

SOUND DESIGN, MUSIC AND THE BIRTH OF EVIL IN *TWIN PEAKS: THE RETURN* : PRESENTATION SCRIPT

Music and Moving Image, NYC, 27 May 2018
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‘Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.’

- John Cage

Following a pre-title sequence that serves as the connective tissue between the 25 years that separate Showtime’s 2017 reboot from the transmission of its preceding two television seasons and the feature film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, the opening line of *Twin Peaks: The Return* is spoken. Carel Struycken’s character – described as The Giant in those previous iterations, but referred to as The Fireman in *The Return* – directs FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper to ‘Listen to the sounds’. Speaking in the unsettling backwards dialect familiar to viewers of the series, The Giant indicates a repetitive, scratching phrase from a gramophone. The instruction is clear and though Cooper can hear only noise, he appears to understand before disappearing in a fizz of what sounds like electricity. These opening moments of the latest incarnation of director David Lynch and writer Mark Frost’s groundbreaking television series demonstrates a playful approach to the relationship between what is said, what is shown and what is heard and understood by characters – and ultimately the audience – in the *Twin Peaks* universe.

Frances Morgan argues that Lynch uses noise to augment reality in order to ‘create atmospheres of disquiet and liminality’. In an interview with Chris Rodley, Lynch described his use of these sonic atmospheres as ‘presences’ that he defined as ‘the sound you hear when there’s silence, [the space] in between words or sentences’. Our paper explores these Lynchian ‘in between’ spaces and argues that it is not the spaces themselves that are important, but the interconnectivity between liminal or threshold places, where components of the soundtrack and the visual representation supplement one

another in order to provide guidance to the viewer navigating the complex narratives of *The Return*, and how through these spaces evil is present.

The first few minutes of the opening episode present the audience with a number of spaces. The narrative shifts from the extra-dimensional Black Lodge to the 'real world' of the Ghostwood National Forest that surrounds the titular town of Twin Peaks. A non-descript truck reverses into a driveway, and Dr Lawrence Jacoby opens his trailer door and speaks with the van's driver over the ambient sounds of the forest. In the following sequence, helicopter wide shots of New York City are accompanied by similarly sonic localisation – the soundtrack dominated by the tropes of this most familiar of cinematic cities, brought to bear through distant sirens and the honking horn of a yellow cab.

As this exterior wide shot cuts to the interior of a skyscraper, however, the sound design returns to the Lynchian wind noise of the Black Lodge. The loft space features a large glass box with a circular porthole situated high above Manhattan. This chamber, which provides a portal between the extra-dimensional and real worlds of the season, is identified sonically as a liminal space. As the camera tracks backwards and reveals the watcher of the box Sam Colby, sounds corresponding to the room rather than the box itself are foregrounded in the mix as the sound design returns to the conventional – the mechanical sound of air conditioning, hum of fluorescent lights and the whirring servos of surveillance cameras trained upon the box. Changes of camera position correspond with a subtle shift in room tone or 'presence', disquieting perhaps in Frances Morgan's vernacular, but this use of sound situates Colby within the real world, perhaps protected from the inhabitants of extra-dimensional spaces by the glass walls of the box itself. When an alarm prompts Colby to change a memory card in one of the cameras, his movements loudly reverberate in the loft. Already, *The Return* is distinguishing the visual and sonic rendering of real world and extra-dimensional spaces and has established conventions for the whole season.

Tese sonic 'presences' help distinguish different spaces for the audience, and also provide clues as to the different characters within the narrative. The sonic rules established here remain consistent throughout the season and are evident in the use of processing and effects applied to dialogue and bodily movement of the characters, in the deployment of both pre-existing source music conveyed non-diegetically in the sound track and through the diegetical performances of acts within venues situated within the narrative, and, finally, in the musical score written specifically by Lynch, composer Angelo Badalamenti and supervising sound editor Dean Hurley. What is most striking about *The Return* is how sound design is privileged throughout: dialogue is often secondary or entirely absent, there is barely any music in the first few episodes and it is the often expressionistic sound design that provides subtext, tone and narrative information. Where Lynchian wind noise or the hum of electricity appears on the soundtrack, something significant is occurring. 'Listen to the sounds,' says The Giant. 'Pay attention to the sounds,' says Lynch and his collaborators.

Beth Venn states, 'in many of Edward Hopper's paintings, one has the vague sense of viewing a film still – the stop-action quality of frozen figures in an act of very little significance'. Although Lynch's *Twin Peaks* universe is visually reminiscent of Hopper's paintings, unlike Hopper's images it is often more monochromatic, and lacks the gloss finish of oil paint. Unlike the frozen diner scene of Hopper's *Nighthawks* in Lynch's world figures flicker and glitch, images are layered and blurred and time changes as we watch. In Hopper's work we have a depiction of a specific time and image viewed in the specific time frame of today – the moment we view the work (or reproduction of the work). Lynch, however, can physically overlay visual images from different times, in addition to having the cinematic tools of flashback and flash-forward to work with, not to mention ideas of fragmentation, differing timelines and unreliable narrators.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead states that:

All phenomena are originally in the mind and have no outward form; therefore, as there is no form, it is an error to think that anything is there

Yet Part 8 of *Twin Peaks: The Return* appears to link the very real, very physical, historical first atomic explosion with the birth of evil, or *an* evil, into the world. As the bomb explodes across the screen, we are led on a visual journey reminiscent of astronaut David Bowman's trip through the stargate in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The explosion is presented as a beautiful visual event on screen, but is accompanied by the sound of Krzysztof Penderecki's discordant and atonal composition 'Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima' and within the slow motion technicolour explosive mayhem we see the spirit BOB floating. In *The New York Times* Noel Murray suggested that 'we just witnessed something like the origin story for the modern saga of good versus evil that "Twin Peaks" has been telling since 1990'.

Part 8 was startling and confusing, but it also appeared to offer us a back story and a creation myth for the whole of Lynch's *Twin Peaks* universe. Its audacious and hypnotic visuals, abstract soundtrack and magical realism seemed to offer a storyline of how evil entered the world on the back of the first atomic bomb test. Beth Venn states that '[f]or Hopper, light was a powerful force', and here, more than ever, Lynch pits that light against dark.

'This was brain-rending, terrifying, fascinating madness' said *Den of Geek's* Joe Matar, but '[y]ou can't explain why evil exists in the world – you can only suggest its virality, the way that it spreads from one person to another, a dark religious code of its own, blood acting as its prophet.'

Significant to the narrative of *Twin Peaks: The Return* are the many portals or gateways that join the extra-dimensional spaces of the season. These portals represent ruptures in space and time, and lead characters to specific locations – the Black and White Lodges, The Glass Box, Dutchman's Lodge, or The Fireman's residence. Where characters move from these extra-dimensional spaces to the real world, it is sonic cues that indicate their arrival

or departure. This is evident in the group of Woodsmen who appear around a convenience store, brought into being by the Trinity atomic bomb test. The Woodsmen appear in a flurry of what the close captioning describes as a 'warbling static stuttering'. This same sound cue announces their presence around the 'zone' that surrounds a vortex in a trailer park in Part 11, and where they are revealed to be lurking in the corridors of a Police Station. Here sound design effectively serves as leit motif, where non-diegetic audio cues remind the audience of the significance of the Woodsmen's presence as carriers or conduits of evil forces between real and extra-dimensional spaces.

Sound also serves to connect disparate dots from earlier episodes or seasons, encouraging the audience to consider how what first appear to be conventional spaces also resonate with layers of meaning. An investigation into mysterious sounds emanating from a room at the Great Northern Hotel, offers an example of where sound is used to bury the past actions of characters literally in the walls of locations. Variations on the ringing or humming sound which appears to emanate from the room are deployed whenever Agent Cooper sees The Fireman, and the same sound is also played in Episode 7 of Season Two in a scene when Cooper dreams of the Red Room. Both locations serve as a portal between the real and extra-dimensional, and suggest that the Great Northern Hotel also shares this property. Lynch appears to wilfully make use of sound as a catalyst for the audience to forge their own connections with narrative events occurring on screen.

Julio Descrivan describes Lynch as a filmmaker who privileges the psychological dimension of sound rather than the representational, and argues that it is sound design that can best serve to link abstraction with representation. Brooke McCorkle argues that sound in *The Return* marks a shift from previous seasons – in that it is often 'hyper-rendered not just for an ephemeral "jump scare" moment, but rather [is] in service of the story and/or the overarching aesthetic of the *Twin Peaks* world'. A core part of this aesthetic rendering of the world is that it becomes 'real' only in certain spaces. McCorkle focuses on electricity, something that has fascinated Lynch

throughout his career, and which she connects to the manner with which the nature of evil is presented within the season – ‘like electricity, she says, the evil is transitory or, to put it better, transmigratory’. Dean Hurley explained in an interview that electricity is written into the script of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, and that his bespoke library of electricity sounds ‘became a defining signature of the show’. This primacy of spaces and what connects them demonstrates the functioning of the portals that will allow for Cooper’s eventual return to the real world from his Black Lodge purgatory.

Take away the idea of linear storytelling, conclusions, and hierarchies and we are left with narratives of associative, tangential, fantastical and juxtaposed events and worlds that we, the viewers, must turn into story (or stories) and try to make sense of; or accept as surreal disjunctions.

Some have resisted this. Todd McGowan, discussing Lynch's film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, states that 'the fantastic dimension [...] places an onerous demand on the spectator,' going on to say that 'one finds the outside within the inside, the infinite within the finite.' Jonathan Foltz suggests that Part Eight of *Twin Peaks: The Return* consisted of 'mind-bending abstractions and derelict poetry', furthering Lynch's previous 'way of elevating peripheral performances to derail our sense of narrative logic' to the extent that the:

new season challenges us most in the way it seems to undo the story it is telling, moving out of sequence and perversely out of rhythm, indicating a wealth of paths it is not interested in going down, spending long stretches of time in scenes that do not immediately further the plot, and jumping without warning from characters and locales we know to those we don't.

Lynch, however, sees things in a different way, stating in an interview with Paul Woods that 'abstractions are a good thing and they exist all around us anyway. They sometimes can conjure up a thrilling experience within the person'. We are free to connect events and characters as we wish, to exercise our own value judgements, to create our own sense of time and

intersecting worlds that *Twin Peaks* may or may not contain. The narrative is always '[b]etween things,' which Deleuze and Guattari state:

does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.

'A rhizome – they say - may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines'. Lynch subverts the small-town soap opera model and claimed in an interview that this 'gives access to all the other subterranean lives which are going on in the town, because literally everybody has their own secret – as I believe they do in life'.

The 'story' of *Twin Peaks*, shares similarities with Matt Bluemink's definition of the rhizome, which:

is constantly growing, adapting, forming new connections with a variety of different multiplicities. It does not stem from one individual entrance i.e. some glorified 'Doorway of Knowledge', it exists precisely as a result of multiple entrances, multiple contributors, and an innumerable number of contributions.

Although meant as a criticism, Jonathan Foltz stated in the *LA Review of Books* that 'the series embraces a narrative style that is arguably even more inventive and jarring than the narrative itself, with its baroque mythology of lodges, personified evil, and interdimensional rabbit holes'. Michaela Bronstein is even more critical, suggesting that:

Twin Peaks: The Return, in the end, seems to want us to remain uncertain of our own position and role as spectators, trying to figure out in what way we're supposed to relate to the fabric of its world and the texture of its narrative experience. The emotional cues point in every direction and lead nowhere.

With the reduction of music over the course of the series, and with little dialogue in many of the episodes, so sound design is required to do much of the narrative heavy lifting. Dean Hurley explains that Lynch's practice involves the introduction of 'music into sound and sound into music where everything blurs' in what he calls an 'omni-lateral understanding of all aspects of film'. This notion of omni-laterality, or the representation of all points of view, resonates with the larger meaning of *The Return* defined by its multiple dimensionality and coexisting timelines.

The lack of conventional narrative hierarchies and playful misdirection is disruptive. Deviating from the conventional is, in part, how Lynch moved from noun to the Lynchian adjective and, as sound designer for *The Return*, he continues in a career-long avoidance of the familiar. This is made manifest with editing techniques such as jump cuts and glitching as evident in the sound design as they are in the visuals.

If Lynch's past work reveals the hidden arguments, sexualities, addictions, violence and strangeness of society and familial life, so *Twin Peaks: The Return* goes even further, to reveal literally hidden, underground, occult secrets and geographies.

Thomas Merton stated that:

it is common among mystics to identify the creation of man with the fall, that is, the creation of man in time and space. In Eden, man was eternal. But he fell from eternity into time, into matter, illusion, chaos and death.

Lynch is no mystic in the accepted sense, but his characters are able to fall out of time into different times and they certainly inhabit a world of illusion, chaos and death. The 18 hours of *Twin Peaks: The Return* are full of violence,

confusion and surrealism, occasional moments of goodness and comedy, but also the creation and dissemination of evil, persuasively imagined through a complex synthesis of sound and visuals.