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## Screening dreams: *Twin Peaks*, from the series to the film, back again and beyond<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

With an approach that combines narratology, intertextuality and gender studies, this essay revisits *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-91; Showtime, 2017) through the myth of the sacrificed movie star to reveal how the series ideologically and narratively interacts with the prequel film. If the *Twin Peaks* series broke with traditional television codes on the aesthetic and narrative levels, Lynch's prequel film, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), which dramatizes Laura's very last days, innovated on the level of gender representation, as it denounced the mystifying screens created by the original series and its patriarchal ideology. Many series that have then been influenced by the seminal show, such as *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010) or *Carnivàle* (HBO, 2003-2005), seem to have unfolded Lynch's artistic project by developing, explicating or diffracting it. Taking these shows into account helps build a unified theory on the *Twin Peaks* matrix (the series and the film), in which the cinematic theme of the sacrificed young female star meets a narrative of dreamlike, parallel worlds, which in the end interrogates the very fabric of fiction.

In the fictional town of Twin Peaks somewhere in the north west of the United States, the body of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), a beautiful sixteen-year-old girl, is found on the banks of

a lake, wrapped in a plastic bag. To tell the secrets of this new Ophelia, David Lynch and Mark Frost's series *Twin Peaks* (ABC 1990-91; Showtime 2017) combines profound tragedy and trivial burlesque in a story that not only includes dreams but feels like a dream itself. The series generates a kind of quirky malaise, arguably condoning misogynistic fascination for sexually brutalized women and letting the male serial murderer off the hook. Lynch's prequel film, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), which was released a year after the original series was discontinued, dramatizes Laura's very last days. With an approach that combines narratology, intertextuality and gender studies, this essay proposes to revisit *Twin Peaks* through the myth of the sacrificed movie star to reveal how the series ideologically and narratively interacts with the prequel film. If the series *Twin Peaks* has broken traditional television codes on the aesthetic and narrative levels, *Fire Walk With Me* innovates on the gender level, as it denounces the mystifying screens created by the original series and its patriarchal ideology. Series that have then been influenced by the seminal show, such as *Lost* (ABC 2004-2010) or *Carnivàle* (HBO 2003-2005), seem to have unfolded Lynch's artistic project by developing explicating or diffracting it. Taking these shows into account will help us build a unified theory on the *Twin Peaks* matrix (the series and the film), in which the cinematic theme of the sacrificed young female star meets a narrative of dreamlike, parallel worlds. Encouraging us to watch the prequel film after the series, then to watch the series in light of the film and of the multiple shows it has influenced, *Twin Peaks* builds an original form of seriality in which cinema and television are both mobilized to engender a neverending Möbius strip. Just as the characters are trapped in the series' Black Lodge, the viewers are invited to return to a story that demands to be re-watched, re-experienced and re-interpreted. *Twin Peaks* thus turns seriality into a circular drive in which each turn of the screw digs deeper into the dreamlike fabric of fiction.

## **Dreaming of stars**

*Twin Peaks* is dreamlike through its surrealistic compositions, its absurd and unexpected situations, its slowness and digressions, its languid and hypnotic music and its gallery of unusual, eccentric and sometimes anachronistic characters. Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan), the FBI Agent assigned to investigate Laura Palmer's murder, is less interested in scientific facts than in magic and Tibetan methods of intuitive deduction. According to Marine Legagneur, the series occurs "in a space between waking and sleeping, between reality and imagination, a porous interface between two worlds" (Legagneur 2012) where supernatural visions abound.

At the end of the pilot, Sarah Palmer (Grace Zabriskie), Laura's mother, screams in terror as she sees, in a vision, an unknown hand unearthing the heart-shaped pendant that belonged to her daughter. In the second episode,<sup>2</sup> Sarah Palmer is visited by Donna (Lara Flynn Boyle), her daughter's best friend, before experiencing another terrifying vision: Laura's face becomes imprinted on Donna's, suddenly reviving the dead girl, just before a menacing man with long grey hair (who will turn out to be evil Bob) appears crouched by Laura's bed.

This mysterious Bob (Frank Silva) resurfaces in Cooper's dream at the end of episode 3. Cooper first sees a one-armed man, Mike (Al Strobel), who delivers the cryptic stanza: "Through the darkness of future's past/ The magician longs to see/ One chants out between two worlds/ Fire walk with me". Mike divulges that, after meeting God, he cut off his arm to detach himself from his former partner Bob; but Bob is always there, a lurking predator, feeding on fears and pleasures. Bob eventually appears in the dream to promise Mike that he

“will kill again”. Mike and Bob are both revealed to be parasitic spirits inhabiting the body of their host and feeding on pain and sadness.

*Twin Peaks* is a dreamlike series not only because it includes sequences of hallucination and magical vision, but because it presents itself openly as a fiction where illusion and reality merge, creating a world of uncertainty and doubt, and playing on the idea of alternate universes and narrative bifurcations where cinematic references abound. For instance, Ben Horne (Richard Beymer), having lost his mind in episode 23, thinks that he is General Lee and imagines that the Confederate army has just won the Civil War. His daughter Audrey (Sherilyn Fenn), who does not want to upset him, disguises herself as Scarlett O’Hara and proposes a version of *Gone with the Wind* where the South is victorious. The characters of *Twin Peaks* thus live as if within a film or a dream.

When Audrey, in episode 3, listens to the music coming from a jukebox—which is also the soundtrack Angelo Badalamenti composed for the series—she begins to dance voluptuously and says “Isn’t this music just too dreamy?” Similarly, in episode 10, Ben Horne’s brother asks if this is not all “some kind of strange and twisted dream” and, in episode 12, Donna wonders whether “our dreams are real”. Ben visits the brothel he owns in episode 8, and asks to test the new recruit without knowing that she is his own daughter; upon entering the room, he teases the young woman he has yet to recognize and quotes from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, “Close your eyes. This is such stuff as dreams as made of”. The whole fiction thus appears as a midsummer night’s dream “governed by libidinal forces [and] unspeakable desires” (Hume 1995, 115).

The series adopts a male gaze on women, offering a catalogue of heterosexual men's fantasies: discreet school girls are revealed to be secret prostitutes; brothels are presented as glamorous places where young girls are dressed up like models; very old men marry teenagers; candidates in the Miss Twin Peaks contest are leered at and appraised by "dirty" old men. *Twin Peaks* is a fiction where *malaise* verges on pedopornography. This specific perverse male gaze does not spare Laura Palmer.

The character of Laura is two-faced: she is the dead young woman in a plastic bodybag, offered, like a morbid version of Sleeping Beauty, to a necrophiliac gaze; she is also, in the photograph that punctuates the end of each episode, the beauty queen, all dressed up and made up, immortalized in her ephemeral glow. *Twin Peaks* replays the "Death and the Maiden" motif, Eros and Thanatos combining in an image that freezes the young woman and turns her into an object of worship. Laura is the object that men desire and that women want to imitate or compete with. Through photographs, videos, diaries and testimonies, Laura's absence after her death becomes a form of spectral omnipresence under the desiring and incendiary gazes of viewers who consume and burn their idol (Roche 2010).

Not surprisingly, David Lynch and Mark Frost had first met to work on a film that was to tell the life of Marilyn Monroe, the ultimate sex symbol—one worshipped by the public but whose private life bore the wounds of a stolen childhood. Marilyn's youth was scarred by abandonment, sexual assaults perpetrated by people who should have protected her and her mother's refusal to believe her stories of abuse. Frost and Lynch's project did not go through but *Twin Peaks*, the series they made instead, bears its trace in the way the show turns a girl whose reality is that of unspeakable violence, raped intimacy and tortured sexuality into a glamorous star—a girl who is "glowing outside and dying inside" (Lynch quoted in Chion

1998, 168). This reflection on stardom further anchors *Twin Peaks* in the history of cinema and of its myths. Symbolically, the series uses the names of characters we find in Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). These two films already exposed how cinema creates celluloid goddesses, spectral images of inaccessible stars, engendering reverence, desire and frustration (Thiellement 2010, 11-13). Laura's photograph revisits Gene Tierney's fascinating portrait, while Laura herself replays the fate of the star sacrificed to fans who adore her but neither know her nor protect her. As Bobby (Dana Ashbrook) shouts in despair at Laura's funeral: "We are all guilty of her death"—a "we" that includes the show's viewers. At the end of episode 9, we see Laura being murdered. In strobe lighting, Laura screams under the blows inflicted by Bob. The images pulsate before our eyes like a heart that will soon stop beating. The stroboscopic light produces quasi-subliminal images that show as much as they hide—a sign that Bob's presence is only a mask, that his "reality" is only intermittent but is compelled to come back in serial form. On screen, Bob serves to screen a reality too sordid to be revealed directly.

### **Supernatural evil and the denial of incest**

A photofit of Bob is drawn according to the visions experienced by Dale Cooper and Sarah Palmer (episode 11). Leland Palmer (Ray Wise), Laura's father, recognizes him as the man he saw when he was a child in his grandfather's house. Bob was a magician who asked him if he wanted to play. The series suggests that Leland was abused as a child—perhaps by his grandfather. Bob appears as a child's imaginary creation to protect himself from the horror of having been raped, but the series is never explicit on this point and maintains the myth of Bob's existence.

Episode 15 unveils Bob behind Leland: Laura's father looks in the mirror and sees the reflection of the monster who inhabits him. After his arrest in episode 17, Leland speaks with Bob's voice: "Oh, Leland, you've been a good vehicle and I've enjoyed the ride". Before dying in his cell, as he painfully realizes the murders he has committed, Leland reveals that Bob wanted to enter Laura's body but failed because she was too strong. In retaliation, he forced Leland to kill her. Since the series imagines that Leland is possessed by an evil spirit that occupies his body and manipulates his mind, the incestuous and abusive father cannot be held responsible for his actions (Hume 1995, 117). If Bob *does* exist, then Leland is innocent and becomes a tragic character. Todd McGowan rightly encourages us to see Bob less as a supernatural entity than as the structural force of patriarchy, a force which unsuccessfully attempts to experience feminine enjoyment (2007, 144-51), but the representation of Bob definitely evolves from the series to the film.

The series first highlights a supernatural Bob and thus a guiltless Leland. Revealingly, when Leland meets Agent Cooper in the Red Room in the last episode, he tells him, "I did not kill anybody". The series thus excuses male violence towards women and displays a world where Laura is no longer there to reveal that she was not only raped by her father and not protected by her mother, but also harassed and coveted by all those who were supposed to help her.

In her diary, Laura recalls a dream in which she wishes to entrust Cooper with the secret of Bob's presence. Her account emphasizes that the words came out of her mouth in a strange and frustrating way. Because Bob's existence is both a secret and a mask, a piece of information that hides the essential missing piece, Laura obviously fails to reveal it. Cooper finally learns what Laura cannot say in a scene where he uses magic to unmask the culprit

(episode 17). The vision he then experiences makes Laura's confession finally audible: "My father killed me". Her father. Not Bob.

One of the most important exchanges in the series takes place at the end of episode 17. Leland has just died and Bob seems to have reincarnated into an owl. Albert, the scientific member of the police team, wonders: "Maybe that's all Bob is. The evil that men do." To Sheriff Harry Truman, who has trouble believing in Bob's existence, Agent Cooper responds: "Is it easier to believe that a man would rape and murder his own daughter? Any more comforting?" Sheriff Truman replies: "No." Part of the series' agenda resides in that "No". *Twin Peaks* makes the comforting choice of an evil that, although it inhabits men, fundamentally lies outside of them. If the series uses the supernatural as a denial of reality, the film *Fire Walk with Me* seeks to expose the incestuous truth.

### ***Fire Walk With Me: unmasking the incestuous father***

As a prequel to the series, the film focuses on Laura Palmer's last days and paradoxically brings her back to life. The film can hardly be understood without the series but the series is also, retrospectively, illuminated by the film. The series and the film function, in fact, as the two complementary halves of Laura's heart pendant. Many critics have noticed how *Fire Walk with Me* is opposed to the *Twin Peaks* pilot in terms of dramatic situations (Astic 2008, 133). According to David Roche, the script is specifically intended to "frustrate" the expectations of those who know the series. It has less often been pointed out that the film offers above all an ideological counterpoint allowing Lynch to rewrite the series, freeing himself from his collaboration with Frost to offer a different worldview, in which *Twin Peaks*' extravagant quirkiness gives way to tragedy.

Like the series, the film includes many allusions to dreams. When Cooper steps into his superior's office, he is worried by a dream he has had. Moreover, his colleague Phillip Jeffries (David Bowie) has visions peopled with strange beings who claim to be "living in a dream" and being "only air", like the shadows and spirits that haunt Shakespeare's plays, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to *The Tempest*, to symbolize the ephemeral and dreamlike nature of performing arts. But *Fire Walk With Me* mainly shatters the masks and illusions that *Twin Peaks* has built.

If the series encouraged the viewers' fascination for an abused young woman, even offering a glamorous image of despair, the film lets us see the tragedy in its sheer brutality, beyond the dazzling myth. McGowan has explored how the film, by revealing Laura's perspective, her void and her inability to fully inhabit the contradictory roles that are imposed on her, makes present and "subjectivizes" what remains the absent, though central, object of desire in the series (2007, 131-2). The young woman we discover in the film is less light-headed and manipulative than sad and fragile; her sexuality is less free than enforced; her life is less ardent and mysterious than dark and traumatized. Behind the Laura/Marilyn of *Twin Peaks*, lies the Laura/Norma Jean of *Fire Walk With Me*. *Twin Peaks* is perhaps so much loved by cinephiles because it still contains fantasies of an eroticized star. Where the TV show invites us to worship and emulate the icon (like Donna, who wears Laura's glasses and talks like her), the film refuses to encourage identification with the star: Laura forbids Donna to follow her and to lose herself in a pseudo-romantic and morbid fascination. She tries to deter her from being a fan whose personality dissolves through the admiration of a persona that is *itself* a mask. Similarly, if the series is based on the denial of incest and the idea that Bob controlled

Laura's father's body, the film breaks this illusion and reveals, through three crucial sequences, the unfathomable violence a father unleashed on his daughter.

The first sequence exposes the creation of the mask. Laura finds Bob lurking in the family home; she screams, runs outside and hides. Cowering fearfully on the ground, she then sees her father come out of the house. She cries, "My god! No! No! No!", a reaction which reflects not only shock at the revelation, but also an attempt to remain in denial.

Much more clearly than in the series, Bob stands as the mask of a truth that Laura cannot accept because it is too horrifying. Bob symbolizes intergenerational sexual violence as evil, as the male victim becoming predator in turn. He was probably created by Leland as an abused child, then internalized by Laura, to screen trauma and avoid seeing the rapist's true identity. In the film, Laura confides in her friend Harold Smith her fear of passing on evil in turn: "Bob is real! He's been having me since I was twelve. He says he wants to *be* me, or he'll kill me." When Harold holds her in his arms, in an attempt to comfort her, she screams and bares her teeth as if she were going to harm him, before regaining self-control and sobbing desperately. Between tears, fears, laughter, bouts of anger and pain, Laura burns out emotionally. She would rather die than continue the cycle of violence and become an executioner like her father. If, at the end of *Fire Walk With Me*, a shot of Laura lying dead in a sheer plastic body bag establishes the narrative continuity between the film and the series, *Fire Walk With Me* goes beyond this sole morbid image. Instead of ending precisely where the series begins, the film shows us Laura in the Red Room with Dale Cooper. An angel comes down to greet her. Between her joyful tears and sad laughter, the fate of Laura, as a raped and sacrificed icon, ends in a radiant assumption and apotheosis on the altar of our gazes.

In the second crucial sequence, while Bob enters Laura's bedroom through the window and forces himself on her, she shouts, "Who are you?" Behind Bob's face, Laura eventually catches the glimpse of her father's and starts screaming wildly. While the series shows us Bob behind Leland, the film reveals Leland behind Bob. Bob is explicitly denounced as a character created by the child to screen horrible memories and bear the unbearable.

The third sequence takes place when Leland is about to kill his daughter. He has just read her diary and shares his astonishment at seeing Bob mentioned as the rapist on every page: "I always thought you knew it was me", he tells her. In the film, Leland is thus fully aware of his actions. The series pretends to forget this, as if *Twin Peaks* were, like Bob, a screen or a cover-up story. The Red Room is the very area where this narrative spin takes place.

### **The Red Room: screening clues and the delusion of dreams**

At the end of episode 3, Dale Cooper has a dream—a startling oneiric sequence unlike any television had ever shown before—propelling us in a room with red curtains and a floor with a chevron black-and-white pattern. This space seems to yield valuable clues to solve the murder case and confound Laura's murderer (Burkhead 2014, 43-5). The Red Room only includes a couch, a chair, two lamps and a statue of Venus. This statue becomes a *Venus de Milo* in the last episode, recalling both Mike's severed arm and Laura's arms, bound before she was killed. Through the iconic (mutilated) statue of the goddess of beauty, the series conjures again the motif of a woman who is both eroticized and harmed. With the reference to the mute and armless statue, Laura is not only presented as a new Ophelia, but as a new Lavinia, Titus's daughter in *Titus Andronicus*. In Shakespeare's play, Lavinia is raped by Chiron and

Demetrius, who then cut out her tongue and cut off her hands to keep her from revealing the crime. In *Twin Peaks*, Laura tries, inside a dream, to reveal to Dale Cooper the truth about the man who raped and murdered her—but she cannot utter a word. To express her pain, she eventually has to resort to a coded narrative, in which a fictional character functions as stand-in for the real-life perpetrator, in a cinematic enactment of the screen memory in the psychoanalytic sense.

Within Laura and Dale's shared dream, an older Cooper is witnessing an amazing scene. Before him, a small man (Michael J. Anderson)—the Man from Another Place in the credits—claps his hands, exclaims “Let's rock!” and begins a strange swaying dance. This “Let's rock” line also appears on a car's windshield in the movie prequel, creating a time loop : one no longer knows if Cooper recycles in his dreams what he has previously experienced or if the dream actually engenders reality. The small man then sits on the couch where he joins a blond woman who looks exactly like Laura Palmer. Their dialogue, pronounced backwards during the filming, is played in reverse so that the lines become intelligible while conveying an uncanny feeling. As Pacôme Thiellement asserts, the scene plays on the cryptographic tradition of pop music and backward recordings (2010, 24).

The woman who looks like Laura puts a finger to the side of her nose, visually signifying that she had a cocaine habit. The small man then says: “I have good news. That gum you like is going to come back in style. This is my cousin but does not she look almost exactly like Laura Palmer?”. When Cooper asks the young woman about her identity, she replies: “I feel like I know her, but sometimes my arms bend back”. The small man adds, “She's filled with secrets. Where we're from, the birds sing a pretty song and there's always music in the air”. The young woman gets up, kisses Cooper and whispers in his ear words that we do not hear.

Cooper wakes up, convinced that he knows the name of Laura's murderer—a name he quickly forgets, as if it had remained in the world of the dream. When Cooper tells his dream to the police, he remembers being twenty-five years older. This twenty-five-year gap between the time of the investigation and that of the vision can now be found reflexively in the time that has passed between the end of the first US broadcast in 1991 and the announcement in 2016 that a third season would be released on Showtime, giving the impression that the creators controlled their narrative master plan perfectly. Similarly, in the last episode of the series, Laura Palmer tells Cooper (and the viewers), "I'll see you again in twenty-five years", while the little man says "When you see me, it will not be me", anticipating a change in the third season's cast and reasserting one of Lynch's favourite themes, that of doublings. As the small man predicts, the release of a third season actually makes the show "come back in style", after having been analysed, dissected and chewed like a stick of gum since the 1990s.

The audience has generally taken Cooper's assertions in episode 4 literally: to resolve the criminal case, all you need to do is to break the dream's code. Viewers have been tracking down how each word or gesture in the dream could point to the solution of the puzzle. The coroner confirms the dream's truthfulness when he notices that Laura was tied up with her arms bent back. The young woman "filled with secrets" gradually reveals her drug addiction and her secret sexual encounters. When the police discover a shack in the woods where men used to enjoy Laura's charms, the curtains hanging on the windows recall those of the Red Room. Moreover, the caged Mynah bird and the record player both materialize the "music in the air" and the bird singing "a pretty song" mentioned by the Man from Another Place.

Laura's cousin, Madeleine, comes to visit Sarah and Leland Palmer. Played also by Sheryl Lee, Madeleine is the spitting image of Laura, but with brown hair and glasses. As Madeleine

adorns a blonde wig and poses as Laura to test Dr. Jacoby's guilt, she becomes her cousin's perfect double and proves again the small man right when he referred to a cousin looking "almost exactly like Laura". Madeleine starts to see Bob in the house (episode 10), falls under Leland's blows (episode 15) and is found in a plastic bag. Tragedy repeats itself as if Laura's murder were an event doomed to replicate itself.

Theories abound regarding Cooper's dreams. He could be receiving messages from a supernatural entity in his sleep, or his intuitions could be so sharp as to enable him to transform his daily experiences into decipherable symbols at night: for instance, before seeing him in his dream in episode 3, Dale had met one-armed Mike in the hospital elevator during the pilot episode (Dolan 1995). Cooper first proves the viewers right when he *himself* reads his dreams as conveyors of clues for the investigation. When he discovers that the murderer was Leland Palmer (episode 17), he is quick to retrospectively list all the dreamlike elements that pointed towards the solution: after Laura's death, Leland had begun to dance as compulsively as the Man from Another Place, and his hair, like Bob's, had gone from black to white overnight.

However, Cooper is misled by tricks and illusions, in the same way as viewers were led to believe that Bob was the real murderer. Because the series is not simply a crime fiction where the completion of the investigation signals the end of the story, the dream sequences are not merely there to guide the FBI Agent or the "forensic" spectators (Mittell 2009). As opposed to the dreams in Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945), they are not merely texts to be "unlocked". Some elements relate to the police investigation, but others remain opaque, pointing to a lack of meaning and readability. The dreams thus stand as "the antithesis of the classic story where every detail, every sign, serves the organization of events" (Astic 2008, 70)—deceptive leads

that play with the viewers' minds, engaging them in a "pure aesthetic experience" (Legagneur 2012). As they deepen and proliferate, the puzzles and riddles end up concealing a greater mystery. In this sense, the beginning of *Fire Walk with Me*, where every detail of Lil's dance is over-interpreted can be read as a way to denounce excessive decoding instead of simply responding to a poetic experience that points to a forever elusive mystery.

### **The Red Room as dream-come-true**

The series' dreams and visions are ambiguous because their existences lie between the mental and the real. In the last episode, the Red Room proves to be a tangible place that is accessible from a specific location (the circle of the twelve sycamores in the forest) at a specific time (when a number of stars are aligned). In episode 28, we learn that a White Lodge can be opened by love and a Black Lodge by fear. The Red Room seems to stand as the waiting room to the Black Lodge, if not as the Black Lodge itself.

Cooper physically enters the Red Room as he chases Windom Earle (Kenneth Welsh) who has kidnapped Annie Blackburne (Heather Graham), the young woman with whom Cooper has recently fallen in love. His former dream materializes into a real space that keeps replicating itself. More or less identical rooms open on each side of a red-curtained corridor. Cooper enters several rooms or rather, enters several times into the same room, where the situation changes each time. In one of them, the little man warns him that he took the "wrong way"; in yet another, he pronounces the word "doppelgänger", pointing to the inherent duality in human beings and announcing Cooper's duplication. In this same room, Laura yells under a pulsating light that evokes the moment when she was murdered.

In the next room, Cooper becomes aware that he is bleeding profusely. Following the blood trail he has left behind him, he discovers his own injured and motionless body near that of Caroline, the woman with whom he had had a beautiful love affair until her husband, Windom Earle, shot the lovers. Caroline died and Cooper was badly injured. The Red Room thus appears as an echo chamber where traumatic situations are repeated in variation within a *mise-en-abyme* of fiction. The Red Room thus embodies the very process of seriality, based on both recognition and an *exploration* of repetition, engendering a paradoxically *unique* form of repetition that is specific to each series (Soulez 2011). If a television series may be considered as a narrative, aesthetic and ideological big bang giving birth to an expanding universe that regularly reformulates and reassesses its origins, the Red Room appears as the literal location where the genesis of *Twin Peaks* takes place. It is the site where the show's narrative potential is revisited, re-examined and replayed from different angles, questioning what is actually repeated in the series and the film—i.e., patriarchal violence against women.

### **The Red Room and the media matrix**

The Red Room is a stage between two worlds, where the musical numbers, songs and dances follow one another in unpredictable ways. It combines live performance (theatre, circus) that implies an ephemeral temporality and direct interaction with the public, with the medium of television, which suggests storable images and an indirect, hierarchical relationship between the producers and the viewers. The ethos of theatre comes through in the red curtains while the media are symbolized by the stripes on the floor, which recall electricity and radio waves. They are also evoked through the sofa-and-chair layout, which is similar to the set of a television talk show where the host (here, the small man) welcomes the distinguished guests between two musical or commercial breaks (Thiellement 2010, 88-90).

Television is also summoned in *Fire Walk with Me*: the film starts with the static noise of a TV set which implodes during the murder of Teresa Banks, Leland Palmer's first victim. The destroyed TV set signifies both the ending of a character's life and *Twin Peaks*'s abrupt cancellation as decided by ABC in 1991. The movie is thus explicitly depicted, metafilmically, as born out of the series' interruption. The cinematic/television divide is here shattered. Paradoxically, cinema seems to be posited as the medium best suited to prolong a television series; but, since the film is narratively situated *before* the story told by the series, television is also conceived retrospectively as the best means to prolong a feature film.

The Red Room's artistic and media matrix is revisited in *Fire Walk With Me* and then diffracted in other series inspired by *Twin Peaks*. The "future's past" chanted by Mike in Cooper's dream may point to the fact that the Red Room exists out of time or all the time. The phrase announces the making of the prequel film—since the viewers of *Fire Walk With Me* already know or even saw what awaits Laura in the future—as well as the reappropriation of the *Twin Peaks* motifs in other series, inviting us to go back to the original show and see it under a new light. The seminal influence that *Twin Peaks* has had on the production of shows in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s has engendered a form of intertextuality that verges on seriality, as the story arcs of Laura Palmer and Dale Cooper continue to be revisited, reformulated and prolonged, but this time outside the series' boundaries.

Shows such as *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci Fi, 2003-2009), *LOST* (ABC, 2004-2010) or *Carnivàle* (HBO, 2003-2005) all include strange initiatory places that are disconnected from time. *Battlestar Galactica* has its opera house where the protagonists find themselves in a dreamlike, out-of-the-world place where different narrative bifurcations are generated and

tested. *LOST* has its island, its Church and its dreamlike flash-sideways which link the characters together and allow them to transcend their pasts. *Carnivàle*,<sup>3</sup> which, like *Twin Peaks*, was interrupted after two seasons, dramatizes the fight between young Ben (an Avatar of Light) and Father Justin (an Avatar of Darkness). The two often meet inside shared dreams where they relive the clash of the previous Avatars (the characters known to us as Scudder and Belyakov). In the dreams, the battles of the First World War and the recurring scene of a chase through a cornfield are shown through flashes that recall the pulsating light in the Red Room. The strobe light embeds secrecy within what is shown and points to a vision that needs to be reconstructed. As for the red curtains, they reappear in the trailer of the mysterious head of the circus, always referred to in the impersonal term “Management”; they close off his bunk from the rest of the trailer, protecting the secret of his identity, and, also, as we come to know, his physical deformity. Because *Carnivàle* follows a travelling circus in the US of the 1930s in an environment that merges economic depression and pre-apocalyptic magic (Du Verger 2012), the show seems to combine John Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1930), Tod Browning’s film *Freaks* (1932) and the series *Twin Peaks*. The universe of *Carnivàle* in fact diffracts the media mix of the Red Room. Live performances and radio waves become separated and polarized. While *Carnivàle*’s transgressive circus protects, frees and unites human beings through the ritual of shows where performers and spectators share the same space and time, the radio program hosted by satanic Father Justin offers a magical variation on the real Father Charles Coughlin’s evangelical propaganda on the radio in the 1930s and reveals mediation as a hierarchical tool of separation (Thiellement 2015).

In the character of Management, revealed to be the horribly dismembered Belyakov, it is possible to recognize a new version of one-armed Mike; in the evil Scudder, an avatar of infamous Bob; in Father Justin, who passes as a respectable member of the community but is

in fact a rapist and a murderer, another Leland Palmer. Samson, the dwarf who runs the circus, appears as a new Man from Another Place, especially since he is played by the same actor. In a sequence that introduces each season, Samson addresses the viewers from a dark space and foretells the eternal struggle of good against evil in a world where magic is still powerful. Like Cooper in the Red Room, he appears older as if he were speaking well after the facts from a timeless no man's land.

The series is therefore presented from the start as a constructed narrative, a fabricated dream that some characters might be aware of. Ben, haunted by his powerful nightmares, tells Samson that he no longer knows what is real and what is not (S01E11) and admit to Sofie, "Sometimes I wonder if this is all a dream" (S02E3). Sofie, Father Justin's daughter, represents the Omega, through whom the End of Times will happen, while Ben, the healing magician, symbolizes Light and Hope. Here again, *Carnivàle* diffracts *Twin Peaks*. Laura Palmer, as the child of the Devil (represented by Leland/Bob), is first akin to Sofie. The two young women are torn between the pure and the impure and are on the verge of becoming evil. But, unlike Sofie, Laura would rather die than become the Omega, because she is also an angel like Ben, who was abandoned by his father and abused by his mother. Laura also spectrally reappears in *Carnivàle*'s young stripper Dora Mae, whose father forces her into prostitution, and who ends up lynched by frustrated and revengeful men. Like Laura, Dora Mae is the victim of those men who rape her and then accuse her of being "defiled" to justify murdering her too, compounding one crime with another. At her funeral, the dead girl's face, seen through a sheer plastic shroud, still displays the word "harlot" that was slashed onto her forehead, bringing back Laura's ghost in a forceful way.

What *Carnivàle* treats in the mode of plurality, *Twin Peaks* presents in the oxymoronic mode, folding opposites within the same character. In a vision, Father Justin can see Ben in a mirror instead of his own reflection (S02E01), but Ben does not *inhabit* Justin in the same way as Bob occupies Leland. Whereas *Carnivàle* portrays two separate opponents (even if the world of dreams brings them together), *Twin Peaks* shows that one's worst enemy is always inside oneself already; every situation, every person, includes an internal opposite.

### **Laura Palmer and Dale Cooper as world makers**

Damon Lindelof, one of the showrunners on *LOST*, has often said he drew his inspiration partly from *Twin Peaks*, a show he watched passionately as a child (Lindelof 2010). *LOST* postulates a dreamlike halfway world (presented in the “flash-sideways” of the last season) between the moment the characters die and the time they really depart to an unknown afterlife. This world, located outside of time, allows the protagonists to remember their past lives, realize they are now dead, and find their friends and loved ones again before “moving on” (Hatchuel 2012). Someone like Desmond has privileged access to this world even during his lifetime. In *LOST*, the characters' encounters and adventures on the island lead to their redemption and the overcoming of their traumas. The post-mortem dreamlike dimension is both an individual and collective creation allowing them to experience moments of reunion, giving them the strength and confidence to “let go”, and enter the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns.

In light of these later shows, *Twin Peaks* appears retrospectively as a fiction that never shows its characters' real lives but directly throws the audience into their disorienting flash-sideways, a post-mortem dimension filled with mysteries and incongruities. Contrary to

*LOST*, this halfway world does not provide the viewers with the keys to understand its status. Moreover, the characters of *Twin Peaks* have not shared a place of transcendence like the island in *LOST*; they have not experienced beautiful encounters to heal their inner wounds and allow them to gradually realize they are now dead. In *Twin Peaks*, the characters can't "let go" and are trapped in a gruesome dimension without any harmonious unity or consistency because it is not their collective creation, but rather a form of purgatory. The Red Room that the Man from Another Place once calls "the waiting room" can be seen as the disenchanting equivalent of the Church in *LOST*, in a flash-sideways world that is mainly the creation of two people—Dale and Laura.

In episode 17, a missing page from Laura's secret diary is found. She tells the Red Room dream from her own point of view. While Donna reads Laura's oneiric account, we visualize the dream through Cooper's eyes as he remembers his own experience of it. Both subjectivities combine to create the scene: Laura brings the words, Cooper the images. Laura and Dale seem to (re)produce together the sequence in the Red Room from episode 3 with their own words and memories. Laura describes the room, the red-dressed dwarf and the "old man" to whom she is trying to talk. The "old man" is obviously Cooper, whose name she does not know. She wishes to entrust her secret to him because she thinks "he can help". Cooper appears as Laura's white knight, in whom she can confide because he is a man of ethical integrity and does not consider underage girls as sexual preys (he turns down, for example, Audrey's sexual invitation). The series suggests that Laura's and Cooper's souls can communicate. As in *Battlestar Galactica* or *Carnivàle*, the two "connected" characters share the same dreams and meet in a space of fiction.

The story of *Twin Peaks* thus seems partly to be generated by Laura Palmer from the Red Room limbo or while she is “moving on” at the end of *Fire Walk With Me*. The Red Room again appears as *a machine producing narratives*, recalling Jean-Pierre Esquenazi’s definition of television seriality (2015). If *Twin Peaks*’s serial formula is based on the creation of different dreamlike worlds reflecting on the abuses against women—an internal regeneration taking place each time the narrative ventures into the Red Room –, the external reformulations in other shows then turn intertextuality into a form of seriality. Each time *Twin Peaks* is cited explicitly or even spectrally in another fiction, the story of Laura (and, in a sense, of all abused women) is played out again. As the Giant tells Cooper “It is happening again” (episode 15) at the exact moment when Leland/Bob murders Madeleine, a Laura look-alike, he highlights the fact that *Twin Peaks*’s seriality is precisely based on self-referentiality. As the prequel film concludes, Laura realizes she is dead; she sees the Angel and leaves this world with joy to become a maker of fictions. Laura is the glamorous icon who, sacrificed by a demonic father figure under incendiary gazes and spotlights, then attempts to rebuild herself by re-telling her life. From the space of the film, she contributes to make the series, from which she prefers to disappear so as not to harbour or reproduce evil. She only appears in the form of avatars like Madeleine or in indexical traces such as photographs.

The series is the story she prefers to tell. It is a story in which her father is not fully responsible for his crimes, because Bob forced him to commit them. It is a story that reveals her wish that a perfect knight might have defended her, like Dale Cooper who has *always* been with her in the Red Room—quite simply because Dale Cooper himself might be dead too, and have been dead all along, after having been shot by Windom Earle. This may be the true meaning of his loss of blood in the Red Room and of his seeing his own motionless body alongside his lost love, Caroline. Dale scripts the plot of the series with Laura, but unlike her,

does not understand that he died with Caroline. Nevertheless, the post-mortem dream that the series is, and which Dale contributes to build, keeps reminding him that he is no longer alive. The allusions to his fatal injury are numerous—in episode 8, he is shot in the belly at close range and left for dead; but Dale, like a writer who wants to continue the story, invents a last-minute bulletproof jacket to deny the evidence. Guy Astic is right to emphasize that the series “can be seen as Dale Cooper’s waking dream as well as his sublime and grotesque projection” (2008, 108), but this dream could be a *post-mortem* dream generating *multiple cinematic fictions*, as Julien Achemchame (2010, 11; 18) suggests in the case of a later Lynch production, *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Dale is like Malcolm (Bruce Willis) in M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Sixth Sense* (1999) or like Jack during *LOST*’s early flash-sideways in the sixth season, when he has not yet accepted his death. Throughout this season, Jack’s obsession with his real/fictional status translates in various shots of mirror: Jack keeps scrutinizing his body. The mirror reflections point to the dual reality of the performing role and evoke the figures of identification that actors embody for viewers. In *Twin Peaks*, repeated shots of mirror reflections return to similar questions: Leland, Dale or Josie (Joan Chen) look in the mirror to fathom whether they are real or illusions.

If Laura imagines a knight figure in the person of Dale, she is also, reciprocally, created by Dale. In *Fire Walk With Me*, Cooper claims to be certain that the murder of Teresa Banks will recur and predicts that the next victim will be a young blonde woman who is sexually active, takes drugs and is carrying food at that very moment. As he delivers these words, the film shows us Laura collecting food for charity. In what amounts to a Möbius strip, Dale creates Laura who creates Dale, just as the series engenders its movie prequel which helps us deconstruct the series.

*Twin Peaks* depicts characters who arrive in the Church/Red Room/Waiting Room when they are not ready to move to the other side. That is why, in there, they literally run round and round after their own self; or why they exit as a doppelgänger. In the final moments of the series, Bob takes possession of Cooper's soul in exchange for Annie's life. Cooper's two selves run after each other, but the one who exits the Red Room is the evil doppelgänger. Because Cooper could not let go, accept his death and move on, the evil version of himself returns to the crazy and extravagant dream played out in the town of Twin Peaks. Now the reflection that Cooper sees in his bathroom mirror is Bob. The "good" Cooper, the perfect FBI Agent, the knight who was our guide within the story, ultimately fails in his mission. By becoming the "bad guy", he questions the principle of viewer identification with the main character: with Cooper "gone", *Twin Peaks* prompts viewers to take over the initiatory and epiphanic quest on their own (Thiellement 2010, 103-11).

The first two seasons of *Twin Peaks* ends precisely when the hero becomes the villain, anticipating the fact that future series would focus on white male anti-heroes—"Bad Cooper" prefigures Profit, Dexter, Tony Soprano, Walter White or Frank Underwood—but this kind of anti-hero would have to wait a decade before being developed on the small screen.

Cooper's replacement by his evil double in the series is simultaneously recalled and anticipated in the prequel film. The second part of *Fire Walk With Me* is the only time we see the characters' "first lives" before they die. Laura wakes up in her room one morning, but paradoxically this awakening marks the beginning of a dream. In bed next to her, she sees a woman she does not know but that viewers recognize as Annie. The latter is covered in blood and says, "My name is Annie, and I've been with Laura and Dale. The good Dale is in the Lodge, and he can't leave. Write it in your diary". Before her death and before Cooper's

arrival in Twin Peaks, Laura thus dreams of a future that viewers have already experienced but that she will never live. She appears as the narrative inspiration for Desmond in *LOST*: while she is still alive, she succeeds in communicating, through dreams, with a world outside of time.

By accessing the Other Place in her lifetime, she reveals the Red Room as a *place-time* when everything has already existed and will exist until the loop is broken. The “Missing Pieces” sequences that were left out of *Fire Walk With Me*’s final cut reveal that the dwarf was supposed to ask the following question on two occasions: “Is it future or is it past?”—a question which cannot be answered since, as is revealed at the end of *LOST*’s flash-sideways, “There is no *now* here”. In *Twin Peaks: The Return*, broadcast on Showtime in 2017, the question is repeated by Mike and anticipates an ending in which Cooper goes back in time to try and save Laura from being murdered. However, Cooper’s attempt only creates yet another loop. The people of Twin Peaks, for one reason or another, all seem stuck in the timeless Red Room, unable to “remember, let go and move on”. *Twin Peaks* here evokes the film *The Shining* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1980) in which Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) appears on a photograph taken in 1921, suggesting that he lived in the Overlook Hotel in a previous life or that he is the prisoner of a parallel dimension with all the ghosts of those who died in the hotel. In the same film, Danny, Jack’s young son, repeats the word REDRUM and writes it down on a door. His mother Wendy discovers the meaning of the word when she sees it reflected in a mirror and reads MURDER. In *Twin Peaks* where mirror reflections abound, the Red Room/REDRUM is the place that Laura and the little man, by speaking in reverse, invite us to read as the murder room from which one never emerges unscathed.

Unlike *LOST* which offers a first-life narrative (where the plane crashes) and a second in the shape of a post-mortem dream (where the plane does not crash), *Twin Peaks* provides only one layer of the story. Spectators are thus naturally (though probably wrongfully) led to interpret it as real because it is the sole version of the story available to them. However, we should not read *Twin Peaks* as a series where everything is a dream and nothing actually happens. Quite the contrary. The series postulates that this dreamlike creation between two worlds actually exists, that the characters really experience it to evolve and understand themselves better. The story implies repetitions in variation until an epiphanic moment is reached for all the characters... and spectators, if they have eventually learnt how to *see*.

### **The viewers' experience: Black Lodge or White Lodge?**

If, according to Guy Astic, the “Fire” in “Fire Walk With Me” means “the mysteries that consume the people of Twin Peaks [and] the creative fire and passion” (2008, 45) that drives creators David Lynch and Mark Frost, it may also represent, for David Roche, the viewers’ creative power to make sense of an aesthetics where the signs are over-abundant and imagine the possible paths the fiction could take. Laura Palmer haunts the residents of Twin Peaks, but also the public of the series and prequel film. Like the series it has inspired, *Twin Peaks* has actively involved the audience in the creative process, anchoring the fiction in the very lives of those who watch and wonder about what they see, and ultimately reintroducing some aspects of the performing arts in television fictions where the distance between producers and viewers is usually so great. The show has promoted spectators’ interpretive theories through repeated viewings and an actual education of the gaze in a medium which previously seldom encouraged such active participation and reflection on the “responsibility of what we saw and how we saw it” (Hume 1995, 111).

Whereas *LOST*'s flash-sideways present a beautiful dream bringing together the characters' souls one last time, *Twin Peaks* is a tragic nightmare. Whereas *LOST* was able to transcend tragedy towards redemption and reconciliation, the artistic project of *Twin Peaks* does not aim to do so. To date (and maybe forever), *Twin Peaks* compels viewers to wonder if their viewings make them experience a White Lodge or a Black Lodge—the series is perhaps the mysterious Black Lodge itself. On the aesthetic and narrative levels, *Twin Peaks* is a series ahead of its time, straddling several worlds and several possible narratives, which offers, as early as the start of the 1990s, an alternate dream world, but without proclaiming to do so. However, on an ideological and gender level, *Fire Walk With Me* is ground-breaking. In denouncing the cinematic icons' unhappiness and revealing the reality of incest behind the cover-up stories, the 1992 film announces the series of the 2000s, which depict what Hollywood films seldom show. The film foreshadows the enigmatic motto “You understand” hammered by the Guilty Remnants in *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017)<sup>4</sup>, pointing to the fact that we often know very well what we do not want to see.

In all its forms and manifestations—from a daring network TV show, to a feature film disclosing what remained repressed in the first series, to an 18-hour premium cable ‘limited event’ questioning the limits between television and cinema—*Twin Peaks* prolongs its story while always asserting the importance of returning to its past (and re-watching hours of fiction) in order for us to *really* see and understand. This type of transformation that still calls for repeated viewings testifies to a circular and haunted form of seriality as well as to an *anamorphic* quality: each viewing of *Twin Peaks* implies an audio-visual accommodation—a change of perspective nourished by time and by other fictions—that puts new forms and meanings into focus. Cooper and Laura's dream in the Red Room has set in motion a serial

and transmediatic machine that has not only contributed to redefining the relations between cinema and television, but also claimed that a series, like a film, can (and sometimes should) be re-watched to perceive its complex and contradictory layers of meaning.

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<sup>2</sup> I consider the pilot as episode 1 and the last episode of season 2 as episode 30.

<sup>3</sup> Created by Daniel Knauf, *Carnivàle* was co-written by Ronald D. Moore, who will become *Battlestar Galactica*'s showrunner. One could almost draw a genealogy of series built on dreams as alternate worlds.

<sup>4</sup> In *The Leftovers*, this sentence is uttered by a dying Patti in S01E8 and then written on a poster brandished by Evie in episode S02E10. In a series that starts with the inexplicable disappearance of 2% of the world's population, these two words, “You understand”, point to the manifest incompleteness of the narrative while claiming that the characters and viewers alike are supposed to know—to have always known, in fact—the real meaning of what is being played out in front of their eyes.