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Listen To The Sounds: Music and Sound Design in Twin Peaks

TITLE

Sound Design, Music and The Birth of Evil in Twin Peaks: The Return

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Safe and Sound in Twin Peaks

Sound is arousing and dangerous because it can so easily penetrate and permeate, so effortlessly become the soft catastrophe of space. [...] Sound can not only impregnate, irradiate, it can also, it seems, provide a haven or habitat: “safe” as the saying is “and sound”. We use sound to locate things, and to orient ourselves in space: to take the measure of things, we take “soundings” or “sound things out”. [...] Sound is exploratory rather than merely metric or analytic, because sound does not give us just the outlines or contour things – their size, shape and position – but also gives us the sense of their quality, or their relation to us: their texture, density, resistance, porosity, wetness, absorptiveness.

– Steven Connor, “Ears Have Walls: On hearing Art”¹

Throughout the third season of *Twin Peaks: The Return*,² writer, director, and sound designer David Lynch and his collaborators deploy a complex combination of sounds and visuals to depict mysticism, the impossible, and to bring to life the birth and spread of evil in the *Twin Peaks* universe. Lynch uses intricate sound design, score, source music, and music performed within the diegesis to articulate and distinguish real-world geography from the supernatural spaces of the season and construct sonically distinct liminal spaces that serve to connect these places within a rhizomic narrative. Rules of sound use established in earlier series are consistent throughout this latest season, with Lynch, composer Angelo Badalamenti, and supervising sound editor Dean Hurley providing a collaborative throughline in the universe.

The season as a whole couples inter- and meta-textual connections in a form which embraces both conventional and experimental film practices. The manipulation of, and complex relationship between, the sonic and the

¹ Connor, Steven. “Ears Have Walls: On Hearing Art”. In *Sound*, ed. Caleb Kelly. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 2005, 2011), 133.

² Lynch, David. *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Showtime, 2017.

visual lends an otherworldly quality to *The Return* and allows the latest iteration of the show to further extend established Lynchian worlds.

In Part 8, evil is manifested through the Trinity atomic bomb test – this event announced through an on-screen intertitle as taking place on July 16, 1945 in White Sands, New Mexico. In this moment, writer Mark Frost, director David Lynch, and their collaborators appear to link this 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*.³ The explosion is presented as a striking and beautiful visual event and is underscored with Krzysztof Penderecki's discordant and atonal composition, *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*.⁴ Within the slow-motion technicolor explosive mayhem we see the floating spirit of BOB – the embodiment of evil present in each of the previous seasons of *Twin Peaks*⁵ and the feature film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*.⁶

Later, the episode moves to 1950s America where a soot-covered woodsman commandeers the local KPJK radio station and broadcasts a poem to late-night listeners, calmly killing the middle-aged presenter as he does so by slowly cracking his skull like an egg. The power of his repeated two-line incantation causes recipients of the broadcast to fall to the floor, presumably dead, before the poem ends and the woodsman disappears into

³ Kubrick, Stanley. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. MGM. 1968.

⁴ Penderecki, Krzysztof. *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*. [CD] Warner Classics, 1960, 2012.

⁵ Lynch, David. *Twin Peaks – Definitive Gold Box Edition*. [DVD] Universal, 1991, 2012.

⁶ Lynch, David. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*. [DVD] 2entertain, 1992.

the night. As an indication of the fate of his audience, the youngest listener of the broadcast is shown to succumb to a locust-like frog-bug which crawls across the desert into her bedroom, then her mouth – presumably the fate of all those who hear the woodsman's elegy. 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”.⁷ David Rothenberg suggests that “[i]t is a small step from dream noises to dream places”.⁸ For the attentive viewer/listener of *The Return*, it is sound that reorientates and connects these otherwise disparate spaces.

Significant to the narrative of the *Twin Peaks* universe are the many portals or gateways that join the extra-dimensional spaces of the season and, as with the atomic bomb test, the manner with which rifts in the liminal spaces that separate them occur. Georges Bataille suggests that the “labyrinth is no longer a maze which has a potential or actual solution, but it is a ‘space’ without an entrance, an exit or a center. In this disorientation, the labyrinth is an image of existence”.⁹ In *The Return*, 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, sonic cues commonly indicate their arrival or departure. This is evident across the series but significantly foregrounded with the group of Woodsmen who are apparently brought into our world following the bomb test.

⁷ Murray, Noel. “Twin Peaks Series 3, Episode 8: White Light White Heat”. In *The New York Times*, June 26, 2017. Accessed October 12, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/26/arts/television/twin-peaks-season-3-episode-8-recap.html>.

⁸ Rothenberg, David. *Sudden Music*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 80.

⁹ Noys, Benjamin. *George Bataille: A Critical Introduction*. (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 14.

Immediately after the Trinity explosion sequence, the Woodsmen appear around a convenience store in a flurry of what the close captioning describes as a “warbling static stuttering.” This same sound cue is consistent throughout, announcing the woodsmen’s presence around the “zone” that surrounds a vortex in a trailer park in Part 11, and preceding a visual reveal of one of their number lurking in the corridors and cells of a police station.

Having reduced the amount of non-diegetic music throughout the season, and with little dialogue in many of the episodes, sound design is required to do much of the narrative heavy lifting. Sound serves to connect disparate dots from earlier episodes and seasons, encouraging the audience to consider how what first appear to be conventional spaces resonate with layers of meaning and intrigue.

John Cage suggests “[w]herever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating”.¹⁰ An example of where characters listen, rather than ignore what they hear around them, is an investigation into mysterious sounds emanating from a room at the Great Northern Hotel. This sequence offers an example of where sound is used to bury characters’ past actions literally in the walls of locations. Variations on a ringing or humming sound, which appears to emanate from the room, are deployed whenever Agent Dale 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 of these locations serve as portals between the real and extra-dimensional, and the use of the same sound

¹⁰ Cage, John. “The Future of Music: Credo”, in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan, 1958), 3.

suggests that the Great Northern Hotel also shares this liminal property. Throughout *Twin Peaks*, Lynch appears to wilfully make use of sound as a catalyst for the audience to forge their own connections with the narrative events occurring on screen. As Juan Aliaga observes, this is centered in the “idea of the hideousness of everyday reality [...] or, in other words, the idea that all manifestations of horror or of the abyss come from within human beings themselves”.¹¹ He adds, “Lynch does not look for another world, finding more than enough inspiration in the distributing strangeness of our own”.¹² 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, after all – what David Foster Wallace described as a unique sense of combining of the mundane and macabre.¹³

As sound designer for *The Return*, Lynch continues a career-long avoidance of the familiar. This is made manifest with the use of editing techniques such as jump cuts and glitching, as evident in the sound design of the series as they are in the visuals. Though often sound and image unite to create this combination, where scenes appear mundane at first glance it is sound design that repurposes these otherwise ordinary situations into the extraordinarily macabre. Sound cues motivate the audience to look beyond what visually depicted and seek out clues to the extra dimensional. If Lynch's past work reveals the hidden arguments, sexualities, addictions, violence, and

¹¹ Aliaga, Juan Vicente. “Lynch’s Inferno”. In David Lynch, *David Lynch*, (Valencia: Editions Alfons el Magnanim, 1992), 18.

¹² Ibid, 20.

¹³ Wallace, David Foster. “David Lynch Keeps His Head”. In *Premiere*, September 1996, 146-212.

strangeness of society and familial life, so *The Return* goes even further, to reveal literally hidden, underground, occult secrets and geographies.

The novelist Agustín Fernández Mallo, whose fiction might itself be described as Lynchian, discusses what he calls “complex realism” in similar terms:

If reality today is different from the reality of 30 years ago, we can't keep describing reality in the same way as we did 30 years ago. Today we understand that reality corresponds to a model – or even better, the sum of various models – which in science are termed ‘complex systems’ [...] This complexity is what creates that which we all know – The World – is connected in a system of networks – and I'm not referring only to the internet but also to thousands of analog networks in which we are all immersed at every instant. Until a short time ago, we knew the world in parts, whereas now we know that those parts are all connected with a very concrete topology. These networks are everything.¹⁴

Such networks and complexities in Part 8 of *The Return* are not only startling and confusing, but also appear to offer a back story and a creation myth for the whole of the *Twin Peaks* universe. Its audacious and hypnotic visuals, abstract soundtrack, and magical realism extended beyond the personal, combining to present a storyline of how evil made itself manifest – the first atomic bomb test the catalyst for its arrival on earth. As Bataille suggests, “a man is only a particle inserted in unstable and entangled wholes”.¹⁵ 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 viewer, must turn into story (or stories) and try to make sense of; or accept as surreal disjunctions.

14 Trefry, John. “... or, ‘on the novel’ – an interview with Agustín Fernández Mallo” translated by Luke Stegemann. In *3:am magazine*, December 14, 2017. Accessed July 3, 2018.
<https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/or-on-the-novel>

15 Bataille, George. “The Labyrinth (1930)” In *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 171-178.

Lynch and the Rhizome

Some critics have not received these disjunctions well. Jonathan Foltz suggests that Part 8 of *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.¹⁶

Lynch, however, sees things differently, 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”.¹⁷ Lynch sets the audience free to connect events and characters as we wish, to exercise our own value judgments, to create our own sense of time and intersecting worlds that *Twin Peaks* may or may not contain. The narrative and characters that populate them are always “[b]etween things”, which Gilles Deleuze and Félix 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”.¹⁸

Lynch subverts the small-town soap opera model, claiming in an interview that this “gives access to all the other subterranean lives which are going on

¹⁶ Lynch, David. *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Showtime, 2017.

¹⁷ Woods, Paul A. *Weirdsville*. (London: Plexus, 1997).

¹⁸ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. (London: Bloomsbury, 1987, 2013), 27.

in the town, because literally everybody has their own secret – as I believe they do in life".¹⁹ This view is shared by the video artist Bill Viola, who states that "[u]nder the surface of all the works exists a kind of underground river that we don't see. It's a continuously moving stream of knowledge, emotion and mystery".²⁰ Viola goes on to defend both mystery and emptiness as facilitators of movement: "You absolutely must have the unknown to live, if you don't have the unknown, the place of mystery or the place where words fail, where thinking stops, if you don't have that place then you can't go forward. So we need this place of emptiness".²¹

The stream and "story" of *Twin Peaks* share 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.²²

In *The Return*, the labyrinth presented by the rhizomic connection between spaces and the form of its visual and sonic representation, is both the destination and journey of Agent Cooper through the season.

Michaela Bronstein is resistant to this, 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.²³

19 Woods, Paul A. *Weirdsville*. (London: Plexus, 1997), 95.

20 Bernardini, Anna (ed.). "Bill Viola interviewed". In *Bill Viola. Reflections*. (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2012), 63.

21 Ibid, 63.

22 Bluemink, Matt. "The Web as Rhizome in Deleuze and Guattari", in *Blue Labyrinths*, July 15, 2015. Accessed February 28, 2019. <https://bluelabyrinths.com/2015/07/15/the-web-as-rhizome-in-deleuze-and-guattari>.

23 Bronstein, Michaela. "Twin Peaks – The Return – The Anxiety of Spectatorship", *Post 45*, June 10, 2017. Accessed October 24, 2018.

Dream Places

Lynch's *Twin Peaks* is visually reminiscent of Edward Hopper's paintings, though it is often more monochromatic and lacks the gloss finish of oil paint. Beth Venn states that "In many of 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".²⁴ Unlike the quiet street in *Early Sunday Morning*²⁵ or the frozen diner scene of Hopper's *Nighthawks*,²⁶ , in Lynch's world figures flicker and glitch, images are layered and blurred, time changes as we watch. In Hopper's work we have a depiction of a specific time and place; 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, different timelines and unreliable narrators.

Lynch's use of snapshots and cameos, disconnected dialogue and long silences, which leave the viewer trying to work out how it all fits together, or if indeed it does, resonates with Venn's description of Hopper's work. He notes that:

Hopper's art not only has had a profound impact on painting and sculpture, but also influenced – and was itself influenced by – photography and film. Hopper participated in and contributed to a process that had long been the domain of photography – capturing a

<http://post45.research.yale.edu/2017/10/twin-peaks-the-return-the-anxiety-of-spectatorship/>.

²⁴ Venn, Beth. *Edward Hopper and the American Imagination*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 4.

²⁵ Hopper, Edward. Early Sunday Morning (1930). In Venn, Beth. *Edward Hopper and the American Imagination*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 2.

²⁶ Hopper, Edward. Nighthawks (1942). In Venn, Beth. *Edward Hopper and the American Imagination*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 5.

segment that suggests a larger story. One finds in many Hopper paintings an incomplete narrative.²⁷

Obsessive fans (see *Twin Peaks – Reddit*²⁸) work out various conflicting timelines from small clues and asides in various scenes, play different episodes alongside each other to search for synchronicity and mirroring, bring occult and conspiracy theories to bear on the season, and read between the lines of Mark Frost's two *Twin Peaks*²⁹ books to find out what is going on. But just as the “uncomfortable spaces of Hopper's canvases”³⁰ may not make for easy viewing, Lynch's work seems specifically designed to confuse and puzzle the viewer. In an interview with Kristine McKenna, Lynch states: “a mystery means there's a puzzle to be solved. Once you start thinking like that you're hooked on finding a meaning”³¹.

Everywhere and Nowhere

The mystical poet and artist William Blake stated that: “Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Existence”.³² He suggests that humans somehow contain all of these in a kind of balance – a non-hierarchical structure, where love nor hate co-exist and neither are better than one another. “[A]ny point of a rhizome can be

27 Venn, Beth. *Edward Hopper and the American Imagination*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 19.

28 *Twin Peaks – Reddit*. Accessed December 16, 2018 and January 18, 2019.
<https://www.reddit.com/r/twinpeaks>.

29 Frost, Mark. *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*. (London: MacMillan, 2016); Frost, Mark. *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier*. (London: MacMillan, 2017).

30 Venn, Beth. *Edward Hopper and the American Imagination*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 16.

31 McKenna, Kristine. “An Interview with David Lynch”. In Lynch, David. *David Lynch*. (Valencia: Editions Alfons el Magnanim, 1992), 31-32.

32 Blake, William. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c1790). Accessed March 2, 2019.
<https://www.bartleby.com/235/253.html>.

connected to anything other, and must be,” state Deleuze and Guattari.³³ Elsewhere they suggest that a “rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo”,³⁴ an idea suited to the storytelling strands of *The Return*.

“The idea of the rhizome,” explains Bluemink, “is a structural metaphor taken from the biological field of botany. It describes an underground mass of continuously growing horizontal stems or roots which extend lateral shoots at certain intervals to and establish connections with other shoots. There is no hierarchical structure to the growth of the rhizome”.³⁵ Remove the idea of linear storytelling, conclusions, and hierarchies – some events being more important than others – 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 questioned the lack of authorial clarity. Todd McGowan, discussing Lynch's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*,³⁶ states that “the fantastic dimension [...] places an onerous demand on the spectator.” He goes on to say that “one finds the outside within the inside, the infinite within the finite”.³⁷ Jonathan Foltz suggests that Part 8 furthered Lynch's previous “way of elevating peripheral performances to derail our sense of narrative logic” to the extent that the season is most challenging in the manner with which:

33 Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. (London: Bloomsbury, 1987, 2013), 4-5.

34 Ibid, 26.

35 Bluemink. Matt. “The Web as Rhizome in Deleuze and Guattari”, in *Blue Labyrinths*, July 15, 2015. Accessed February 28, 2019. <https://bluelabyrinths.com/2015/07/15/the-web-as-rhizome-in-deleuze-and-guattari>.

36 Lynch, David. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*. [DVD] 2entertain, 1992.

37 McGowan, Todd. *The Impossible David Lynch*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 153.

it seems to undo the story it is telling, moving out of sequence and perversely out of rhythm, indicating a wealth of paths it has no interest 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.³⁸

Lynch argues that this undoing of narrative is linked to Freud's notion of the sinister, "the hybrid union of two apparently contradictory elements: firstly, all that which is normal, familiar, well-loved or – when it affects the peace and tranquillity of domestic life – related to the family, and secondly, the sudden appearance of a malign element; the presence of evil appearing unexpectedly in an otherwise warm and friendly context".³⁹ We are free to connect events and characters as we wish, to exercise our own value judgments, to create our own sense of time and intersecting worlds that *Twin Peaks* may or may not contain. The narrative is necessarily always "[b]etween things,"⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

One way or another way? Black Lodge or White Lodge, perhaps the Red Lodge? Past or present, Bad Cooper or Good Cooper, dead or alive, possessed or unpossessed, elsewhere or here? Deleuze and Guattari state, "A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again

³⁸ Foltz, Jonathan. "David Lynch's Late Style". In *Los Angeles Review of Books*. November 12, 2017. Accessed November 13, 2017. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/david-lynch-s-late-style>.

³⁹ Aliaga, Juan Vicente. "Lynch's Inferno". In David Lynch, *David Lynch*. (Valencia: Editions Alfons el Magnanim, 1992), 15.

⁴⁰ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. (London: Bloomsbury, 1987, 2013), 27.

⁴¹ Ibid, 44.

on one of its old lines, or on new lines".⁴² The "story" of *Twin Peaks*, like the rhizome:

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.⁴³

Lynch and Frost contribute, as do musicians and actors, as they construct and film *Twin Peaks*, a world of many entrances (and exits), be they caves, cellars, circles of trees or temporary slippages of time created by music or the alignment of planets and stars. Len Gutkin distinguishes the storytelling of *Twin Peaks* as distant from more traditional techniques, an allegorical dislocation that has a "singular capacity to evoke (rather than merely propose, like the rest of television) a world of infinite, magical dread".⁴⁴ Here, dreams are significant and amplified in importance, rather than a convenient narrative device to avoid ambiguity or sensemaking.

The whole of *The Return* is full of confusion and violence, yet also specific moments of surreal and personal creation. The woodsman's incantation is a prophecy announcing the arrival of a new power, in addition to a comment upon the power of radio and the voice upon the filmic world. If the Woodsman's incantation is an annunciating angel or being who is the conduit to extra-dimensional spaces, he could be considered as an agent of what Cole describes as Jowday – the heralder of BOB, launched at the earth following the atomic test.

42 Ibid, 44.

43 Bluemink. Matt. "The Web as Rhizome in Deleuze and Guattari", in *Blue Labyrinths*, July 15, 2015. Accessed February 28, 2019. <https://bluelabyrinths.com/2015/07/15/the-web-as-rhizome-in-deleuze-and-guattari>.

44 Gutkin, Len. "Twin Peaks: The Return – Allegorical Dislocation". In *Post 45*, 2017. Accessed April 1, 2019. <http://post45.research.yale.edu/2017/09/twin-peaks-the-return-allegory-and-dislocation>.

Cooper seems to escape the Lodge he was trapped in at the end of Season 2 through an electric plug via some kind of spaceship; BOB and Laura are launched, post-atomic bomb test, to the world as some kind of bubble; rooms that do not physically exist act as holding and meeting spaces for spirits and demons. Giants and Woodsmen inhabit worlds which sometimes overlay the human one. Characters may die in one world but find themselves alive in another. Everything is possible, everything is as meaningful or as meaningless as anything else. Bataille argues that “it is time to abandon the world of the civilized and its light”.⁴⁵

The inventiveness that Lynch and his collaborators demonstrate through their deployment of sound and music in imaginative ways creates a febrile space within which narrative meaning is constructed, with the intent of disturbing traditional meaning-making on TV – a form dominated by modes of expositional reliant on explanatory dialogue or flashbacks which inform rather than disrupt the present. Rhizomic storytelling indeed.

Twin Peaks as Hypertext

If we cannot accommodate or cope with a non-hierarchical reading, we might turn to hypertext theory to try to understand how Lynch constructed, or allows the viewer to construct, *The Return*. Instead of endless rhizomes (or, in hypertext terms, links) we can discuss elements of *Twin Peaks* as nodes, characters, events, places or objects which are linked to other events or

⁴⁵ Bataille, George. “The Labyrinth (1930)” In *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 178-182.

objects, each offering the provision of “a conceptual anchor”.⁴⁶ Charles Nicholas suggests that “More than one type of cluster might prove valuable,” citing “three types of organizational nodes,” that he defines as:

structure nodes, which are basic composites of other nodes without traversal restrictions; *sequencing nodes*, which allow the author to specify a particular node traversal sequence; and *exploration nodes*, which aggregate a set of nodes for arbitrary traversal, but which restrict entry and exit to a single access point.⁴⁷

Lynch’s nodes include key characters, events and places, which control and facilitate how we “traverse” the storylines of *The Return*. Clearly, the town of Twin Peaks acts as one such node. How does such a small American town contain such a conglomerate of dreams, desire, lust, subterfuge, and evil. Within the town, there are other nodes where traverse is controlled, where characters are affected by the place itself: there is the owl cave, the hotel, The Roadhouse (seemingly out of time in *The Return*, a place for visions and pause while music plays), and the room above the convenience store where spirits and demons live. Then there are entrances to the Red Room (itself a node that controls traverse), which offers access to and from the Lodges. These entrances include the fantastical – spaceships, electrical plugs, vortexes in time, as well as the mundane, such as the cellar beneath the hotel. Power lines travel between these nodes, a literal example of nodes being linked.

Agent Cooper is clearly a node: spiritual and detective knowledge flow through him, is gifted to him in dreams and visions; his associates and most of the town trust him, even when he is absent, as he is for so much of season 3.

⁴⁶ Barber, C. Bradford. “Topic: hypertext nodes”. *Thesa, a thesaurus of ideas*, 2004. Accessed March 4, 2019. <http://thid.thesa.com/thid-0513-0671-th-1345-6681>

⁴⁷ Nicholas, Charles. *Intelligent Hypertext: Advanced Techniques for the World Wide Web*. (New York: Springer, 1997, 2008), 100.

Even when present as the doppelgänger Bad Cooper, it is Cooper in one form or another is the point of focus; a node, for the series. It is Cooper who returns in *The Return*.

Laura Palmer may also be considered a node, after all, her murder is a catalyst for the whole of *Twin Peaks*. Mark Frost notes that “it wasn’t until we said, ‘a body washes up on the shore’ that we had a starting point”.⁴⁸ Cooper is trying to undo her death; when he does, it appears time goes awry and our exit point for the whole of *Twin Peaks* is the wrenching scream that ends *The Return*. No matter what route the viewer has taken through *Twin Peaks*, the entrance and exit points remain the same: death, horror, and pain.

“We live inside a dream”

Perhaps it is a dream, the atomic explosion and ensuing light show, the birth of BOB, the woodsman’s radio broadcast? Perhaps it is the feverish result of adolescent love, a sexual awakening; perhaps the episode is mostly about how love exploded within us and infects us, changes us, makes us dream and desire? Perhaps *Twin Peaks* is about thwarted or fulfilled desire, however twisted, violent or abusive the results might be. The “complete” or “real” Cooper in the final episode kicks ass in the diner but retains elements of wisdom and love.

Some say it is about parallel or alternative times and worlds, with travel between them. Agent Cooper is desperate to undo Laura’s death, willing to sacrifice himself, and perhaps Diane, to save her. Perhaps he should not interfere? Perhaps he is not making sound decisions? Adrift in the lodges,

48 Woods, Paul A. *Weirdsville*. (London: Plexus, 1997), 94.

traveling the electric wires and alive as three versions of himself, communes with the dead and missing, travels through the spirit world, laments lost love, and rescues Diane from the trauma of rape by his doppelgänger. In doing so he loses himself, sets Diane adrift, and inhabits a world where Laura is another person. She is alive but the cozy town of Twin Peaks is gone. There are no easy answers, only the hum of wires, half-forgotten memories and a bunch of conspiracy theories on the web.

The 18 hours of *The Return* are full of violence, confusion, surrealism, occasional moments of goodness, and comedy, but also the creation and dissemination of evil. Thomas Merton, in an essay about William Blake, suggests 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.”⁴⁹ 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, persuasively imagined through a complex synthesis of sound and image.

Word Count: 5725

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