on-TV elements that viewers love (detectives, pie and coffee, humorously quirky characters) and focuses the world through Laura's pained, sad, and desperate consciousness. (Olson, 2008: 387)

In reconsidering what *Fire Walk with Me* offered in the *Twin Peaks* universe, one is compelled to acknowledge the despair and desperation that its central character undergoes, emphasising the tragedy of the events that take place, and the significance of Laura's death in the series. While *Twin Peaks* can certainly exist in its own right without *Fire Walk with Me*, the film does, however, offer insights into a character that suffers through a series of horrific events. The true extent of Laura's suffering is not revealed in the series, and as such viewers have a one-sided understanding of the severity of her life and death. As Robbie Collin's aforementioned comment attests, at the very least *Fire Walk with Me* unsettles viewers by providing them with a more realistic glimpse of Laura's agony that is alluded to, but not seen, in the series. Arguably, however, this absence of imagery creates even greater poignancy via the viewers' imagination. While directors can provide us with graphic images, thereby filling in the gaps, it is the ability of the audience to imagine the unspeakable horrors that proves truly effective. Nothing the directors could ever provide could be as disconcerting as what we are already allowed to imagine, and in her silence, Laura serves as a character of endless speculation and wonder. As M. Morse writes about *Fire Walk with Me*:

Being shown the decadence that Laura participated in doesn't deepen her tragedy or heighten our sympathies, it only underlines the surprising

power in alluding to sin versus the diminished power in witnessing that sin firsthand. The show's method of doling out information and revelation regarding Laura's secret life was, for me, highly effective. It showed us just enough to understand the depths Laura had sunk to, while leaving us free to fill in the many gaps with our imaginations, in the process rendering Laura's character in near-mythological terms. (Morse, 2010: n. pag.)

The bits and pieces of information given in the series – from the fragments of Laura's diary, the accounts of her friends and family, to the iconic photograph of her on the mantelpiece – thus gives us an incomplete version of Laura's character, but thereby heightens her significance. The strategic use of details, then, becomes the crucial difference between the film and television version of *Twin Peaks*, between presence and absence, revelation and imagination, and fact and mythology, utilising not only the serialised format of television but the minds of its viewers to create a compelling mystery.

Return to Television

Despite the assumption held by Lynch and others that cinema is superior, *Twin Peaks* as a television series, rather than as film, has garnered greater appreciation and following. *Fire Walk with Me* has more recently been seen as a useful, though not entirely necessary, companion to the series, as it offered partial closure. While it was criticised for undermining its strongest narrative device by bringing Laura to life, *Fire Walk with Me* invariably provided greater depth to our understanding of the events that led to her death, particularly the complexity and horror surrounding her relationship with Leland. As Olson argues, the film's focus on Laura's descent separates the film from the series in terms of the trademark elements present in the series that made it such a cult hit to begin with. Following the announcement of the show's reboot, claims to the *Twin Peaks* narrative's strength in television is reiterated, as both fans and creators acknowledge the extent to which the soap opera and supernatural elements of *Twin Peaks* functions best in television, providing the suspense and humour for which the show is renowned.

While the series is notable for containing cinematic elements that fundamentally separated it from earlier television, breaching the TV/cinema boundary, it is nevertheless regarded as cinematic *television*, the combination of cinematic techniques and episodic format granting *Twin Peaks* a reputation as one of the most influential shows of the 1990s. Lynch is instrumental in bridging the gap between film and television in the 1990s, particularly in his depiction of the home and suburb as a deeper, more complex location. In this sense Lynch's work opens up the American home more so than previous television shows, whose reliance on more one-dimensional portrayals of domestic life do not as effectively convey the inherent complexity of the family unit. This is where both *Twin Peaks* and *Fire Walk with Me* in their respective ways provide something unique, however flawed, in regards to the relationship between the suburban and the supernatural that had been all but absent in American television. What Lynch essentially achieved, then, was to bring the concerns of suburban life, notably seen in his films such as *Blue Velvet*, into the domain of television. Yet the added element of the supernatural in *Twin Peaks*, along with its take on the detective genre and soap opera theme, produced something entirely different and unique, and has since worked best in television. As production for *Twin Peaks* resumes, we are reminded that the greatest elements that defined *Twin Peaks* occurred in the series, relying on the gaps and mysteries that the series propagated, rather than the revelations that the film provided, once again confirming that the natural habitat of *Twin Peaks* is television.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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