

# INTRODUCTION: *TWIN PEAKS'* PERSISTENT CULTURAL RESONANCE

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Through taking different perspectives on the role of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017-) within contemporary media contexts, the articles of this themed section together demonstrate *Twin Peaks'* enduring resonance within media culture. Since the airing in 1990 of its pilot episode, *Twin Peaks* has indeed proved to be a persistent cultural force. The *Sesame Street* (1969-) and *Saturday Night Live* (1975-) parodies of *Twin Peaks* that aired during the series original run reflect its prominent position in popular culture at this time (Clark, 2013: 9). Yet the continuation into the 21st century of newly produced media content offering pastiches of the Twin Peaks community, examples of which include the Japanese video game *Deadly Premonition* (2010) and the children's animated series *Gravity Falls* (2012-2016), speaks to an ongoing cultural

fascination with *Twin Peaks* (Jowett, 2015). So too does the continuation of a high degree of fan engagement and production in relation to the series. As part of contemporary digital culture, for instance, fans continue to circulate online content – e.g. screencaps, GIFs, fan art – that appropriates their favoured *Twin Peaks* elements – the Red Room, the cherry pie, the Log Lady, the damn fine cup of coffee. Jennifer Gillan, Rebecca Williams and Katriina Heljakka each reflect upon fan participation with *Twin Peaks* in their respective articles here.

*Twin Peaks'* intertextual afterlife and vibrant participatory culture is significant, and no doubt played a part in the premium cable service Showtime's decision to commission a new *Twin Peaks* series (scheduled to air in 2017, at this time of writing). But, in looking to understand *Twin Peaks'* persistent

influence within popular culture, it is important to look beyond the many direct citations of *Twin Peaks*, and observe the series' even wider impact on television culture in the decades since first airing. *Twin Peaks* has held a powerful influence over the production of original drama within US television, helping to popularise not only a distinct type of television narrative but also new ways of engaging with television drama. In terms of narrative production, the series' cryptic storytelling has served as an important influence in the years since the original series ended. In the decade prior to *Twin Peaks*, the narrative complexity of US network primetime television drama significantly increased. Following an era in which drama was often intended to be uncomplicated and therefore easily accessible to the widest possible audience, a range of so-called 'quality' dramas emerged in the 1980s designed to be more challenging and therefore more appealing to the sophisticated tastes of an educated and affluent niche audience; this context resulted in the incorporation of serialised storylines within many such dramas (e.g. *Hill Street Blues* [1981-1987]), as well as an embracing of intertextuality and arch self-reflexivity in others (e.g. *Moonlighting* [1986-1989]) (Thompson, 1996; Dunleavy, 2009).

Yet while *Twin Peaks* adhered to the precedents set by prior series via its adoption of these storytelling modes (Dunleavy, 2009: 144-147) its narrative's famed mysteriousness was highly innovative within a network television context. Layering enigma upon enigma, the series is structured as a matryoshka nesting-doll of mystery, with 'Who Killed Laura Palmer?' serving as only the first of many enticing questions that the series long withholds the answers to (Jenkins, 1995). *Twin Peaks* combines this enigma-laden plotting with its trademark narrative ambiguity (Thompson, 2003: 106-139; Curtin and Shattuc, 2009: 141), often leaving to interpretation any narrative meaning that audiences might make from the peculiar goings on in the town of Twin Peaks. Along with the ABC network's inconsistent scheduling of the series, *Twin Peaks*' inherent inscrutability likely contributed to the strong ratings decline (Telotte, 1995: 171) that led to the series' cancellation. Yet the series' storytelling approach has nonetheless served as a useful model in light of the continuous audience fragmentation that US television has faced since the 1980s onwards. The ever-increasing rise in viewer choice that has accompanied such developments as the widespread adoption of cable, digital and Internet streaming television services has led to many networks and cable channels frequently placing a high value on narratives that engender firm loyalty among audiences, even at the risk of limiting their wid-

er appeal (Hilmes, 2014: 400). As Henry Jenkins' (1995) study of *Twin Peaks* viewer practices during the original series' run observes, the series' opacity helped to foster strong commitment from viewers seeking to discover its secrets via message board speculation and the close scrutiny of VHS recordings of the series. For Jenkins, 'the many fan meta-texts that circulated on alt.tv.twinpeaks were as compelling as the aired episodes themselves. [...] [P]articipating in this virtual community became a way of increasing the intensity and density of these speculations, of building up other fans' explorations, and expanding upon their theories' (Jenkins, 1995: 66). Within industrial conditions in which such high levels of engagement have become increasingly prized, more recent series, such as *Lost* (2004-2010), *The Leftovers* (2015-2017), *Mr Robot* (2015-) and *Westworld* (2016-), have been permitted to offer their own brands of enigmatic storytelling. Challenging viewers to master their sphinx-like narratives, such series have encouraged practices of intense 'forensic fandom' (Mittell, 2015), which descend from those that formed decades ago around *Twin Peaks*. A key cultural legacy of *Twin Peaks* has therefore been the role it has served in helping to inspire certain modes of television storytelling and accompanying viewer engagement.

Each of the articles in this special section further considers via a distinct vantage point the continuing cultural relevance and influence of *Twin Peaks* within television culture. While Gillan and Heljakka focus on contemporary digitally mediated fan activities that keep the memory of the original series alive through practices of fabrication and social media dissemination, Willams and Ross Garners' articles focus instead on the events of commemoration and social media intervention leading up to the return of *Twin Peaks* after twenty five years to a much transformed televisual environment. Yet as these articles all attest, *Twin Peaks* persisted in the intervening years, in part due to the kinds of active and generative fan practices that the articles engage with.

Gillan turns her attention to the under-researched field of fan-produced GIFs and more specifically GIFs of Audrey Horne, which are then typically circulated on 'list' oriented sites like BuzzFeed. Gillan is interested to interrogate both what kind of textual relationship such practices maintain with their source texts, as well as what makes some television shows, like *Twin Peaks*, eminently 'GIF-worthy'. To do so she adapts from Jenkins (1992) the concept of 'textual poaching' and reworks it as 'textural poaching' referring to how the practice of producing GIFs based on the animation of a handful of frames is all about surface style rather than the more in-depth textual appropriation referred to by the

original concept. As Gillan puts it, "Of particular interest are GIFs created out of frame grabs that put on display Audrey's signature costuming and the eye-catching production design. ... The practice involves repurposing top-of-the-mind textural content—a series' most arresting elements of costuming, set design, and dialogue—and posting it to a visual interface." These textural appropriations coupled with their social media dissemination, while not without precedents, are a new layer of fan practices, that also attest to the enduring legacy of *Twin Peaks* whose iconic production design, costuming and gestural performance make it eminently GIFworthy.

Heljakka points to a quite different practice that at first glance would seem more associated with the past than the present, namely the fabrication of *Twin Peaks* dolls that she refers to as 'Toyification'. These dolls are then used to play with and replay *Twin Peaks*. This points to a larger field of studies of play that, far from being limited to child hood, pervades adult fan practices. As she puts it, "the goal is to examine how a cult series of the '90s continues to inspire fans to re-create and immerse themselves in the fantasy by re-playing the original storylines with toys". While there is an element of DIY artisanal fabrication in these practices, since few *Twin Peaks* dolls have been commercially produced, they are also intimately connected to and played with on social media networks and specifically photo sharing sites like Flickr. As Heljakka puts it, "As shared on these platforms of social media, amateur images invite us to join in a game of mimetic practices [...] At the same time, toy photography, or photoplay, presents itself not only a playful activity involving appropriation of miniature objects, but rather, a popular form of adult play." Heljakka's research of *Twin Peaks* doll playing fans suggests that not only are fan cultures inherently playful, but also that toy practices are a unique way of playing with and replaying the original series.

Garner's article turns its attention to the 25th anniversary of the original series, and the chain of events that led up to the commissioning of the new *Twin Peaks* series. However, Garner is especially interested in the practices of commemoration around *Twin Peaks* taking place in 2014, specifically associated with the release of *Twin Peaks: The Entire Mystery*, a DVD box set not only containing the entire series of the TV show and the prequel film *Fire Walk with Me* (1992), but also a disc of missing scenes from both and a strange interview, "Between Two Worlds", conducted between David Lynch and the actors who played the Palmer family in the show, who are interviewed as characters rather than performers. Garner sees this commemoration as something other than

a simple PR exercise, and instead positions it as a way of addressing complex fan expectations and anxieties, putting into play two distinct wills. According to Garner, "Regarding *Twin Peaks* in 2014, two discursive 'wills' clustered around the series. These were the 'will to commemorate', through which discourses of memory, nostalgia and, in some contexts, commerce became activated, and the 'will to cohere', which mobilised Romantic discourses of 'art' and authorship to support anniversary-based readings and make claims for the show's enduring value." In particular he points to the "Save the Date" campaign which alerted fans to expect something new to be happening in the *Twin Peaks* world on July 29, 2014. While this was strictly speaking only the release date of the box set, it also pointed, with its symbolism derived from both the TV series and the prequel, to anticipate "future developments in the *Twin Peaks* mythology", which ultimately took shape first through rumours then via the actual confirmation of a new series after twenty five years.

Rebecca Williams in a sense takes up her account where Garner's finishes in the events leading towards the actual new series itself. Originally scheduled for 2016, this plan seemed to have hit a wall in 2015 when David Lynch announced via Twitter that he would not be involved with the show due to a budget dispute with Showtime. Both fans and cast members from the original series protested this via social media, the latter making the widely shared "No Lynch, No Peaks!" social media campaign, spearheaded by Sherilyn Fenn. This consisted of a series of short videos that were then circulated by fans across a range of social media platforms, especially YouTube. Williams points out that this is a very interesting example of fan practices, given that it activated actors-as-fans: "The No Lynch/No Peaks campaign offers a relatively unusual opportunity to consider the celebrity/actor labour that often powers such movements and to explore *Twin Peaks*' stars as subcultural celebrities, media workers and fans of *Twin Peaks*/David Lynch". In a sense, *Twin Peaks* fandom had come full circle, returning to the Internet in the Web 2.0 era, and using it as a vehicle not only to protest the potential axing of the series but also to insist on the centrality of Lynch as auteur (echoing frequent discussions on alt.tv.twinpeaks around the cancellation of the show back in 1991). Ultimately Lynch returned to the fold but not before animating a new generation of *Twin Peaks* fandom (whether deliberately or by accident), and, as he put it on Twitter, "it is happening again!"

Accompanying this section is a double interview conducted by Andreas Halskov with the series composer Angelo Badalamenti (who is also the composer for the new series),

and the music editor Lori Eschler Frystak. While some of the articles in this section are more focused on fan engagements with the visual aspects of the show, whether recreated as GIFs or dolls, as well as anxieties about its return, one of the key identifiers of the show that features in many of the paratexts that the show has generated in media culture is the distinctive music for the series. As Badalamenti says in the interview, you only have to hear the first two bass notes of the theme music to know you are entering the world of *Twin Peaks*. In our previous journal section on *Twin Peaks* for *Senses of Cinema*, several of the articles emphasized the sonic dimensions of the show; Agnes Malkinson (2016), for instance, points out that it is *Twin Peaks* signature music that enabled the coherence of the Georgia coffee campaign Lynch subsequently directed, featuring several of the *Twin Peaks* cast, and that was later adopted by fans as a part of the *Twin Peaks* universe. The interview goes well beyond the theme music, however, and looks especially at the use of different forms of jazz in specific moments of the show, and Badalamenti's own compositions like "Falling" that purportedly made Lynch's arm hairs stand on end, as well as the role of Julee Cruise's music within the show. The intimate portrait of Badalamenti's working relationship and intuitive communication with Lynch can be seen as one more instance of professional mutual fandom, and goes a long way to explaining the continuation of their working relationship from *Blue Velvet* (1986) to the anticipated new series of *Twin Peaks* itself in 2017.

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## Films

- Blue Velvet* (1986)  
*Fire Walk with Me* (1992)

## Games

- Deadly Premonition* (2010)

## TV shows

- Gravity Falls* (2012-2016)  
*Hill Street Blues* (1981-1987)  
*The Leftovers* (2015-2017)  
*Lost* (2004-2010),  
*Moonlighting* (1986-1989)  
*Mr Robot* (2015-)  
*Saturday Night Live* (1975-)  
*Sesame Street* (1969-)  
*Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017-)  
*Westworld* (2016-)