2023 VERSION WITH UPDATED NOTES

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THERE IS ONE THING YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ME (FIRST DISCLAIMER)

This book could be described as a more organized stream of consciousness, written primarily to express my feelings about TWIN PEAKS: THE RETURN and the way viewers responded to it in this era of blogs, vlogs, forums, and message boards.

There is one element that makes what follows decidedly less academic and more conversational: sarcasm. I've limited myself to no more than a pinch of the stuff, but it's there.

WANT, NOT NEED (SECOND DISCLAIMER)

Dwelling on semantics is one of the many ways to dismiss criticism, so let's have a quick chat about that before diving in.

In an entry for the Chicago Sun-Times, amiable blogger Jim Emerson uses Richard Schickel's negative review of THE TREE OF LIFE (Terrence Malick, 2011) to discuss the misuse of the adjectives "boring" and "entertaining."[i] A thing cannot be boring; it's a person who feels bored, contends Emerson. And the Michael Bays of this world do not have a monopoly on escapism—an Andrei Tarkovsky film, too, can supply entertainment. (And, for my money, most Michael Bay films are sleep-inducing.) Equally ill-defined are the value judgments "good" and "bad," yet those are the very linguistic nuggets most critics select when writing a review. Even the late Gene Siskel was partial to the pronouns "we" and "you" when describing how films affected him personally.[ii] It's fairly axiomatic that a critic's assessment is always subjective, not a universal truth—reviews need not include the preamble "This is but my opinion, so please don't be pedantic or obstinate if you disagree with me" to make that clear.

I won't write the name "Bob" in caps. I understand why many fans do, but none of the show's writers, and that includes David Lynch and Mark Frost, ever did so in any of the teleplays.

Some insist that The Black Lodge should always be called The Red Room. We've never seen the actual Black Lodge, they claim. But Windom Earle cackled about finding a map to The Black Lodge; Sarah Palmer groaned that she was in The Black Lodge with Dale Cooper; Annie Blackburn told Laura that the good Dale is in The Lodge, and Hawk informed Frank that Harry saw Cooper come out of The Lodge with Annie. Even Lynch himself has used the phrase "Black Lodge" in a scene heading of the TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME script,[iii] and I'll do likewise here.

What should I call the 2017 edition? Fights and celebrations have broken out in the fan community over less (one vlogger performed a little victory jig because, to him, barkeep Jean-Michel answering the phone with the colloquial "Roadhouse" meant no Real Fan™ should ever refer to the dive by its proper name, The Bang Bang Bar), so I'd best have a think. Showtime used "Twin Peaks: The Return"; preliminary artwork for the home media release bared the subtitle "The Third Season," but the final product was titled "A Limited Event Series." I'll go with THE RETURN whenever I bring up the new show. For the 1990-1991 show, I'll use S1 (Season 1), S2 (Season 2), and "the original show"; for the film, FWWM.

One small point: the following will spoil all things Lynch, all things Frost, and, obviously, all things TWIN PEAKS. Away with you if you're somehow not yet up to speed.

Let's rock.

ONE

PLEASE, BE SPECIFIC
(AN INTRODUCTION)

The date: June 18, 1991. I'm fourteen years old, flipping channels in my upstairs bedroom and landing on BBC 2, where I was introduced to TWIN PEAKS by catching the tail end of the S2 finale. That's right, what I saw was this:

Intrigued, I wanted to watch the entire show from the beginning. What a blessing in disguise that I had to wait several months for that opportunity: by then my recollection of those five minutes had become hazy and inaccurate.

TWIN PEAKS was captivating and fascinating—here was a show with better acting, writing, and directing than what I had come to expect from television. To this day, the original show still holds its power to tickle my funny bone, pull my heartstrings, and scare me.

Watching the show wasn't enough: I bought every tie-in book available and subscribed to the fanzine *The Lynchburg Chronicles*. Reading about TWIN PEAKS wasn't cutting it, either; I also wanted to talk and write about it, so I became a contributor to the fanzine. But what I really wanted was to visit the town, and I did.

Posing in front of Twede's during my May 2000 pilgrimage to North Bend and Snoqualmie.

It's safe to say that TWIN PEAKS is my all-time favorite TV show. Do I also consider it the *best* TV show? Probably not, because of S2.

People bemoaning S2 usually mean the back half of S2. And by that, they mean the first couple of episodes following the denouement of the show's central mystery: Who killed Laura Palmer? It's a plotline network ABC wanted resolved a.s.a.p. S1, consisting of an 88-minute pilot and seven one-hour episodes, attracted a large viewership. ABC was happy to greenlight a second season of twenty-two episodes as long as Lynch/Frost agreed to one proviso: wrap up the murder mystery. The capture and "suicide" of the killer—Leland Palmer—was a thrill ride from beginning to end. Who can forget Coop, Truman, Briggs, and Albert discussing the nature of Bob ("Perhaps that's all he represents: the evil that men do") and an owl flying into the camera right after Truman wondered aloud where Bob, if real, went? The series, or at least S2, should have ended here but couldn't. It would have been an ideal moment to regroup and draw up battle plans, but a new episode aired the following week, and it gets my vote for the weakest of the original show.

In an excellent article about sexual violence against women in TWIN PEAKS, Lindsay Stamhuis discusses how the townspeople, Sarah, and Cooper forgive Leland Palmer because Bob was calling the shots.[iv] But *Episode 17: Dispute Between Brothers* cops out by informing us that three days have gone by since Leland's passing—we're denied the townspeople's initial response to the aftermath. Leland is only mentioned once in subsequent episodes: when Ben refers to him as a homicidal lunatic: this confirms that the townspeople have assigned sole blame to Leland—they don't know

about Bob; even Coop, who *does* and has mentioned him when offering Sarah words of comfort, admits to Major Briggs that he doesn't know if the long-haired man truly exists or not. The show is in such a hurry to jettison the Laura Palmer storyline and snuggle up to esotericism and broad comedy that Sarah all but disappears, so we have no way of knowing where *she* stands on her late husband's culpability. How fascinating it would have been to keep checking in on Sarah: what's it like for her, living alone in a house where so many terrible things occurred? Do people avoid her on the street and talk about her while her back is turned? Would Windom Earle take an interest in her? There's a wealth of possibilities here, but we get Nadine going for cheerleading tryouts and Ben Horne hankering for raw carrots. Still, I loved these characters; hanging out with them was fun. And, as we know, the show would eventually pull itself together and head for a powerhouse conclusion.

I can't in good conscience credit TWIN PEAKS with introducing me to the finer things in life. I'll explain. Our household as run by my mother knew few restrictions television-wise. There used to be plenty, I'm sure, but they went out the window after what I'll call The Tarzan Mishap. One evening when I was about eight or nine, Mom said she had a surprise for me and turned on the television: a Tarzan film was about to start. What my well-meaning single parent didn't know: this version starred sexpot Bo Derek, who disrobes every five minutes, goes for a refreshing skinny-dip, lets Tarzan cop a feel, and permits a chimp to nuzzle her breasts.

You know, for kids! Bo Derek and Miles O'Keeffe in John Derek's Tarzan, the Ape Man.

I reckon Mom figured that continuing to shield me from risqué movies would have been fatuous. By the time I turned ten, I'd seen many R-rated films of questionable artistic merit—PORKY'S, MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE, FRIDAY THE 13TH, and Chuck Norris vehicles—but also such critical darlings as TAXI DRIVER, MANHATTAN, ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA, and many other works intended for a mature audience. I didn't mind slow burners; I wasn't impatiently waiting for warehouses to explode or things to go bump in the night.

I *can* give TWIN PEAKS props for introducing me to surrealism. During the draught of 1992-1997

(the years between FWWM and the underrated LOST HIGHWAY) I frequented the arthouse aisle of the video rental store and worked my way through Lynch's back catalog: I adored ERASERHEAD, loved THE ELEPHANT MAN, liked DUNE, and had tons of fun with WILD AT HEART. Even though I admired BLUE VELVET right away, it tackled issues I found difficult to deal with at the time. If I hadn't enjoyed the film's plot, acting, tone, and overall execution, I wouldn't have given it a second try. (In the 1990s, the abbreviation DNF was not yet de rigueur, but even back then we knew that life is short. There's much to do, much to discover; if you don't care for a cultural text, don't feel obliged to keep revisiting it until aversion becomes like or even love.) When I watched BLUE VELVET again a year or so later, it became my favorite Lynch film. [This had more to do with its story and cinematic qualities than its obvious "Vermin in the freshly cut grass represents bad things brewing under the tranquil facade of Small Town, USA" stuff critics fawned over. A more interesting element worth discussing is Hunter, Frank's third goon. The fickle Hunter has only one line, no one ever addresses him by his name, and no one ever makes eye contact with him; in fact, no one so much as acknowledges his presence. Paul (Jack Nance) and Raymond (Brad Dourif) are antagonist Frank Booth's only cronies in the original screenplay.[v] This and the fact that the character bears the same name as its actor—J. Michael Hunter—implies that he was a last-minute addition. I wondered why, because Hunter originally seems without purpose, not unlike Pete the Droog in Stanley Kubrick's (film adaptation of) A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. But when Frank takes Jeffrey on a joyride, Hunter serves as the college kid's watchdog. They always share the same point of view: it's as though Hunter represents how Jeffrey might turn out should he go down the rabbit hole. When an enraged Frank uppercuts Jeffrey, Hunter is visibly shaken by the sudden outburst of violence. At this moment, Jeffrey is both a victim and, through Hunter, a spectator. He wishes to be neither. When the night draws to a close, Jeffrey has made up his mind: he wants no part of anything Frank stands for. I think it's no coincidence that Hunter isn't seen again.]

The ghostlike Hunter (J. Michael Hunter), flanked by Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan) and Paul (Jack Nance).

Writing articles for the fanzine gave me access to bootlegs of Lynch's early shorts: SIX FIGURES GETTING SICK, THE ALPHABET, THE GRANDMOTHER, and THE AMPUTEE. After seeing those, I was no longer just a TWIN PEAKS fan; I loved *all* things Lynch, including the furniture designs and fine art showcased in the 1997 documentary PRETTY AS A PICTURE.

With no new Lynch films yet available, I turned to the works of Lars von Trier, Ingmar Bergman, Andrei Tarkovsky, and Luis Buñuel. (Make no mistake: I'm not a snob, and I still carry a torch for pulp. Chuck Norris rocks; just ask David Lynch.[vi])

But what about TWIN PEAKS? Did the show and its groundbreaking approach have a lasting impact on television or was it back to business as usual?

TWO

I'M SUPPOSED TO WATCH THE BOX AND SEE IF ANYTHING APPEARS INSIDE (ABOUT TELEVISION IN THE 1990S AND NOSTALGIA)

Thomas Leitch, professor of English at UDel, once famously posed the question "When is a director not a director?" He courteously provided an answer in the same breath: "When he is directing a television program."[vii] As Tony Magistrale, author of *Stephen King's Hollywood*, delineated, the tight schedules and low budgets of television productions seldom allowed for grand set pieces, multiple takes, or state-of-the-art effect sequences.[viii] Television directors were thought of as *metteurs en scene*, journeyman professionals adhering to predetermined visual styles and expected to get an episode in the can on time, on budget. Not even the late, great Alfred Hitchcock managed to put his mark on the handful of ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS episodes he directed.

Title cards for The Stand *(1994),* Lipstick on Your Collar *(1993), and* 'Allo 'Allo! *(1982-1992) singling out their writers as the creative forces.*

To this day, TWIN PEAKS is the only show referred to as "Auteur TV." Perhaps this is because A-listers heeding the call of the small used to be frowned upon. (When Dustin Hoffman voiced Mr. Bergstrom in the early THE SIMPSONS episode *Lisa's Substitute*, he didn't want to be associated with a TV show and insisted on a pseudonym: Sam Etic.) Lynch put his stamp on TWIN PEAKS by approaching it from his unique cinematic perspective: he demonstrated that television drama can be as accomplished as anything in the theaters. Nearly three decades later it's commonplace for popular actors and such lionized filmmakers as David Fincher *(*HOUSE OF CARDS, MINDHUNTER), Martin Scorsese (VINYL), and Steven Soderbergh (THE KNICK) to direct television episodes and even develop their own shows.

TWIN PEAKS *did* change the television landscape immediately by paving the way for off-beat shows revolving around mysteries, supernatural goings-on, and/or tight-knit communities: PICKET FENCES, WILD PALMS, NORTHERN EXPOSURE, AMERICAN GOTHIC, NOWHERE MAN, THE X-FILES. Those are typical products of the 1990s, when studios and networks were partial to a much faster pace, in a hurry to reach the chewy middle out of fear to lose impatient viewers.

NOWHERE MAN, about a photographer who finds his existence erased, presented a seemingly airtight explanation for the man's predicament at the end of every episode, only to backpaddle the next week. AMERICAN GOTHIC's pilot ended with what should have been a season finale: a murderous sheriff chasing the male lead through a burning house. The writers had to use plenty of elbow grease to justify why things were restored to relative normalcy in the next episode. In THE X-FILES, FBI agent Fox Mulder encounters so many odd things right off the bat that his belief in the supernatural should have been solidified. No dice—for some reason there's still doubt in the man's heart, even after rescuing colleague Dana Scully from an alien vessel in the motion picture FIGHT THE FUTURE (Rob Bowman, 1998). Looking back on the first ten seasons, my favorite episodes were the standalone ones penned by Darin Morgan—they contain the much-needed self-deprecating humor and irony most other episodes lacked.

Dana Sculley (Gillian Anderson) catches up on her reading in the The X-Files *episode* Jose Chung's From Outer Space *by Darin Morgan.*

I agree with David Lynch that modern cable television is the new arthouse.[ix] In the late 2000s and early 2010s, the rise of streaming services led to many daring, visually arresting shows that wouldn't have been possible in the 1990s: BREAKING BAD, MAD MEN, THE DEUCE, BLACK MIRROR, HOMELAND, GAME OF THRONES, STRANGER THINGS, MR. ROBOT, WESTWORLD, THE AMERICANS, BOARDWALK EMPIRE, TRUE DETECTIVE, THE HANDMAID'S TALE, MANIAC, SEVERANCE, MIDNIGHT MASS. The list goes on and on.

The acclaimed film FARGO (Joel & Ethan Coen, 1996) was adapted for television before, in 1997, but test audiences wrinkled their noses at the watered-down, TV-PG pilot (directed by Kathy Bates), and it never went to series.[x]

Edie Falco as Marge Gunderson in Fargo (1997)

Mary Elizabeth Winstead as Nikki in the third season of Fargo (2017)

Like many other modern TV dramas, Noah Hawley's 2014 FARGO anthology series looks quite cinematic. The picture and sound are superb, the screen is wider, experimentation is welcomed, the late 90s smoking-on-TV ban has been lifted, and the visual effects are often first-rate.

Every so often members of online groups and forums dedicated to being children of the 1980s and 1990s will pose the question "What did you love the most about those good old days?" The predictable answers were variations on "Life was simple," "Life was carefree," "Life was more fun," and "Life was *better*." Well, *of course* life was all these things—we were *kids*. The world was our oyster, we had oodles of spare time, and we didn't have bills to pay. We like to remember things our own way, not necessarily the way they happened. Our memory of the past is an inaccurate and romanticized highlight reel. Now we jump at every chance to deprecate modern music and talk smack about kids spending their downtime cooked up inside (even though kids playing outside is still a common sight). Such behavior doesn't make us special. The previous generation lambasted the music *we* listened to, the films *we* watched, the clothes *we* wore, and the ways *we* whiled away the hours. (Did we really play outside all weekend or were we often more interested in beating Super Mario Bros?) Make no mistake: our kids *will* grow up to think back fondly of today's idols; they *will* romanticize the aughts and twenty-tens, and they *will* roll their eyes at *their* offspring's culture.

Bart, the voice of his generation, in the The Simpsons *episode* Radio Bart.

What sets my generation (the 35-45 bracket) apart is that it's the first to use the world wide web to pine for days gone. We're both suppliers and requesters of nostalgic images and videos hosted by Tumblr, Instagram, and YouTube. We visit discussion websites like Reddit and the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter to dwell on the past, reacquaint ourselves with schoolmates, and publicly express our love and longing for the shows of yesteryear. And as attentive content producers are only 280 characters away, we've been given loads of books, movies, and TV series set in, or inspired by, the 1980s: STRANGER THINGS, *The Saturday Night Ghost Club*, YOU MIGHT BE THE KILLER, COBRA KAI, SUMMER OF '84, IT & IT: CHAPTER TWO, *Our Lady of the Inferno*, *My Best Friend's Exorcism*, ADVENTURELAND, BEYOND THE GATES, READY PLAYER ONE, THE FINAL

GIRLS, SUPER DARK TIMES, BEYOND THE BLACK RAINBOW, MANDY, KUNG FURY. (Much like our individual memories, many of these projects are "sanitized retro," evoking a fictional past where characters adhere to today's sensibilities and values.) And let's not forget the popularity of synthwave, a music genre influenced by the 80s synth scores of John Carpenter and Giorgio Moroder.

Reunion TV movies and event shows of popular sitcoms and soap operas are nothing new (see DALLAS: J.R. RETURNS, HAPPY DAYS: 30TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL, DYNASTY: CATFIGHTS & CAVIAR), but networks now dare to produce entire new seasons, often to great commercial success, of the shows we loved back in the day: THE X-FILES, THE GILMORE GIRLS, ROSEANNE, FULL HOUSE.

Like most other belated continuations and revivals, THE X-FILES is steeped in nostalgia. The first episode, *My Struggle*, starts with Fox Mulder's monotone narration over an anonymous person sifting through a pile of photographs (actually stills from previous seasons). What follows is a muddled series of events that, in typical nineties fashion, steer to a point-of-no-return, with Mulder and assorted friends all but yelling "The end of the world is nigh!" In the next episode, that sense of urgency has evaporated, and Mulder and Scully set out to investigate a new, humdrum case. That approach didn't sit well with me in the nineties, and it doesn't sit well with me now. (I *did* enjoy Darin Morgan's new monster-of-the-week episodes.)

FULLER HOUSE basically repeats FULL HOUSE's premise: a single parent raises their kids with the help of friends and relatives. The first episode goes as far as recreating a scene from the original show and presenting it side by side with the 1987 version.

Is it future or is it past? Joey, Jesse, and Danny sing a lullaby in Full House *and* Fuller House.

I never pined for a continuation of TWIN PEAKS. Sure, Cooper staring at the grinning reflection of Bob while mocking his earlier inquiry about Annie's wellbeing doesn't seem a desirable way to end his story … then again, it's an incredibly powerful conclusion, one that was never intended as the end of the thing but rather a season finale. Furthermore, we pretty much already had the logical

closure point in the episode *Dispute between Brothers* when Cooper said goodbye to his friends at the Sheriff's Department. (It didn't end here because the Mounties barged in to accuse Coop of drug trafficking.)

Besides, a return seemed unlikely. The original show was immensely popular for only two or three months. Lynch has stated countless times that he never intended to answer the question "Who Killed Laura Palmer?" The murder mystery was there to draw viewers in, and then, like THE FUGITIVE, the show would focus on other stories. He believes that ABC forcing him to solve the murder killed the goose that laid golden eggs.[xi] Mark Frost, on the other hand, has gone on record as saying that the murder mystery had to be solved eventually.[xii] I agree with Frost here. TWIN PEAKS would not have worked as a THE FUGITIVE style show. In that 1960s hit, pediatrician Richard Kimble is wanted for murdering his wife. Knowing that a mysterious one-armed man is the perpetrator, Kimble skips town and embarks on self-contained weekly adventures. In TWIN PEAKS, characters are either local suspects, local lawmen investigating the murder case, or local friends doing a little sleuthing themselves. Ergo, viewers can't become sidetracked. On top of that, Lynch's logic falters: if he intended to make the viewers invested in other stories, solving the murder mystery shouldn't have made that much of a difference. (Truth is, viewership dropped long before the big reveal.[xiii]) And if he believes not knowing who killed Laura Palmer was crucial to the success and longevity of TWIN PEAKS, why did he even bother with a prequel film?

In the end, ABC put TWIN PEAKS on indefinite hiatus and aired the remaining episodes only after pleas from fans. FWWM was a critical and commercial disappointment, none of the other Lynch/Frost TV projects—ON THE AIR, AMERICAN CHRONICLES—were successes, Lynch's 1993 miniseries HOTEL ROOM failed to attract viewers, ABC passed up on the MULHOLLAND DRIVE pilot,[xiv] CBS axed Frost's 1998 crime series BUDDY FARO after eight episodes, and UPN canceled the 2001 hospital drama series ALL SOULS, which Frost co-wrote and co-executive produced. So, yes, it was amazing that Lynch and Frost announced their return to television … and would do so with TWIN PEAKS.

Despite everything, my initial response was one of pure delight. I pictured watching THE RETURN with my younger fiancée, who'd never seen anything from the mind of Lynch. I wasted little time to ~~ask~~ urge her to watch the available two seasons and familiarize herself with DKL. I'm not being at all facetious when I say that it was a charged moment, like a Scientologist getting involved with a wog (the religion's term for an outsider) and introducing them to the teachings of LRH. As it turned out, my fiancée wasn't a big fan of TWIN PEAKS and skipped ahead to the S2 finale after Leland's death. I was completely fine with this—it dawned on me that if one is used to contemporary television drama, chances are they'll be underwhelmed by the quarter-century-old show that helped break the mold. Per her own request, we *did* watch FWWM together (which she loved). We feed

our Blu-ray player a Lynch film once in a while, and I'm happy to report that she's responded favorably to every single one.

My fiancée's levelheaded, nostalgia-free appraisal of TWIN PEAKS informed how I approached THE RETURN: less obsessive. In the months leading up to the release, I joined online groups devoted to TWIN PEAKS. Still, when it came to online discussions, I was an infrequent lurker, rarely a participant, and never an instigator. I think the kid I was in '91 would have loved the idea of forums and message boards; as a somewhat jaded adult, I'm perfectly happy to before all else *experience* Lynch's output.

When Lynch walked away from the project (he felt Showtime didn't offer enough money), people sided with the filmmaker without knowing the specifics; my social media feeds flooded with "boycott Showtime" posts and videos of fans and actors finishing the slogan "TWIN PEAKS without David Lynch is like **…"** We already knew what TWIN PEAKS is like without Lynch, didn't we? Many people point at the second half of S2, but Lynch co-wrote only three and directed four of the original show's flawless first sixteen episodes. Why was Lynch absent during most of S2's second half? A persistent false memory shared by cast and crew in interviews has it that Lynch left to do WILD AT HEART, but that film had already won the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or two days before the S1 finale aired and ABC commissioned a second season.[xv] [xvi] [xvii] Lynch was missing in action because, and here it's straight from the horse's mouth: "It becomes something you don't really want to do."[xviii] Fed up with the show taking up all his time, he abandoned ship. This time around, he was ready to pull out before the start of production.

Yes, Lynch would have been missed, surely and sorely, and he deserves full credit for coming up with the red room, Killer Bob, and lots of effective other on-set improvisations, but let's not downplay all those other people whose creative input made TWIN PEAKS the show we love.

Then news broke that Lynch's demands had been met: Showtime would cough up more bread and

let him turn the script into eighteen hours of television instead of nine.[xix] Lynch even had enough clout to veto Showtime's marketing campaign, flat-out refusing to release any footage that would give viewers the slightest idea of what THE RETURN was going to be about.[xx] He allowed only a couple of teasers consisting of brief shots without context and photo spreads drawing heavily on nostalgia.

One of Entertainment Weekly's promotional photos. Not quite representative of The Return.

Lynch has enjoyed final-cut privilege for most of his career, but we shouldn't equate this with "free rein." He is contractually obligated to secure R ratings, and apart from the self-financed INLAND EMPIRE, his films cannot exceed a certain running time (120 minutes for BLUE VELVET and WILD AT HEART; 135 minutes for Ciby 2000's FWWM and LOST HIGHWAY). This has often turned out to be a blessing in disguise—it kept Lynch disciplined and his films focused. Lynch used to welcome such restrictions and wasn't opposed to test screenings:

> *If you have a little too much freedom, it can be dangerous. You get lazy and stop listening to the film. Those screenings are very important. Otherwise you fall in love with the film and you think it's OK. Having other people around forces you to see it isn't OK, and it forces you to do something about it.*[xxi]

He voluntarily trimmed Johnny Farragut's violent death scene in WILD AT HEART and took scissors to ERASERHEAD when an early screening at the NY Film Festival didn't go over well.[xxii] [xxiii] [xxiv]

Lynch's take-it-or-leave-it approach to THE RETURN and its doubled runtime worried me. Ditto for a press release announcing "The Secret Lives of Twin Peaks," a novel by Mark Frost that would tell us what happened to the characters between the end of S2 and the beginning of THE RETURN.[xxv]

When his film DONNIE DARKO (2001) became a sleeper hit, writer-director Richard Kelly was given carte blanch for his next project and fell into the same trap as so many other talented directors who go from hearing "no, man!" to being surrounded by yes-men: indisposed to take out their pruning

shears and kill a few darlings, they dish up something that is overambitious, overlong, overblown, and a critical and/or commercial failure:

What made Kelly's SOUTHLAND TALES (2006) stand out was that the film functioned as part of an interactive multimedia experience: to make heads or tails of the film, you'd first have to read a series of graphic novels.

Homework first, then you may watch a movie.

Would Lynch go overboard? Would Frost pull a Richard Kelly, making it impossible for viewers to understand THE RETURN unless they'd read his book? The release of the novel was postponed a year, and its title changed to *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*. I cast an eye over the tome at my local book peddler and figured this epistolary novel, only peripherally dedicated to the show's characters, wasn't for me. My fiancée, who almost always knows best, went ahead and gave me the book for

my 40th birthday, less than three weeks before THE RETURN premiered. To my surprise and delight, I adored *The Secret History*. It's very much a standalone piece—not essential reading, but certainly a rewarding read in the vein of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*.

I could only hope that Lynch, too, would pleasantly surprise me, but I didn't dare to be anything more than cautiously optimistic. The filmmaker as a young (wo)man is hungrier, keener to impress, and bursting with ideas. Sometimes they peak early, often after years of craft-honing. It is not in the artist's nature to call it quits while they're ahead; they will not retire at 65—the need, the *compulsion*, to keep creating is too big. It happens frequently that an artist's later output bears the mark of one too many trips to the well. As far as I'm concerned, the last stage works and/or swansongs of the following influential filmmakers left something to be desired: Tobe Hooper, Lindsay Anderson, Nicolas Roeg, George A. Romero, Wes Craven, Alfred Hitchcock, Nora Ephron, Stanley Kubrick, Orson Welles, Charlie Chaplin, John G. Avildsen, Akira Kurosawa, Penny Marshall, Bernardo Bertolucci, Miloš Forman, Peter Bogdanovich, Ken Russell, Max Ophüls, Jean-Luc Godard.

What about filmmakers who, as of this writing, have yet to cross the Styx? It's been a while since I stood in awe of these veterans: William Friedkin, Tim Burton, Bernard Rose, John Carpenter, Hal Hartley, Roman Polanski, Francis Ford Coppola, John Landis, Woody Allen, Brian de Palma, Mary Lambert, Kevin Smith, Joe Dante, Wim Wenders, Elaine May, Richard Donner, Robert Zemeckis, Alan Parker, Adrian Lyne, Mary Harron, John Waters, Dario Argento, Oliver Stone, Amy Heckerling, Werner Herzog, Terrence Malick, Peter Greenaway, Lana and Lilly Wachowski, George Lucas, Terry Gilliam.

In the postlude of his 1993 story collection, *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, Stephen King addresses how critics think he is repeating himself when writing short stories about peculiar little towns. (King doesn't earn his keep as a filmmaker, but *all* artists, be they musicians, novelists, or painters, are susceptible to losing their touch.)

> *There's a big difference, it seems to me, between working in traditional forms and self-imitation. Take the blues, for instance. There are really only two classic guitar chord-progressions for the blues, and those two progressions are essentially the same. Now, answer me this - just because John Lee Hooker plays almost everything he ever wrote in the key of E or the key of A, does that mean he's running on auto-pilot, doing the same thing over and over again? Plenty of John Lee Hooker fans (not to mention fans of Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters, Furry Lewis, and all the other greats) would say it doesn't. It's not the key you play it in, these blues aficionados would say; it's the soul you sing it with.*[xxvi]

I disagree with King's comparison. John Lee Hooker playing in the keys of E and A is *style*, not *content*. King writing the umpteenth story about querulous lovers in weird hamlets is *content*; not *style*.

Based upon his post-MULHOLLAND DRIVE, pre-THE RETURN work, would I place Lynch on a list of artists who are past their prime? Tough call. Between 2001 and 2017, he released a wealth of shorts and web series (including the still-running daily weather report), wrote the transcendental meditation book *Catching the Big Fish*, shot commercials and music videos, recorded the solo album *Crazy Clown Time*, directed the concert film DURAN DURAN: UNSTAGED, and treated us to the largely improvised INLAND EMPIRE. Shot on consumer-grade video, it doesn't look too good, but the acting is top-notch, and Lynch keeps things dynamic and compelling. Of all those mentioned projects, I like only INLAND EMPIRE a great deal, but I think of the three-hour piece as video installation art, not a motion picture to be watched in one sitting (which I've done twice).

One last thing that had me concerned about THE RETURN is that the ending of FWWM functioned as a beautiful fare-thee-well to Laura Palmer by letting her find peace in death. The camera registers her newfangled happiness and then pulls back to give her room, to leave her be. (Some fans have shared their belief that, linearly, this scene comes after the denouement of THE RETURN, but I'm dubious. I'll discuss the concept of fan theories at length in chapter 9.) Previous films that ended with bittersweet, fitting adieus to their leads are INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE (Steven Spielberg, 1989) and TRAINSPOTTING (Danny Boyle, 1996). Their late sequels—INDIANA JONES AND THE KINGDOM OF THE CRYSTAL SKULL (Steven Spielberg, 2008), T2: TRAINSPOTTING (Danny Boyle, 2017)—undid those goodbyes and couldn't hold a candle to their predecessors.

My skepticism about THE RETURN intensified.

A good place to end. Indy rides off into the sunset; having burned his bridges, the morally ambiguous Renton begins to smile as he heads into an uncertain future; Laura weeps with joy when she sees the angel that's meant to help her.

THREE

THERE'S FIRE WHERE YOU ARE GOING (ABOUT ONLINE DEBATES)

In 1998, critics and film buffs eagerly awaited the release of Terrence Malick's THE THIN RED LINE. Did his first two films, BADLANDS (1973) and DAYS OF HEAVEN (1978), really cement Malick's reputation or was it his mysterious twenty-year absence that sealed the deal?

THE THIN RED LINE displays all the director's strengths and weaknesses. It's an audiovisual feast, but the storytelling is unfocussed. What's the film about? Who is the central character here? I wasn't surprised to learn that Adrian Brody, onscreen for all of six minutes, was the original leading man.[xxvii] It took an indecisive Malick more than a year of editing to give the film something resembling a narrative.

What further undermines the gaudy film's success is its overreliance on pompous interior monologues: "Oh, my soul. Let me be in you now. Look out through my eyes. Look out at the things you made." The praise Malick received for this goes to show that if your sales pitch contains the right amount of vigor you can sell about anything to anyone. In my opinion, these near-fatal flaws render THE THIN RED LINE an aimless series of images, frustratingly devoid of rhythm, momentum, and narrative urgency.

In early 1999, I was confident that my favorite films of the year were going to be EYES WIDE SHUT and STAR WARS EPISODE I: THE PHANTOM MENACE. Not only was the former Stanley Kubrick's first film in twelve years, but we also knew it'd be his last.[xxviii] The production was shrouded in secrecy, no information about the plot was released, and the rumor mill went into overtime (a particularly vile nugget of fake news had it that Harvey Keitel needed to be replaced with Sydney Pollack after accidentally ejaculating on Nicole Kidman during an orgy scene), and the Kubrick-overseen teasers misleadingly suggested a sexy, playful film.[xxix] [xxx]

Too bad EYES WIDE SHUT turned out to be a mannered piece centered on the less than titillating sexual odyssey physician Bill Harford embarks upon after his wife shared with him her seven-year-itch fantasy. The film is slow but never subtle. Many superfluous, drawn-out scenes, without a compelling narrative to connect them, hurt the pace and aren't interesting in and of themselves. Dr. Bill cajoling a waitress into giving him Nick's address, for example—viewers would have readily accepted that he already knew where his buddy was staying. And Dr. Bill, who constantly folds his arms and displays the annoying tendency to repeat what he's just been told, isn't exactly someone

you'd gladly accompany for just shy of three hours. Add to that the film's predictable pattern of following Dr. Bill to a certain location for a scene that seems to lead to adultery and ends midway with a smash cut to the good doctor en route to another location, Kubrick allowing co-scripter Frederic Raphael to tie up loose ends in a dialogue-heavy sequence, many continuity errors as a result of Kubrick favoring the perfect take over how it functions as part of a scene, and you have yourself a film that is as frustrating as it is fascinating.[xxxi] [xxxii](David Lynch's opinion: "I really love EYES WIDE SHUT. I just wonder if Stanley Kubrick really did finish it the way he wanted to before he died." [xxxiii])

Angles change, patrons in diner change. Doctor Bill (Tom Cruise) killing time in Eyes Wide Shut.

STAR WARS EPISODE 1: THE PHANTOM MENACE was both a belated return of cinema's most successful franchise and the first film George Lucas had directed in twenty-two years. In hindsight, the special editions of the original trilogy, released theatrically two years prior and featuring updated visual effects and "humorous" new footage, should have given the viewer an idea of what to expect.

The special edition of Return of the Jedi *features in-your-face tomfoolery.*

George Lucas insists that THE PHANTOM MENACE, an origin story taking place before the events of STAR WARS EPISODE IV: A NEW HOPE, was youth-geared, but putting a harlequinesque, eight-foot-tall leporid named Jar Jar Binks in a muddled plot about taxes and trade disputes doth not a great children's film make.[xxxiv] There's talk about famine, but we never get to see it. Familiar faces—C3PO, Jabba the Hutt—show up intermittently but often purposelessly; new characters Qui-Gon Jinn and Padmé Amidala are stoic and bland. Jake Lloyd, portraying the wee prodigy who'd eventually become Darth Vader, is cute as a bug's ear but a mediocre thespian. Speaking of Darth Vader, in the original trilogy he was primarily a henchman. "Governor Tarkin, I should've expected

to find you holding Vader's leash," japes Princess Leia at one point. Yes, the villain gained some depth when he was revealed to be Luke Skywalker's father (the first draft of STAR WARS EPISODE V: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, based on Lucas's notes, some awkward dialogue in STAR WARS EPISODE VI: RETURN OF THE JEDI, and the fact that Luke lived with his uncle under his own name, prove this wasn't Lucas's original intention[xxxv]), but making him some sort of fallen angel, prophesized to bring balance to The Force, was a retcon. In the original trilogy, The Force was a mystical energy Jedi could tap into; in the prequels, it was quantifiable, measurable even, by using some doohickey to count the number of microscopic lifeforms—midi-chlorians—in one's bloodstream. The higher the number, the better the Jedi's prospects. Remember Yoda checking how many midi-chlorians Luke had coursing through his veins in THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK to quickly determine whether the kid had what it took? Neither do I.

THE PHANTOM MENACE is an oddly paced piece of cinema, with scenes of excitement sandwiched between plodding filler and exposition. In the sobering 'making of' featurette *The Beginning*, we're reminded of something we tend to forget or ignore: not everything on screen is planned or otherwise intended. Sometimes, during filming, mistakes are made and unforeseen incidents occur (in the case of THE PHANTOM MENACE, sandstorms destroying sets); nip-tucks in postproduction can rectify and shade only so much. Through interviews with cinematographer David Tattersall and co-editor Paul Martin Smith, we also learn that while Lucas took great care during key moments, his use of the camera is often static and most scenes are cut together utilizing basic coverage (close-up, shot/reverse shot, two-shot, master shot).

He's cool, he's always been cool. Jar Jar Binks breaks the fourth wall by smirking at the audience in Star Wars Episode II: Attack of The Clones.

Origin stories are an unfortunate staple of conventional tale-spinning, a writer's yen to reveal what happened "before," oftentimes a sign of a creative draught and/or a dubious attempt to inject the story and its characters with more gravitas. It's why SOLO (Ron Howard, 2018) focused on trivial things Han Solo mentioned in STAR WARS EPISODE IV: A NEW HOPE. It's why River Phoenix showed up as Young Indy in INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE to enlighten us how, in one afternoon, the character sustained a facial scar, obtained his fedora and bullwhip, and developed

ophiophobia. It's why Superhero movies (and their inevitable reboots) need to start with how the costumed battlers gathered their powers. It's why HALLOWEEN's Laurie Strode became Michael Myers's sister and why Michael's bloodthirst was revealed to be the result of a druidic curse. It's why Seymour Skinner from THE SIMPSONS became the imposter Armin Tamzarian.

Now, it's common knowledge that opinions are like assholes: everybody's got one, right? In the pre-internet era, we got confronted with other people's opinions through LTTEs in newspapers, talking heads on television, orators in Hyde Park, proselytizers stopping by to claim they possessed the sole key to God's kingdom, and Uncle so & so's gin-soaked rants about how the earth is flat and autism can be cured with the CD protocol. Courtesy of the world wide web, already no longer the strict domain of geeks but not yet the ubiquitous necessity it would become (who doesn't start their day with checking newsfeeds?), avoiding such folks and their ideas became increasingly difficult in the late 1990s. When I stumbled upon the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), I expected interesting conversations and maybe heated but civilized discussions. How naïve of me. Disliking THE PHANTOM MENACE became acceptable soon enough (it even appeared that fans were united by their shared distaste for the prequel trilogy) but criticizing the more prestigious/highbrow EYES WIDE SHUT and THE THIN RED LINE occasioned ire. (And not exclusively from trolls, those pesky cyberbullies thriving on negative attention.)

Six years after THE THIN RED LINE, Malick released THE NEW WORLD. In 2011, his fifth film, THE TREE OF LIFE, won the Palme d'Or. The experimental drama concerns itself with the lively childhood memories of Jack O'Brien. Extensive montages of teenager Jack butting heads with his disciplinarian father are interspersed with scenes of an adult Jack unmoored in the urban jungle of Dallas. The ever-reliable Sean Penn delivers the goods as adult Jack, but I think that if a lesser-known thespian had played the underused character, his scenes would have ended up on the cutting room floor. Brad Pitt as Pa O'Brien is arguably the best of the bunch. Ambitious but unsuccessful in his pursuit of financial gain, the head of the family vacillates between doting on his boys and taking his own inadequacies out on them. We expect the tension between him and the rebellious Jack to culminate in a fierce confrontation, but it doesn't. Jack doesn't grow up to be an embittered delinquent with daddy issues; he even shrugs off his father's uncomfortable apology with a matter-of-factly "It's *your* house." I applauded the polarizing twenty-minute interlude that covers the birth of the universe and carbon-based life. Not only is it a breathtaking segment that harks back to Stanley Kubrick's masterpiece 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, but it also offers a prolix yet riveting contrast between the temporary and the eternal, the small and the large, the individual and the all.

For my money, THE TREE OF LIFE is a flawed masterpiece. (What did Lynch make of it? "It wasn't my cup of tea." [xxxvi]) On the IMDb message boards, much more crowded than they'd been a decade earlier, passions ran higher than ever before. There were basically two camps: those who proclaimed

it a masterpiece … and those who loathed it. (Tellingly, IMDb retired the message boards in 2017 because they were "no longer providing a positive, useful experience." [xxxvii])

Malick has since become prolific and churned out five more films: TO THE WONDER (2013), KNIGHT OF CUPS (2015), VOYAGE OF TIME (2016), SONG TO SONG (2017), and A HIDDEN LIFE (2019). The tepid write-ups these works received indicate that Malick's output is easier digested in measured doses: give us odd narration and lingering shots of sun-dappled meadows every other year, and they quickly lose their sheen.

Marina (Olga Kurylenko) waxes poetic in To The Wonder.

FOUR

NOW I'M SO CURIOUS
(ABOUT INITIAL RESPONSES TO THE RETURN)

It was both wonderful and strange to hit the streaming service's play button and return to town. I hadn't felt this excited since Windom Earle punctured Caroline's aorta.

Taken out of context, the early scene with a character known as The Giant but credited as "????" was comforting: Cooper, appearing sound of body and mind, still hasn't returned to our realm, but the room's floor pattern insinuates that "????" led him to safer pastures. (We later find out that events aren't necessarily shown in the correct order; this little tête-à-tête could take place between Cooper's request to time-travel and his witnessing Laura's rendezvous with James.)

Cut to the town of Twin Peaks, where the ostracized Dr. Lawrence Jacoby receives a shipment of shovels. After this throwaway scene (the shovel-painting sequence, which is as oddly soothing as an episode of Bob Ross's THE JOY OF PAINTING, should have been our reintroduction to the character), gorgeous Getty Images stock footage of the New York skyline[xxxviii] takes us to a loft where college kid Sam stares intently at a large glass box surrounded by motion detection cameras. Sam is called to the foyer and flirts with barista Tracy. When the security guard goes missing the next night (after viewers have caught up with the Horne Brothers and Lucy), Sam invites Tracy in and tells her it's his job to watch the box and see if something appears inside.

Thusly starts Lynch's improved version of the time-tested horror trope "sex equals death": as soon as Tracy peels off her dress, the box's interior goes pitch black and the faint contours of a naked, female apparition can be detected. Tracy hollers like a seasoned scream queen, and the monster breaks out of the box to turn the youngsters into minced meat.

Not unlike the videotapes Fred and Renee Madison receive in LOST HIGHWAY, the glass box is a McGuffin. No points will be awarded to those stating the obvious: Sam watching a glass box and waiting for something to happen resembles impatient people staring at their TV, demanding to be entertained. (Lynch has denied this was his intention, but I suspect Frost had it in mind.[xxxix])

We then catch up with Cooper's doppelganger, referred to here as Mr. C. No longer the piss-and-vinegar kid we encountered in the S2 finale, he moves and acts with caution. In a fine scene echoing Donna Hayward's visit to the bedbound Mrs. Tremond and her grandson, Mr. C enters a shack where a hillbilly swigs moonshine, a toothless biddy dawdles, a bumbling chucker-out demonstrates

he's ignorant about peripheral vision, and a wheelchaired dwarf and a tall man observe the goings-on in silence.

Now you're just somebody that I used to know.
Kyle MacLachlan cuts a scary figure as Mr. C and shines as at least three other versions of Dale Cooper.

The first scene I disliked was the one where Marjorie Green of Buckhorn, North Dakota, calls the police upon suspecting something might be wrong with her neighbor Ruth. The unremarkable digital photography, bland color-grading, and dodgy acting make it come across as a cheap FARGO knock-off. (Awkward, as every iteration of FARGO is obviously inspired by TWIN PEAKS.) Minutes of "hilarious" stalling pass before the cops find a decapitated female head and a headless male body. The main suspect, high school principal/scuba diving enthusiast Bill Hastings, admits knowing Ruth (they moderated a website about a portal to another dimension—"The Zone") but maintains his innocence.

At the end of *Part 4: …Brings Back Some Memories*, I realized I didn't love THE RETURN as much as I'd hoped. I wasn't even sure if I *liked* it.

It was always a joy to see the credit "directed by David Lynch" in S1-S2. (In just about every case, I already knew he was behind the camera before his name appeared on the screen. Back in those days, it was common practice to list the main cast and crew in the title sequence and superimpose the names of noted guest stars and crew members over the first scene of television episodes. I don't know if this has ever been discussed with Lynch in interviews, but I believe he never superimposes opening credits over scenes of his films for the reason that he finds it distracting. In the first two seasons of TWIN PEAKS, Lynch often worked around this by locking down the camera and withholding action or dialogue until the credits were over. He *does* seem fine with rolling end credits over footage of people performing—see THE RETURN, WILD AT HEART, and INLAND EMPIRE.) The episodes Lynch handpicked to helm were always extra important.[xl] Not just because of their visual flair, but also because often something important and/or terrifying would occur.

One of the things I admired about the original TWIN PEAKS was how Lynch handled the restrictions

of network television. Both Tobe Hooper and Tommy Lee Wallace, directing respectively SALEM'S LOT (1979) and IT (1990), didn't know how to deal with ABC's Standards and Practices department, which dictated what could and what could not be shown or said on their network. The boys' unimaginative solution: place murder scenes at the end of acts, then cut to a commercial break (or, if you're watching these miniseries on home media, a fade to black) right before the moment supreme. When Lynch shot Maddy's murder and Ronette's flashback to Laura's death, he used every trick in the book—acting, lighting, editing, sound effects, suggestive camera positions—to create an almost unbearable level of suspense. How telling that when Lynch was leashed, he created scenes that were scarier than anything he cooked up in THE RETURN. Some have argued that the upped violence in THE RETURN is a sign of the times (or a comment on this), but I believe this romanticizes the past. When I was growing up, we had the nuclear arms race to reckon with, then the gulf war, and then the racial tension brought on by the Rodney King beating. And Lynch, he's always had a knack for showing extreme violence in his feature films: head-crushing and decapitation in WILD AT HEART, Andy's death-by-table and Renee Madison's chopped-up corpse in LOST HIGHWAY, Deputy Cliff Howard's brains pouring out of his skull and Sam Stanley tearing off Teresa's fingernail in FWWM.

The apparent indifference with which Lynch staged THE RETURN's more mundane storylines and expository scenes is disheartening. It's as though he was detached from this material and wanted to rush through them to flex his creative muscles on abstract sequences. Too bad even those sometimes miss the mark. Take, for example, a set piece from *Part 6: Don't Die.* When a child dies after being run over by a truck, his soul can be seen departing the body. The "hit by a vehicle in a flat angle" set piece, popularized by the film FINAL DESTINATION (James Wong, 2000), has been parodied ad nauseam. Second, we get reaction shots of assembled bystanders incapable of acting shocked and saddened. I don't believe, as some have proffered, abrasively so, that Lynch insisted on hammy acting for parodic effect. But, pray, *what* does it lampoon? And why would people who call the scene gut-wrenching even defend it as parodic?

Sound and music have always been of great importance in Lynch's work. His sound design is marked by blowing winds, industrial soundscapes, and preternatural silences; he isn't above using "stingers"—sudden loud sounds to make you jump: a ringing telephone in LOST HIGHWAY, the bum's first appearance in MULHOLLAND DRIVE. His use of music and sound in THE RETURN is as experimental as you can get. He slowed down Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* to accompany the first appearance of the woodsmen and added a sped-up recording of his own voice to a scene featuring The Jumping Man. What surprised many is the near absence of Angelo Badalamenti's incidental music, which was used to great effect in the original show. Music and artificial sounds are almost by design manipulative—by heightening the emotion of the scene, they at the very least nudge the viewer to a certain interpretation of it. Using only ambient sound and/or diegetic music (that is,

music from a source also heard by the characters) can have powerful results, as demonstrated by THE BIRDS (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963), but it's an approach that can easily alienate viewers and give them the sense they're watching something unfinished, as made evident in a reworked scene from E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (Steven Spielberg, 1982).[xli] Sound-wise, Lynch walks a tight rope with THE RETURN. The scene where Hawk, Andy, and Lucy discuss the missing chocolate bunny, is one of the many sequences that felt stale and incomplete without Badalamenti's tunes.

Cinematographer Peter Deming half-jokingly remarked that Lynch would have shot THE RETURN on an iPhone if allowed,[xlii] but they eventually settled on the relatively lightweight Amira camera; no effort was made during the shoot or in postproduction to make the footage approximate the look and texture of celluloid. This and the use of generic coverage for many scenes, make much of THE RETURN look like what the previous seasons didn't: a product intended for the small screen.

Do Lodge spirits age? I would have been more than willing to suspend disbelief considering the actors are decades older now, but Lynch and Frost found a creative way to work around this. Frank Silva (Bob) passed away in 1995, but he makes many appearances in THE RETURN, exactly as we remembered him, through clever use of archive footage and the magic of CGI. I never feared that Silva would be recast. In FWWM Pierre Tremond (grow spurts and prequels don't mix) and Donna Hayward switched actors, but Lynch and Frost knew better than to recast an iconic character enjoyed for decades. Outside of The Black Lodge, Bob was never seen in the flesh, only in dreams and visions of the gifted and the damned, so it makes sense that when he enters our realm, his form is more spectral. (Yes, Bob stepped out of The Lodge in *Episode 27: The Path to the Black Lodge*; note, however, that the episode's script specifies his appearance as a disembodied, floating head.[xliii]) Carel Struyken returns as "The Fireman." It's never made clear if he's the same character from S2. (One of the THE RETURN Blu-ray featurettes does show Struyken rehearsing the line "Do you remember me?" for a scene missing from the final cut.) We've never seen the true form of Mike, only his vessel, Philip Gerard a.k.a. The One-Armed Man, and it makes perfect sense that *he* has aged. Michael J. Anderson did not return as the dwarf/The Arm (I think we all know Anderson and Lynch won't be having lunch again anytime soon[xliv]) and was replaced with a CGI creation resembling both a nervous system and a sycamore tree. Inspired writing, an untimely death, and a falling out have led to a satisfying return of these Lodgers. My favorite has to be Laura('s spirit) appearing as a quadragenarian despite having died as a teenager. We could have been shipped off with a contemptuous excuse like the one used for the deteriorating T-1000 in TERMINATOR: GENYSIS (Alan Taylor, 2015), or no excuse at all, but we're given the "I'm dead yet I live" storyline. On that score, Ray Wise's two-word cameo as Leland Palmer is all the more regrettable—here, there is no reason why a long-dead character('s spirit) got gray about the gills. Senescence happened to Wise, can't be helped.

Film and television have taken us to otherworldly realms before (The Zone in STALKER) and would do so again—The Shimmer in ANNIHILATION, The Further in INSIDIOUS, and The Upside Down in STRANGER THINGS—but The Black Lodge takes the cake. Windom Earle described the otherworldly realm as follows:

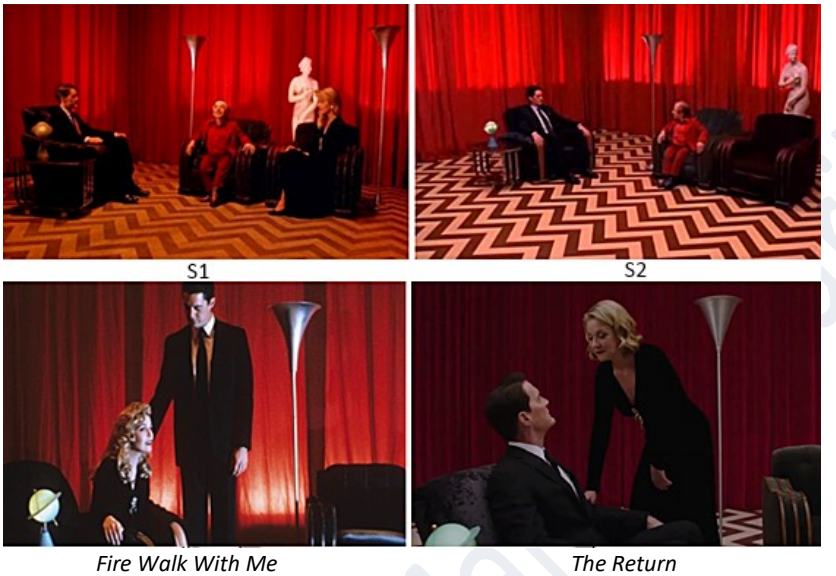
Once upon a time, there was a place of great goodness called the White Lodge. Fawns gamboled there amidst happy laughing spirits. The sounds of innocence and laughter filled the air. When it rained it rained sweet nectar that paralyzed the heart with the desire to live one's life in truth and beauty. Generally speaking, a ghastly place reeking of virtue's sour smell, engorged with the whispered prayers of kneeling mothers, mewling newborns, and fools young and old compelled to do good without reason. But, I am pleased to note, our story does not end in this place of saccharine excess. For there is another place, its opposite, of almost unimaginable power, chock full of dark forces and vicious secrets. No prayers dare penetrate this frightful maw. Spirits there care not for good deeds and priestly invocations. They are as like to rip the muscle from our bones as greet you with a happy g'day. And, if harnessed, these spirits, this hidden land of unmuffled screams and broken hearts, will offer up a power so vast that its bearer might reorder the earth itself to his liking. This place I speak of, is known as the Black Lodge.

In *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*, Dougie Milford has the following to say about The Lodge:

This is the mother of all others and were we ever able to set our eyes on its ultimate nature, we would find it as foreign, incomprehensible and indifferent to us as ours would be to bacterial microbes swimming in a drop of water. These final truths you must never forget: we are utterly incapable of knowing their true intent, and their true intent may not be to wish us well. It may be that they're here to guide or even aid our evolution; it's equally possible we may matter no more to them than those random protozoa in our tap water do to us. In other words, by our own meager moral definitions, they may be both "good" and "evil," and those precious distinctions of ours mean nothing to them. There may even be a "good" and "evil" side at play here, and we, our human race, is the game.[xlv]

The Black Lodge, a nightmarish place where ghosts and supernatural beings speak in garbled non-sequiturs and keep popping up to mess with your head for the hell of it, has never looked the same twice. In the S2 finale, the lodgers have taken a pressure washer to the grimy chevron floor we saw in Coop's original dream sequence. In FWWM, the scarlet curtains seem to be of a lighter, thinner, more wrinkled material. In THE RETURN the curtains have a carmine tint and appear to be made of velvet, with its fibers teased in opposite directions. Distracting and hard on the eyes. Gone are the mysterious light sources behind the curtains. In a scene riffing on the original dream sequence, camera angles and lighting are disappointingly flat—for a second, I thought the actors were sitting in front of a green screen. The same actors who pulled off the "backward speech" so neatly in the original show and FWWM struggle with their lines here.

The Black Lodge is still no Pee-Wee's Playhouse in THE RETURN, but its ability to terrify has been diminished. Overexposure is part of it, and it doesn't help that The One-Armed Man and The Arm spout exposition, seem cooperative, and can be bossed around.



Fire Walk With Me *The Return*

Let's skip ahead to *Part 8: Gotta Light?* When Ray Monroe plugs Mr. C, several woodsmen close in on the doppelganger to perform some kind of healing ritual. These dirty, bearded men are the real deal, not the surplus phonies from FWWM.

You versus the guy she tells you not to worry about.
David Brisbin in Fire Walk With Me *and Jon-Thomas Butler in* The Return.

At the Roadhouse, Nine Inch Nails performs *She's Gone*. We then witness, in black and white, the detonation of the first a-bomb in 1945 New Mexico, and what's either the birth of evil or its migration. The Experiment (who might be the glass box monster) spews out a cluster of what resembles a frog's egg masses (one of these orbs contains the face of Killer Bob) while many woodsmen assemble in front of a convenience store. We know it's a convenience store because the building is labeled as such. This reminded me of the scene in EXISTENZ (David Cronenberg, 1999) where the leads are looking for a country gas station and end up at this generically named retailer:

After more abstract imagery, we move over the waters of a purple sea and enter a fortress (which, by the way, bears more than a passing resemblance to House Artreides from DUNE). Here, a woman (identified in the credits as "Señorita Dido" sways to music until a weird device starts buzzing. The Giant/????/The Fireman enters an auditorium (shot inside Tower Theatre, also used as Club Silencio in MULHOLLAND DRIVE) to replay earlier scenes. He starts to levitate; an orb with Laura Palmer's face emerges from his head and travels to earth. Ten years later, motorists encounter woodsmen on a freeway; a cross between a frog and a moth hatches from an egg and crawls inside a sleeping girl's mouth, and the main woodsman broadcasts an unsettling chant.

In short: we go from a NIN mini-concert to pure abstraction to a 50s monster movie. It's the furthest we ever veered from classic TWIN PEAKS, yes, but it's also one of the most creative, atmospheric, visually exciting things Lynch has ever produced. A few qualms: I thought it unfortunate that Laura Palmer was no longer a MacGuffin interesting enough to get her own movie but an ethereal being on a mission, and I didn't need a Bob origin story. (The One-Armed Man's answer "that cannot be revealed" in answer to Cooper's query about where Bob's from gave me gooseflesh; to me, it meant that Bob existed in the realm of shadow and nightmare. Learning in Episode 29: Beyond Life and Death this realm is the accessible Black Lodge was more than enough information.)

Things are business as usual in *Part 9*: *This is the Chair*. The pace is slow but the strokes are broad; the look is bland and uninspired, almost sterile. Cooper is still cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs, Mr. C still has many errands to run before he can check out his coveted coordinates, and there are still new characters to be introduced (and discarded). At this halfway point, the show's driving point remains nebulous. Easily distracted by dead-end subplots and (at least seemingly) standalone scenes, THE RETURN feels at once bloated and pressed for time.

Some examples of how THE RETURN continued to frustrate me:

- We've seen that Andy and Lucy have more decorative functions—there are competent dispatchers and investigators in a backroom. So why send Andy alone to confront a suspect in the hit-and-run case? Why does Andy allow the guy to fob him off with a lame excuse?

Why isn't this scene followed up in any way? And why don't the other cops have further questions when Andy carries Naido down the hill, like "Hey, Andy, how come you know what's what?" And are they seriously not getting this naked, eyeless, fanged woman medical attention just because Deputy Doofus diagnosed her as "fine physically"?

- Why does Sheriff Frank respond blasé to Hawk's speeches concerning scary maps and black lodges? Does he already know all about the entryway to another plane of existence a few miles down the road, or is he simply humoring his deputy? Either way, those scenes are drier than a Sauvignon Blanc.

- Why do the other cops react surprised when Bobby remarks that Dale Cooper was the last man to see his father, Garland Briggs, alive? Surely the major's death and Cooper's disappearance were investigated back then.

- Detective Mackey is the only one acting sensibly when Bill Hastings loses the top half of his head: he requests backup to deal with what any reasonable person would assume is a sniper situation. What the Blue Rose Task Force does: step into a possible line of fire, casually approach the body, deliver a deadpan pun ("He's dead"), and all but declare "The Zone" unworthy of another visit.

- It never becomes clear why the Task Force continues to hang out in Buckhorn. We don't see them do any riveting police work or anything else that would make waiting for the next installment and catching up with them a chore. No, they sit in chairs surrounded by high-tech equipment, gobble wine, sit in chairs some more, have coffee breaks (sitting in a chair all day long wears one out, I s'pose), and shoot the Diane tulpa (without getting up from their chairs). They don't pack it in until the Vegas boys give them a call to say that Dougie is Coop.

- What's up with Gordon and Albert keeping important information from each other for decades? All this made me think of the Blue Rose Task Force as a day-care group for sapped FBI agents nearing retirement age, not an elite team characterized by superb investigational skills and the occasional derring-do.

In the past, being disappointed by a Lynch project—especially a return to TWIN PEAKS— would have made me question myself: why couldn't I recognize its undeniable brilliance? Feeling like a parishioner going through a crisis of faith, longing to repent and genuflect at Lynch's altar, willing to gaze up at the director with unconditional idolatry, I would have set out to convince myself that I loved THE RETURN. I did hope that revisiting every available episode would make me embrace it.

Nothing doing. I admired the occasional touch of brilliance … but THE RETURN still didn't pull me in.

I remember a playground friend of mine compiling a list of his favorite films and putting MOONWALKER (Jerry Kramer, 1988) in the top slot. The rub is that he had yet to see it for himself. When I pointed this out to him, he turned his eyes heavenward, fixed me with a testy smirk, and riposted: "It stars my idol: Michael Jackson! *Of course* I'll love it!" Preconceived notions color even how professional critics approach texts: Mark Kermode is such a fan of THE EXORCIST that he co-wrote director William Friedkin's 2018 documentary THE DEVIL AND FATHER ARMORTH. Kermode was sincere when he devoted an episode of his podcast to praising THE EXORCIST alumni Linda Blair's filmography.[xlvi] (Let's not mince words, after THE EXORCIST Blair had to make do with taking her clothes off in exploitation fare). Ray Carney, professor of film at Boston University, can't go two minutes without reminding everyone of his unconditional love for cineaste John Cassavetes.[xlvii] The late Roger Ebert habitually gave Lynch's output a thumbs down until 1999's THE STRAIGHT STORY, often calling the director a conman.[xlviii] [xlix] It's no secret that Ebert favored the films of Martin Scorsese. On the rare occasion that Ebert wasn't enthralled with one of Scorsese's pictures, he still gave it a relatively high rating and, like many TWIN PEAKS bloggers are prone to do when mildly criticizing Lynch, always reiterated his appreciation of the director (perhaps to keep readers from crumpling up the article). Curiously, Ebert started his mixed review of Scorsese's THE COLOR OF MONEY with the following:

> *If this movie had been directed by someone else, I might have thought differently about it because I might not have expected so much.*[l]

Certain names—and Lynch's is one of those select few—will get my backside in that theater seat, yes, but once money has exchanged hands and the ceiling lights have dimmed, I'll judge the film on its own merits. David Lynch owes me nothing, that's true, but I owe him nothing either.

Lynch objected vehemently when ABC moved S2 from Tuesday night to Saturday night—he wanted the show to air on weeknights so people would be able to discuss it at work the next morning.[li] Moreover, Lynch thought of Peakies as party people who wouldn't be home on Saturday nights.[lii] I distrust such generalizations; I think TWIN PEAKS was enjoyed by all kinds. However, going by myself and the fans I know (both in real life and online), the average Peakie is more of a "still waters run deep" type. Introverted, shy. They're also cordial and solicitous … but, and here's the nub of the matter, emotion governs rational thought when it comes to Lynch and TWIN PEAKS. Between the announcement and the airing of THE RETURN, this hypersensitive disposition already reared its head online. In the comment sections of "Lynch on The Tonight Show" YouTube videos,

the angry consensus seems to be that host Jay Leno is an idiotic jester who doesn't deserve to be in the same room as Lynch.[liii] [liv] Never mind that THE TONIGHT SHOW is variety entertainment, not newsmagazine; and forget that Lynch and Leno have been Transcendental Meditation buddies for ages.

I'm your friend, always.
Jay Leno, Jerry Seinfeld, George Shapiro, Russel Brand, and Lynch at the DLF comedy night.

Whereas many fans take umbrage with journalists and interviewers approaching Lynch with a note of levity, the man himself enjoys having fun with his reputation as the Czar of Bizarre. He appeared as "The Knowledgeable One" in the Spanish short film PEIXE VERMELHO (Andreia Vigo, 2009) to explain that there's no such thing as a red herring. He also voiced himself in the 2016 FAMILY GUY episode *How The Griffin Stole Christmas*. (After crawling out of a chimney, Lynch presents a young boy with a severed finger and says: "Don't look away; let the fear wash over you." When the boy says he doesn't understand, Lynch tells him that's the whole point.) He also voiced Bartender Gus (whose physical appearance and personality are modeled after Lynch's) in THE CLEVELAND SHOW, and he videotaped himself stuffing the worn panties of a davidlynch.com message board member in his mouth. In the INLAND EMPIRE home media featurette *David Lynch Cooks Quinoa*, Lynch even parodies his trademark hand gesturing by adding comical sound effects.

He's here all week, try the plateau de fruits de mer!

Despite this, Peakies take Lynch very seriously and even tend to interpret his truisms about matters great and small[lv] as profound statements worthy of social media shares (with some comments expressing the wish he'd run for president).

Many Peakies aren't above using tired, fallacious, and sometimes downright puerile responses when "debating" naysayers:

- Let's see *you* make art. You're just jealous because you've never done anything meaningful in your life! If you don't like it, just turn off your television and shut up!

In other words, people are entitled to a negative opinion of something only if they so happen to work in the same branch and have proven to be at least equally good at it. Do these commentators practice what they preach? Of course not—all is fair in love and war.

- If you don't like THE RETURN, stick to films by [hack director] or go watch [random sitcom]!

This illogical statement makes the odd presumption that if someone doesn't like a particular project, they have no love at all for arthouse cinema.

- Hold your kvetching about the show until September, when you've seen all 18 parts.

Ah, but by that specious rationale, lavishing praise on the show after the first couple of episodes was equally premature.

- You just want THE RETURN to be like the old show.

This poignant statement echoes a remark Robert Henri made in *The Art Spirit*, one of David Lynch's favorite books:

> *[Audiences] are outraged if they do not find what they expect. Such people want peace -- they want no new sensations, and they want nothing that is hard to get.*[lvi]

I tend to agree with Henri, but a little nuance is in order regarding TWIN PEAKS. We've carried a torch for the original show all these decades because we loved it for what it was, warts and all. TWIN PEAKS never represented easy viewing—it demanded the viewer's undivided attention and dealt with incest and filicide. Hating THE RETURN just because it's different is nonsense, but so is loving it for that exact same reason.

If you take something that has been loved exactly the way it was and change it, a little resistance should be expected.

Case in point.

Repudiating expressions of dislike eliminates the need for substantive arguments, but what if it comes to aspects of THE RETURN that some viewers considered *problematic*?

FIVE

YOU DON'T CALL A WOMAN LIKE THAT A GIRL (ABOUT RACE & GENDER, REPRESENTATION & EQUALITY)

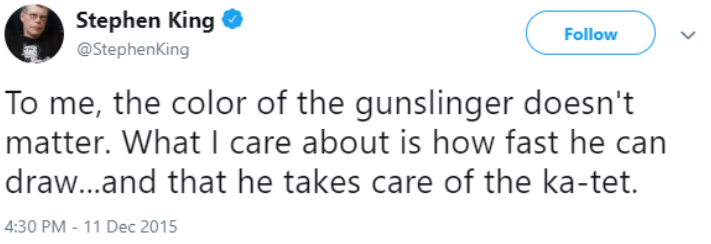
The demand for more diversity on both sides of the camera has become more pressing in recent years. TV networks and film studios try to meet that demand in their own way and, predictably, not everyone in the audience is a happy camper.

For the stage play *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child*, the producers cast black actress Noma Dumezweni as Hermione Granger. Fans were divided, but J.K. Rowling publicly applauded the decision. (Let's cut the bull, what else could she have done?)

But let's take a look at the sketch Rowling drew when she was writing the first installment of the saga: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Hermione is white and Dean Thomas (renamed from Gary) is black.

When black actor Idris Alba was cast as THE DARK TOWER's Roland, a character known as

Caucasian for more than three decades in Stephen King's source novels, the author stood behind it. (What else could he have done?)



Never mind that Roland being a privileged white man was of great importance in the books as it drew the ire of black character Susannah.

Us-against-them, either-you-adore-something-or-hate-it, fact-check-only-if-we-disagree-with-something attitudes are especially prevalent on the world wide web, for it is the realm where double standards reign supreme, differing opinions are met with pooh-poohing and combative rhetoric, personal morals and values are inconsistent, few can resist skipping rungs on the ladder of inference,[lvii] and which has yet to figure out its rules of conduct.[lviii] [lix]

Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) deals in absolutes.
Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith *(George Lucas, 2005)*

I think that we as a society have some fine-tuning to do and should cut back on responding in kneejerk fashion. There are YouTube videos of people throwing out expensive razors in response to Gillette ads about toxic masculinity;[lx] [lxi] Facebook posts calling for a Starbucks boycott on account of the company's holiday cup designs;[lxii] Twitter tantrums regarding a Caucasian girl showing off her qipao;[lxiii] angry film reviews lambasting the flawed but bona fide film drama GIRL (Lukas Dhont, 2019) as "trans trauma porn" in part because a cisgender man portrays a transgender character;[lxiv] blogs reminding the world, immediately after the singer's passing, that David Bowie was accused of rape in 1987 and had sex with underage groupies in the 1970s.[lxv]

In the case of the aforementioned topic—changing a fictional character's race—I think it's imperative to take a closer look at the *why* before we lose our heads. Was the change a creative decision? Did the folks from Marketing wave stats around and declare it a box office no-brainer?

Did the studio try to placate parts of the demographic? Simply changing the character's hue and nothing else, as was the case in both the Harry Potter stage play and THE DARK TOWER, is what psychiatrist Frantz Fanon described as cultural assimilation in his 1952 book *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* ("Black Skin, White Masks").[lxvi] Fanon argued that, as a person of color, his native cultural origin was rejected in favor of the mother country's culture.

When the white, thirtyish Jackie Burke from Elmore Leonard's novel *Rum Punch* became the black quadragenarian Jackie Brown in the 1997 film adaptation, director Quentin Tarantino understood that Brown's background, struggles, and stakes would differ from Burke's. The following line of dialogue from the film drives this home: "If I was a 44-year-old black woman desperately clinging on to this one shitty little job that I was fortunate enough to get, I don't think that I had a year to throw away."

What to think of Dr. Who as a woman in the 11th series? The good doctor is a centuries-old extraterrestrial humanoid whose abilities include generating a new, sometimes older, sometimes younger body (with, to a certain extent, a different personality), so it was only a matter of time before it'd take on a female appearance. If one character is tailor-made to be portrayed by actors of any race, color, and sex, it's Dr. Who. So ignore pesky naysayers and proceed surprising and delighting us, Aunty Beeb!

When it comes to diversity in TWIN PEAKS, it has been stressed that we shouldn't forget that the most prominent of the few black characters who do appear in the original show is an authority figure: FBI agent Roger Hardy, a Mark Frost creation sent to town to suspend Cooper on suspicion of drug trafficking.[lxvii] But why expect anything less from a show where every other adult character is an entrepreneur, a judge, a lawyer, a doctor, or a law enforcer? I'd say it's more interesting that Hardy is the bureau's sole straight arrow: he doesn't gush about pie or coffee, isn't belligerent, has good hearing, and favors suits over skirts.

What about other minorities? Tommy "Hawk" Hill (Michael Horse, of Yaqui descent) is the burg's most likable, competent, reliable cop. Too bad he stays a sidekick without his own storyline.

"Him kept tossing out snails." Michael Horse and David Lynch (plus a cowboy and a Frenchman) on the set of … Oops, wrong photo, wrong collaboration. Sorry.

There's Josie Packard (Chinese American Joan Chen), heir of the Packard sawmill. Her English is funny ("Pete, push the plug!") and she ends up as an all-purpose house slave.

We also get fleeting appearances from Ron Taylor as wrestling coach Buck Wingate and, in FWWM, Calvin Lockhart as The Electrician.

Since I believe that cultural texts are products of their time/reflections of the era in which they were made, I do not endorse reevaluating fiction from decades ago using current sensibilities, so let's give S1 and S2 a break and move on to THE RETURN. Even though a large chunk of the show takes place in metropolitan Las Vegas, it knows little diversity.

In THE RETURN, Lieutenant Cynthia Knox reports to Ernie Hudson's Colonel Davis. Since Knox is the one doing the fieldwork, Hudson's role amounts to little more than ~~tokenism~~ a cameo.

Minorities in a position of power. Ernie Hudson as Col. Davis and Clarence Williams III as FBI agent Roger Hardy.

The African American with the biggest role in THE RETURN is guest star Nafessa Williams, appearing in two episodes as Jade. Is she in a position of power? That depends on whether you regard sex work as degrading or empowering. The moment she's fulfilled her duties as a Magical Negro[lxviii] by giving Cooper two rides and putting his Great Northern room key in a mailbox, it's curtains for the kindhearted Jade.

Nafessa Williams as Jade and Nae Yūki as Naido in The Return.

And then there's Naido (the Japanese Nae Yūki), whose eventual fate reminded me of S2's Mr.

Tojamura/Catherine Martell storyline, but also of a racist remark from Stanley Kubrick's 1987 FULL METAL JACKET.

I'm not implying that Frost and Lynch are racists. I do, however, understand and respect that the gents' innocuous disinterest in a multicultural dramatis personae is disappointing to some viewers.

Lynch's stance on women is harder to defend. In a post on one of the TWIN PEAKS Facebook groups, a female fan brought to attention the objectification, verbal aggression, and sexually charged violence befalling the women of THE RETURN: Tracy is stark naked during her death scene; Darya is in her unmentionables when Mr. C taunts, beats, and shoots her; Stephen physically intimidates Becky; Richard Horne gropes a terrified Roadhouse patron ("I'm gonna laugh when I fuck you, bitch!") and later call his grandmother, Sylvia, a "cunt" before strangling her; the police find Naido completely naked; a trucker says to Sarah: "I'm gonna rip your lesbo titties off"; Stephen tells Gersten: "I like your cunt"; Candie, Mandie, and Sandie seemingly dedicate their every breathing moment tending to the Mitchum Brothers in heels and carnivalesque waitress uniforms; both Diane Evans and Audrey Horne are rape victims; Ike stabs Lorraine to death and proceeds to murder a female co-worker; Jade sits fully naked next to the fully dressed Dougie.

The fan, far from alone in her observations, was respectful and articulate, not a haranguer seeking out things to be offended by, but many wouldn't stand for this "blasphemy": roughly two dozen comments swept her criticism aside with Diane's favorite phrase: "Fuck off." One guy wrote, "David Lynch is an equal-opportunity character killer. Unfair of these women online to suggest he's a misogynist."[lxix] [lxx] [lxxi]

Calling THE RETURN egalitarian in its selection of casualties oversimplifies matters. Even though Lynch's films often *do* pass the Bechdel test[lxxii] (a cockeyed, non-committal way to measure gender bias in stories), the man clearly favors his young heroines pretty as a picture, high-heeled, red-lipped, anguished, often subordinate to male partners and authoritarians (parental figures, employers), and in various states of nakedness. When FWWM was announced, 14-year-old me wrung his hands in excitement and said to himself: "What with Lynch directing, we'll get to see Laura Palmer's boobs!"

We would indeed. Upon reading in a magazine that MULHOLLAND DRIVE's rejected pilot episode would be retooled as a motion picture, I wondered how soon into the new material the female leads would disrobe. (Answer: within a minute.) I wasn't fazed by the fact that Lynch had agreed to direct a pregnancy test ad on the grounds that it'd involve the psychological torture of a young woman.[lxxiii] I predicted correctly that Emily Stofle would flash her breasts in Lynch's web series OUT YONDER, I took it as a given that "Suzy" was going to rip off her shirt completely in Lynch's video for the song *Crazy Clown Time*,[lxxiv] and it didn't surprise me that Lynch had requested Mark Frost and Harley Peyton, writers of S2 episode *Variations on Relations*, to include a scene where Gordon Cole gets to smooch Shelly.[lxxv]

In Lynch's work, romances are usually skin-deep and involve adultery or any form thereof: they're motivated by carnal desire and physical attraction, not mutual interests or other compatibilities. In his photography books (*Nudes* and *Digital Nudes*), he showcases the unblemished bodies, but seldom the faces, of exclusively slim white women. His provocative mixed media pieces[lxxvi] or statements made in interviews don't hint at him using his female subjects to censure society's treatment of women either. My lack of interest in Lynch's private life, his political views, and his love for Transcendental Meditation (or his affiliations with Mehmet Öz , a.k.a. Dr. Oz, and Alex Jones[lxxvii] [lxxviii]) notwithstanding, the 2018 autobiography *Room to Dream* reveals that Lynch's fascination with the courting phase has caused him to hopscotch from one romantic partner to the next. He was still with Isabella Rossellini when he started seeing Mary Sweeney in secret, and he abruptly broke off all ties with the former by telling her over the phone that he never wanted to see or hear from her again. *Room to Dream* also suggests that Lynch is pretty much estranged from his current wife, Emily Stofle.[lxxix] (I'd better not remind the reader here that Lynch was among the signatories urging the immediate release from prison of cinematic legend and statutory rapist Roman Polanski.[lxxx])

THE RETURN addresses Lynch's character Gordon Cole's frowned-upon partiality for younger female agents in a scene featuring David Duchovny's previously cross-dressing DEA agent and now transgender Chief of Staff Denise Bryson (another minority in a position of power, albeit one created by Frost alone[lxxxi]), but self-awareness doesn't mitigate the issue at hand.

Personally, I don't much mind the way Lynch treats his female characters—as long as there's no pretense that it's done to expose an issue he's concerned with. As Anne Bilson wrote in an article for The Guardian:

Horror movies like to place their characters in peril, and their almost exclusively male directors invariably view women as more vulnerable, more easily terrorized than their male counterparts, fair game. 'You fear more for her than you would for a husky man,' said Brian De Palma.[lxxxii]

Needless to say, this vulnerability is amplified if the women wear revealing outfits or nothing at all.

Left to right: Marion Crane (Janet Leigh/Marli Renfro) in Psycho *(Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), Rose Elliott (Irene Miracle) in* Inferno *(Dario Argento 1980), Kathy (Elizabeth Cox) and Lisa (Suzanne Snyder) in* Night of the Creeps *(Fred Dekker, 1986), Jay Height (Maika Monroe) in* It Follows *(David Robert Mitchell, 2014), Liz Blake (Nancy Allen) in* Dressed to Kill *(Brian De Palma, 1980), Martha MacIsaac as Paige in* Last House on the Left *(Dennis Iliadis, 2009), Lynda Van Der Klok (P.J. Soles) in* Halloween *(John Carpenter, 1978), Allison Miller (Alexandra Daddario) in* Bereavement *(Stevan Mena, 2010), and Sheryl Lee as Laura Palmer in FWWM.*

Those who *do* find the way THE RETURN deals with women and minorities objectionable should be able to share their opinion without being subjected to aggression, ridicule, or instant dismissal from those who opt to be selectively ignorant and interpret troubling aspects of the show in ways that are harmonious with their progressive convictions.

SIX

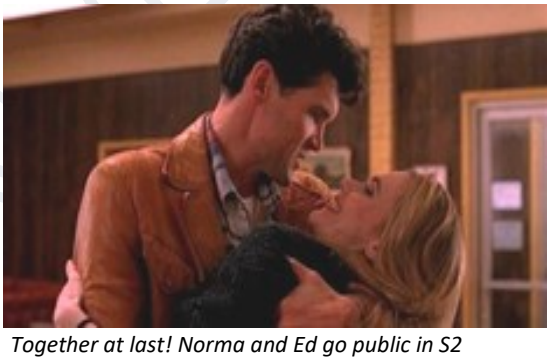
I'VE BEEN LOVING YOU TOO LONG (ABOUT OLD FRIENDS AND NEW ACQUAINTANCES)

The original TWIN PEAKS cut back and forth between multiple storylines that were, to one degree or another, connected to Laura Palmer. It made us queasy as we knew that even someone as lovable as Big Ed Hurley might be the killer. (In an early draft of an S2 episode, Big Ed indeed is the one possessed by Bob.[lxxxiii])

In THE RETURN, the locals we already know have no traditional storylines. Many of them are reintroduced to us early on, only to disappear for many consecutive episodes; others don't show up until late in the proceedings, sometimes no more than once.

What I like about this approach, these little glimpses of what their lives are now, is that it eschews artificial exposition: There is no "Last week, Doc and I had a good laugh about the time he punched my lights out!" or "Remember Pete? It's so sad he died." There's no "Today's the anniversary of Leo's death" either, but we *do* see a chain with a wedding band around Shelly's neck—something not uncommon for widows.

What I dislike is that what we get of the original show's locals comes across as perfunctory. Take Big Ed, who doesn't make an appearance until *Part 13: What Story is that, Charlie?* We don't even know what his relationship status is until his first and last scene with Nadine in *Part 15: There's Some Fear in Letting Go*. What follows is a rehash of what we already got in S2: a freshly unshackled Ed enters the RR Diner to scoop up Norma (who here spends the majority of her scenes doing paperwork).



Together at last! Norma and Ed go public in S2

Together at last … again! Norma and Ed go public in The Return.

Carl Rodd, a supporting character from FWWM, relocated his trailer park to Twin Peaks, but he's

not quite the same man. Unless I miss my guess, Lynch wanted to work with Harry Dean Stanton again but deemed it distracting to cast him in a new role. It's always wonderful to see Stanton, but he doesn't have much to do or contribute.

When Michael Ontkean refused to come out of retirement to reprise his role of Harry Truman, Michael Horse's Hawk should have been made sheriff. Many scenes set up Hawk as a key player in whatever will happen, but the character suffers a fate not dissimilar from Dick Halloran's in Stanley Kubrick's 1980 horror classic, THE SHINING. Hawk doesn't get axed to death by a maniacal Jack Nicholson, but he does end up a clueless bystander when things come to a head.

Jerry Horne, high as a kite, gets lost in the woods and witnesses (without consequence or any sort of follow-up) Richard Horne's death. His "story" ends when Ben receives a call from the police that his brother has been found safe and sound. Okay, then.

Denise Bryson (David Duchovny) returns for just one scene. It's good to see her, but a conversation that should have been about Cooper's arrest quickly becomes a farcical back and forth.

David Bowie declined to make an appearance as Philip Jeffries (few knew how ill the legendary singer was at that point), but he did give Lynch his blessing to reuse footage from FWWM.[lxxxiv] For new scenes, Lynch made Jeffries a (man in a) machine.

Where is my handle? Here is my spout. "Phillip Jeffries" in The Return.

Fan-favorite Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn) makes her belated entrance in a humdrum scene where she and her husband, the vertically challenged Charlie, talk for ten minutes straight about characters we don't know (and don't get to know). Audrey is no longer the strong-willed romantic but a harpy who cusses like a sailor on shore leave. Thank God the monotonous storyline runs for only a couple of episodes. At least its open ending is poignant.

Blu-ray featurettes about the production show a grateful and humble Fenn, but the actress came across as displeased in a series of tweets before THE RETURN had hit TV screens.

Without social media, it's unlikely that we'd been aware of behind-the-scenes drama so soon.

Statements made by Fenn suggest that she disliked what was originally written for her character (supposedly the one-off scene where Richard attacks Johnny Horne and what is now Sylvia). In response, Lynch cooked up something else and shot it in just a couple of days.[lxxxv]

Some memorable new characters:

- Wally Brando (Michael Cera). Lucy and Andy's son shows up at the sheriff's station to say hello to his parents. The scene is played for laughs, and laugh I did.

- Assassins Chantal and Hutch Hutchins. I sort of liked the couple and the Tarantino-esque way they're disposed of.

- The Mitchum Brothers. Your mileage may vary. Seeing as they would have killed Dougie had he not brought pie, I'd say Candy is just being airheaded again when she remarks Rodney and Bradley have hearts of gold.

However, like many veterans, most rookies are given short shrift. They show up so infrequently (and often disappear unceremoniously) that we never get to know them, let alone have a real chance to care for their plights:

- In Frost's book(s), Special Agent Tamara Preston is a hyper-intelligent and wry detective; in the show, as brought to life by singer Christa Bell, she goes by the cutesy diminutive Tammy, dresses unpractically (Lynch selected the character's wardrobe[lxxxvi]), sashays instead of walks, and has her derrière checked out by Cole and Albert (they hate to see her go but love to watch her leave). Her big scene, the one we were told would explain why Cole vouched for her, consists of a garden-variety interrogation.

- When newcomer Becky Burnett's first scene ended with a loving close-up of her face as she rides high, fans speculated aloud that this troubled young woman, married to moocher Stephen, would become this century's Laura Palmer.[lxxxvii] That didn't happen. We see Becky only three more times: when she drives away in a huff to confront homewrecker Gersten (one of the many characters never mentioned by name), receives a stern talking-to from her parents (Bobby and Shelly), and bickers with Stephen. After that half-baked, fragmented shaggy dog story, it's exeunt Becky. Stephen might or might not shoot himself in the woods. Yeah, real edge-of-your-seat stuff.

- Beverly Paige (notable actress Ashley Judd) flirts with Ben; we follow her home to her sickly husband once. That's all we get.

- Red, the town's new drug dealer. He humiliates Richard Horne, shows up at the RR Diner to get hot and heavy with Shelly … and that's that.

- The new sheriff, Harry Truman's brother Frank. I love actor Robert Forster, but I thought his character was underwritten and frustratingly stoic. (The less said about Frank's wife, Doris, the better.)

- Deputy Chad Broxford is crooked at heart and mean on top. The other cops, already up to speed, book him. Done and done!

- The drunk prisoner. For some reason he never sobers; his puss-leaking facial lacerations require immediate medical attention, but no one gives him the time of day.

- Duncan Todd, a Vegas mobster hired by Mr. C to assassinate Dougie Jones. He never gets up from his chair.

- Lorraine, hired by Duncan Todd to hire hitmen (that description alone is a testament to the character's superfluous nature), makes up for her lack of personality with a catchy theme song. Do we feel for her when she dies? No, we don't. Perhaps that's why her death is so

visceral, to at least elicit a primal response from the viewer.

- Diane Evans('s tulpa). Her home decoration and dress sense are informed by Asian cultures (~~cultural appropriation!~~ foreshadowing!) and lend the character a semi-comical vibe. Her catchphrase: "Fuck you." (I prefer the inspired insults of the original show: *I've had about enough of morons and half-wits, dunces, dullards, and dumbbells. And you, you chowderhead yokel, you blithering hayseed,* you *have had enough of* me*!??*)

- Bill Hastings, played by an excellent Matthew Lillard. He rakes his fingers through his crewcut when stressed and chokes up when talking about his missed opportunity to catch some rays. Poor Bill, we hardly knew ye.

- Freddie Sykes. Lynch was so amused by likable YouTube comic Jake Wardle that he put him in THE RETURN, repurposing an idea he once had for Jack Nance (which shouldn't be interpreted as "for Pete Martell"). Fitted with a green glove that gives him superhuman strength, the Londoner dukes it out with Bob.

- Constance Talbot, a Buckhorn coroner. She's out after breaking bread with Albert (as seen in a single wide shot with inaudible dialogue).

- Monica Bellucci appears as Monica Bellucci in one of Cole's Monica Bellucci dreams. The Italian actress meets with the deputy director in Paris and intones what the latter calls "the ancient phrase": *We're like the dreamer who dreams and then lives inside the dream.* After a pause, Bellucci adds: "But who's the dreamer?" Forgive me for giggling at the phrase "the ancient phrase," the ancient phrase itself, and its subordinate clause. If we're exactly like the dreamer who dreams and lives inside the dream, does it matter who Dreamer Zero is?

- The character known as "Drugged Out Mother." She has no lines other than the repeated cry "One one nine," which is 911 in reversed order. Her dramaturgic purpose remains opaque; she appears briefly in three episodes (one instance reuses earlier footage). More on her later.

Down at the Roadhouse, characters we've never seen before and will never see again tittle-tattle about characters we've never seen and won't get to see. Even more so than those of many returning locals and other new characters, their isolated appearances are story-within-story rather than subplots. Stories-within-stories usually function as parables or intertextual commentary. Dave Gibbons and Alan Moore's 1986 limited comic book series *Watchmen* featured splash pages and columns of the fictional comic *Tales of the Black Freighter*, showing us that the characters of *Watchmen*

are every bit as obsessed with fictional worlds as we are. The 1988 adaptation of Jay McInerney's novel *Bright Lights Big City* kept us up-to-date about a comatose newborn's struggle to live (a clear nod to the main plot's protagonist's attempts to kick his drug habit and stop pining for his ex-wife); Ben Stiller's 1996 film THE CABLE GUY showed us news updates of "The trial that keeps America captivated," involving a jealous man, Sam Sweet, accused of having killed his famous twin brother. (The eventual verdict coincides with the main plot's lead character besting his pal-turned-tormentor.) Even the original TWIN PEAKS had a story-within-a-story: the soap opera *Invitation to Love*, overflowing with betrayals, clandestine business deals, conniving doubles, and baddies taking a couple in the chest (a clip Leo watched in a daze after Hank Jennings shot him).

Much has been made of how names mentioned during the Roadhouse scenes hint at a connection with the Audrey Horne storyline, but in the world of TWIN PEAKS many people have the same or a similar name: Bob, Mike, Philip, Richard, Linda, Jade, Bill, Douglas, etc. Whatever Lynch was going for with these flavorless vignettes (I'm ready to wager they were entirely his creation), they have nothing on MY DINNER WITH ANDRE (Louis Malle, 1981).[lxxxviii]

S1 and S2 underlined how strong the town's community was. Cooper summed it up perfectly in a scene from *Episode 3: Rest in Pain*:

I've only been in Twin Peaks a short time, but in that time I have seen decency, honor and dignity. Murder is not a faceless event here. It is not a statistic to be tallied up at the end of the day. Laura Palmer's death has affected each and every man, woman and child because life has meaning here, every life. That's a way of living I thought had vanished from the Earth but it hasn't. It's right here in Twin Peaks.

There's no togetherness in THE RETURN—we're not privy to how the people of Buckhorn respond to Ruth's death; Bill Hastings doesn't get a wake; the dead often remain nameless statistics to be tallied up at the end of the day. This is, in theory, as fascinating a concept as the hostile stance the denizens of Deer Meadow took in FWWM. Too bad THE RETURN doesn't do much with what it suggests about small-town isolation and loneliness. For example, we only get to *hear* about teen prostitution and local problems with Chinese designer drugs. It makes for aloof subplots whose barely sketched-in characters seldom display genuine, recognizable human emotions; existing in their roped-off little corner, they say "hi" and "bye" without leaving a lasting impression.

SEVEN

CALL FOR HELP
(ABOUT DOUGIE JONES AND DALE COOPER'S RETURN)

Your appreciation of THE RETURN may hinge on whether you're on board with Special Agent Dale Cooper spending most of his screen time as the feebleminded Dougie Jones.

Thy cup runneth over…or does it?[lxxxix] *Kyle MacLachlan as "Dougie" in* The Return.

It wasn't the first time that a TWIN PEAKS character underwent a personality change: Leo Johnson woke up from his coma a drooling invalid; Nadine Hurley came out of her vegetative state believing she was a teenaged cheerleader. The latter's storyline was played for laughs, and it *did* make me chuckle, but it misbecame the world of TWIN PEAKS we'd come to know: I still doubt if the student body would have gone along with the therapeutic ruse; the likes of Bobby might have deemed Nadine a grotesqueness. ("Why's Mr. Monkey Wrench's harpy in my algebra class?" I can picture the Briggs scion demanding.) Such silliness marred much of S2, and, surprisingly, THE RETURN dishes it up in spades.

Lowbrow stoner comedy in The Return.

In any case, Mr. C has "manufactured" yet another version of Cooper: hapless insurance agent

Douglas "Dougie" Jones. The idea is that when Mr. C is to return to The Black Lodge after a 25-year leave, he'll send Dougie instead. (Mr. C has orchestrated or allowed Dougie to marry Diane's estranged half-sister. Maybe the evil doppelganger was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's story *The Purloined Letter* when he hid Cooper's double in plain sight.) The plan comes together, but right after Dougie disappears (leaving behind a wife and a son), the real Dale Cooper comes out of an electrical socket. This means of transportation hasn't been kind to his brain: he's more or less a helpless infant in a grown man's body. Prostitute Jade mistakes Cooper for Dougie and sends him home (where he arrives after "accidentally" winning $200,000 during a pit stop at a casino).

I enjoyed Dougie-Coop's slot machine hijinks, but none of his other buffoonery—some of it involving Dougie's boss, Bushnell Mullens, and the criminal Mitchum Brothers—made me laugh.

Mark Frost has likened Dougie to Odysseus.[xc] Odd, considering Coop-as-Dougie is a passive, taciturn marionette: little of what he does, or doesn't do, has any bearing on the narrative's outcome. Cooper's life as Dougie remains in a state of deadlock until the plot dictates that he needs to snap out of it. (Cooper's awakening-by-electrocution comes at a moment when Dougie and Jane "Janey-E" Jones's marriage is in a good place, but this seems more incidental than causal). Others have compared Dougie-Coop to Chance from BEING THERE (Hal Ashby, 1979). But that movie, based upon Jerzy Kosinski's novel, is a political satire featuring an intellectually disabled groundskeeper whose simple-minded soliloquies about gardening were construed as profound political metaphors. Dougie-Coop, on the other hand, commonly only repeats what's said to him, and cannot even walk in a straight line without assistance. No matter how many "spells" the real Dougie Jones has had in the past, his condition and altered physique should elicit immediate worry *and* suspicion, but Janey-E is initially annoyed by his behavior and then aroused by his fit body (resulting in a played-for-laughs sex scene that ignores the potentially troubling fact that Dougie was in no state to give consent). In a last-ditch effort to make Dougie-Coop and thereby the majority of THE RETURN work for myself, I tried to draw a parallel between him and Antoine Roquentin (from Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist novel *La Nausée*), but this made me appreciate Dougie-Coop even less.

In terms of comedy and believability, the Dougie storyline veers closer to WEEKEND AT BERNIE'S (Ted Kotcheff, 1989), that unfortunate box office juggernaut revolving around two woebegone interns who, for silly reasons, need to parade their boss's stiff around and pretend it still has a pulse. And, wouldn't you know, the sham pays off: no-one notices Bernie's body and spirit are far apart.

Now that we're on the subject of one-joke comedies, it might be that Dougie finds his origin in Frost and Lynch's unproduced 1988 screenplay *One Saliva Bubble,*[xci] one of those "body switch" type deals that were briefly in vogue decades ago. In *One Saliva Bubble*, manly men trade bodies with Dagwood Bumsteads, and factory workers become pencil pushers (who show up at the office in

garish green suits). With this and such shows as ON THE AIR and DUMBLAND in mind, I have an idea Dougie is above all an expression of Lynch and Frost's affection for low-brow comedy and slapstick.

Courtesy of a fork and a wall outlet, Cooper becomes his old self again in *Part 16: No Knock, No Doorbell*. (We knew he eventually had to: the teasers contained brief glimpses of "traditional Coop"—how Lynchian that they turned out to be from the last two episodes.)

"You are awake," croaks The One-Armed Man through an astral service hatch in the hospital Cooper has been rushed to. "One-hundred percent," comes our lead's reply. "Finally," The One-Armed Man quips. Audiences worldwide caused a minor seismic shock by jumping up and down in joy. I didn't partake in this bit of jazzercise. I had beef. *Finally*, Gerard? Is that what you said? Couldn't you have *told* Cooper who he is in place of staggering about, arm raised in a gesture that calls to mind the Nazi salute, and saying "Don't die" over and over? If you couldn't, fine, but the only reason I can think of is plot convenience.

Even if 25 years in The Lodge didn't feel like it, the realization of having lost so much time would have left a mark. But THE RETURN's Coop is a larger-than-life comic book hero who goes from moronic to 100% himself without giving the viewer so much as a soupçon of how the ordeal affected his psyche.

Declared fit for discharge by the world's most careless physician and ready to burn rubber, Coop says to Bushnell: "I *am* the FBI." I didn't get moist-eyed; I had more beef. You're the FBI, Coop? No, you're not. You've been out of the loop for over two decades, so you can't just jump back in the saddle and wave your badge around. Furthermore, some government agencies think you and Mr. C are one and the same. Getting yourself legal representation at this point is no luxury by any means. And seeing as you just commissioned a new Dougie to give the Joneses their happily ever after, what sense does it make to reveal your true identity to Dougie's associates? Why don't you go on alone once in Washington state ("I'll take it from here. Thanks, Mitchums; see you back in Vegas")? This way, the new Dougie won't be plied with questions like "What are you doing here at the office? I thought you were FBI!" or "Holy shit, Cooper, you're here? We just stopped by the house to see how Janey-E and Sonny Jim are holding up. We thought you were a goner when you and that Diane lady and the man with the gray elevated hair disappeared into thin air, and now you're back here like nothing happened? What's that, Janey-E? You asked me what the hell I'm on about? Why, I'm referring to the fact that your husband is an FBI agent named Dale Cooper!" You know, queries that could ruin everything for the Jones family? And wouldn't the FBI, and especially the Agent Preston from Frost's book(s), want to visit the Joneses? Yet, for reasons beyond my ken, the fan community heralded the hospital sequence, no questions asked. In fact, some have gone as

far as saying these crowd-pleasing moments work so well because we've *earned* them at that point.

I'm reminded of TAXI DRIVER, Martin Scorsese's film penned by Paul Schrader. In this 1976 masterwork, cabbie Travis Bickle goes off the deep end when his would-be squeeze, Betsy, jilts him. Out for blood, he first plans to assassinate the presidential candidate Betsy campaigned for. When this falls through (recognized by the secret service agent he'd sized up earlier, Travis aborts the mission seconds after reaching for his concealed handgun), he settles for saving underage prostitute Iris from her pimp. During the resulting shoot-out, Bickle is seriously injured, tries to commit suicide on the spot, and acts certifiable when the police come in. Despite all this, the following montage shows Bickle making a full recovery and being venerated as a hero. In the closing scene, he even reconciles with Betsy!

Chicago Sun-Times critic Roger Ebert doesn't rule out that the epilogue constitutes Bickle's dying thoughts:

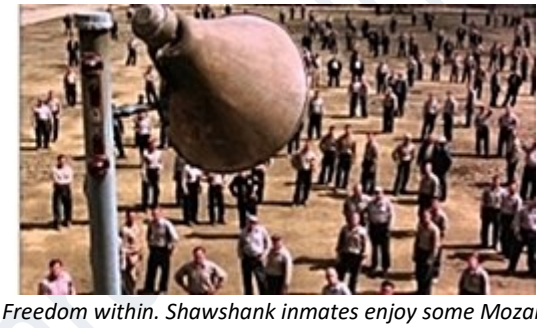
The end sequence plays like music, not drama: It completes the story on an emotional, not a literal, level.[xcii]

It's tempting to agree with such a reading; after all, surely the secret service agent who ran into Bickle not once but twice would recognize the unlikely hero; a visit from the government and some loaded questions about his intentions and the attempt at the presidential candidate's life should be a sure thing if Bickle indeed survived. But Scorsese and Schrader have gone on record saying that the ending *is* to be taken literally: Scorsese stated that Bickle is a time bomb and has begun ticking again—the final shot features suspenseful music and shows a discombobulated Travis readjusting his rearview mirror; Schrader wanted to comment on the fact that America likes to turn people into heroes and celebrities, no matter how ill-fitted they are for such statuses.[xciii]

Another example of a scene that works on an emotional, not a literal (or logical), level can be found in THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION (Frank Darabont, 1994), based upon Stephen King's novella. It tells of Andy Dufresne, a whip-smart banker sentenced to life at the eponymous correctional facility. Warden Murphy, recognizing that he can use Dufresne to do a little "creative bookkeeping," grants him choice privileges. Adapting the source material, Darabont made several alterations, some of which useful (the story of Brooks, a kindly old parolee who can't cope with freedom in a changing world), some of which so-so (omitting goodbyes to Red's other friends and adding a conclusion that favors certainty over the film's theme of "hope springs eternal"), some of which tinctured with improbability: Dufresne, suddenly recalcitrant, locks himself in the warden's office to play an opera record over the intercom. While the camera cranes over neatly positioned inmates gazing up at the

courtyard speakers, narrator Morgan Freeman murmurs something about how the music made every last man in Shawshank feel free for the briefest moment. Why did Dufresne provide that service to an assortment of rapists and murderers? After all, we later find out he had a great deal to lose at this point. The scene conveniently fades to black when the prison guards, established earlier as disproportionally sadistic (they kicked an inmate to death for crying), close in on him. When the next scene starts, things are status quo, with Dufresne having lost not a single one of his essential privileges (including contraband the pious warden barely tolerated to begin with: cheesecake posters we eventually learn covered Dufresne's escape tunnel-in-progress.) It reduces the previous scene to a self-contained "for your consideration" moment without cause or consequence.

Travis Bickle. Cabbie, would-be assassin, psychopath, hero.


Freedom within. Shawshank inmates enjoy some Mozart.

When a scene or story development makes us feel good, we'll gladly gloss over lapses in logic.

Next up: The Fireman transports Mr. C to the sheriff's station. It's Lucy, not Cooper, who saves the day by shooting Mr. C in the back. I like how expectations are subverted here, even though Lucy's remark that she finally understands cellphones is a lame payoff for a lame, nonsensical joke set up fourteen episodes earlier. Here come the woodsmen to resuscitate Mr. C once more through interpretive dance. The real Cooper arrives just as the Bob "egg sack" appears, but it's Freddie who fights the long-haired man. Either too stunned or too fascinated—though his facial expressions betray slight annoyance, Frank never gets up from his chair. In a sequence I found ridiculous and satisfying in equal measure, the evil that men do is relegated to a digital mid-boss who packs it in after multiple blows to his orbed visage.


Cloudy with a chance of Bob balls. Freddie Sykes and his power glove make short work of what once was the series' Big Bad.

Then Naido does what was expected at this point: she morphs into Diane—the *real* one. While a superimposed Cooper states joylessly that we live inside a dream, Diane plays tonsil hockey with an overjoyed Cooper. I'm glad that being trapped inside the body of an eyeless, silenced woman for God knows how long didn't traumatize Diane. These people are made of sterner stuff! And Coop seems to have forgotten all about Annie Blackburn, the young woman he entered the Black Lodge for in the first place.

Coop, Diane, and Cole somehow end up in the basement of The Great Northern. Coop unlocks a door, tells his friends not to follow him ("See you at the curtain call," he says to Diane), and enters the room.

In a bravura sequence that beautifully mixes new footage with scenes and outtakes from FWWM, Coop time-travels to the night Laura Palmer was murdered. He stops the teen from meeting with Leo and company, takes her hand, and announces he's going to take her home. Knowing "home" is the killer's lair, I sure hope Coop meant it figuratively. After some digitally altered footage from the pilot (Laura's corpse disappears), Coop notices Laura is no longer holding his hand; she has vanished. Julee Cruise, who took to social media to disclose how unhappy she was with her contribution to THE RETURN, sings *The World Spins*.[xciv]

Back at the Jones residence, the new Dougie arrives. Hopefully, this one won't spoil—steer clear of country buffets and women of ill repute, sir! (I probably shouldn't ask how Dougie 2.0 made his way from The Black Lodge to Vegas. Did he leave the portal in Glastonbury Grove and hitch-hike to Nevada—without being spotted by Twin Peaks locals—or did he use the Evolution of The Arm's chevron floor shortcut or simply step out through Mike's astral service hatch? The very fact that I wonder about Lodge Logistics accentuates how disengaged from the proceedings I was. Then again, is asking such questions less reasonable than obsessing over flickering aircraft windows?)

Probably Morse Code. Let me write it down for you:
... --- -- . - .. -- . ... / .- / -.-. .. --. .- .-. / .. ... / .--- ..- ... - / .- / -.-. .. --. .- .-

In one of THE RETURN's creepiest moments, Sarah Palmer wails offscreen and then enters her

parlor to smash Laura's framed homecoming picture with a bottle.

Cut to The Black Lodge, where we get a truncated and slightly altered version of the scene from *Part 2*: *The Stars Turn and a Time Presents Itself*. Whereas the original sequence ended with Cooper plunging through the floor and ending up in Vegas (with transfers in New York and Purple Palazzo), this second go ends with him leaving The Lodge. The scene is anticlimactic, and appropriately so: we already had a short but happy reunion at the Sheriff's Station, but it also appears there is little reason for celebration now. Cooper's on a mission, and the only one waiting for him at Glastonbury Grove is Diane ("See you at curtain call"), and even *she* needs to ask him if it's really him. The true nature or purpose of their relationship is up for grabs and stays that way. We've seen them share some tender moments in Truman's office (supposing, of course, that this business took place in the same continuity), but Diane still calls Cooper by his last name. To quote from the last chapter of Stephen King's 1989 novel *The Dark Half* (about a fundamentally good man, Thad Beaumont, who inadvertently causes his darker impulses to manifest themselves as evil doppelganger George Stark):

Standing next to you is like standing next to a cave some nightmarish creature came out of. The monster is gone now, but you still don't like to be too close to where it came from. Because there might be another. Probably not; your mind knows that, but your emotions – they play a different tune, don't they? Oh boy. And even if the cave is empty forever, there are the dreams. And the memories. There's Homer Gamache, for instance, beaten to death with his own prosthetic arm. Because of you, Thad. All because of you. […] And he could not forget the way Stark and Thad had laughed together. That crazy, loony laughter and the look in their eyes. He wondered if [Thad's wife] would be able to forget. […] You don't understand what you are, and I doubt that you ever will. Your wife might . . . although I wonder if things will ever be right between the two of you after this, if she'll ever want to understand, or dare to love you again.

Darkness within.
Timothy Hutton as Thad Beaumont and George Stark in George A. Romero's 1991 adaptation of The Dark Half.

Such justified and fascinating concerns are not addressed here. Cooper and Diane enter yet another timeline/parallel universe where they pull up in the parking lot of a desert hotel and Diane's exact double looks on from afar.

What follows is an uncomfortable sex scene between Coop and Diane. It smacks of sex-magic, or

a desperate attempt to recapture what once was (or, perhaps, *never* was), or a necessary cleansing ritual. It's not unlike Rita and Betty getting hot and bothered in MULHOLLAND DRIVE. That scene has shown up on many a "fave lesbian snogging scenes" list, but its visual and thematical darkness suggest something more foreboding. In both scenes, love has little to do with it.

Coop wakes up to a Dear John letter from Diane, who refers to him as "Richard" and to herself as "Linda." Coop exits the hotel, which is not the one he entered the previous night. Even his car is of a different make and model.

When Coop enters a diner called Judy's, he comes across as a terrifying hybrid of the Cooper we know and Mr. C. He's heroic but aggressive and calculated when saving a waitress from some oncoming cowboys, going so far as casually aiming his gun at the staff. And what FBI agent in their right mind would ever dispense of baddies' guns by deep-frying them?

Coop tracks down the diner's other waitress. This Carrie Page looks exactly like Laura Palmer (and is portrayed by Sheryl Lee). Both Coop and we are so surprised that he and we may miss her urgent first line: "Did you find him?" Carrie expected *someone*, but probably not an FBI agent who wants to drive her cross-country to Washington state. Anxious to put some miles between her and the random corpse on her sofa, she accepts Coop's proposal.

What follows is a driving sequence that lasts for more than ten minutes. Nothing of note happens during the road trip, and few words are shared, but the tension is so thick you could cut it with a knife. Arriving in Twin Peaks, Coop and Carrie pass the RR Diner (closed and *sans* "RR 2 Go" banners) and pull up in front of the Palmer house. The hapless duo discovers that going home isn't always possible. The woman answering the door is middle-aged blonde Alice Tremond (!), who says she's never heard of Sarah Palmer and that she bought the house from a woman named Chalfont (!). Cooper says: "What year is this?" Carrie, hearing a faint voice calling out "Laura" (the audio, I believe, is taken from the FWWM dream sequence), shivers and lets out a piercing scream. The lights in the Palmer house go out with a loud electrical sound, and the screen cuts to black. End credits, accompanied by the new Badalamenti piece *Dark Space Low* (which is every bit as haunting and melancholy as *Dark Mood Woods*, written especially for the S2 finale), play over a slow-motion shot of Laura whispering something to a distressed Cooper in the Black Lodge. So … every time Cooper encounters Laura—whether it's in the Black Lodge, in Ghostwood Forest, or under another name in a parallel universe—and tries to change her fate (take her home), an unseen force whisks the screaming woman away and hits 'reset'? *Do not pass Go. Do not collect $200. Go directly (back) to the Lodge.* Or: *Game over; try again.*

As "just" an episode, I loved it. It's my second favorite of THE RETURN (*Part 8: Gotta Light?* wins

by photo finish). As a way to end it all, it's infuriating, especially with so many subplots left to fall by the wayside. Frost and Lynch had the luxury of writing an ending before they shot a single second, and this is what they gave us? I've since come to terms with it for no other reason than, for better or worse, its unconventionality seems to fit the direction THE RETURN took. Unconventional, I say? Perhaps not, as the phrases "limited series" and "miniseries" have lost their meaning: it appears as if the door must always be left open, if only a crack, for a continuation.

After devouring Frost's slim but welcome *The Final Dossier* in November 2017, I rewatched THE RETURN over three weeks, curious how it'd strike me knowing upfront what was to come. I liked it even less. It contained one of the very best TWIN PEAKS episodes (*Gotta Light?*) but also the worst (*Let's Rock*). On my third go, I had pen and paper at the ready.

How apt that the first things of Twin Peaks *I saw were its final scenes and that the first leaked images from* The Return *I laid eyes on turned out to be from its final scenes.*

EIGHT

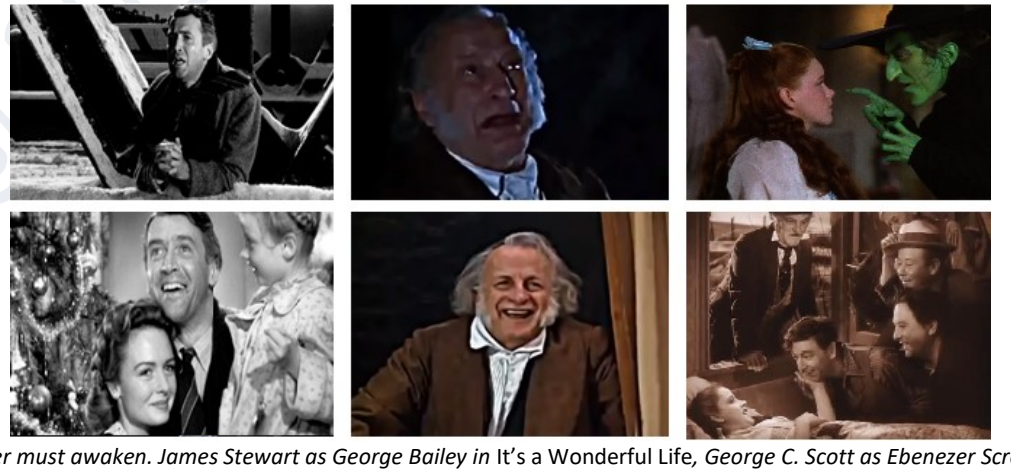
WE LIVE INSIDE A DREAM (ABOUT DREAMS & DREAM LOGIC, METAFICTION & NARRATIVE/STYLISTIC INFLUENCES)

Robert McKee insists in his (in)famous Story Seminar that tale spinners should avoid "it was a dream" resolutions.[xcv] The reasoning is that nothing was at stake if trials and tribulations were just products of fevered minds *within* the fiction. In SUCKER-PUNCH (Zack Snyder, 2011) we know upfront that its drawn-out action sequences featuring Babydoll and her band of friends are but the girl's inconsequential daydreams. In BOXING HELENA (Jennifer Chambers Lynch, 1993), Dr. Nick Cavanaugh recognizes that dismembering his *objet du désir* was a dream. The film ends soon after, with Nick as lovelorn as ever.

Dream a little dream of me. Baby (Emily Browning) in Sucker Punch.

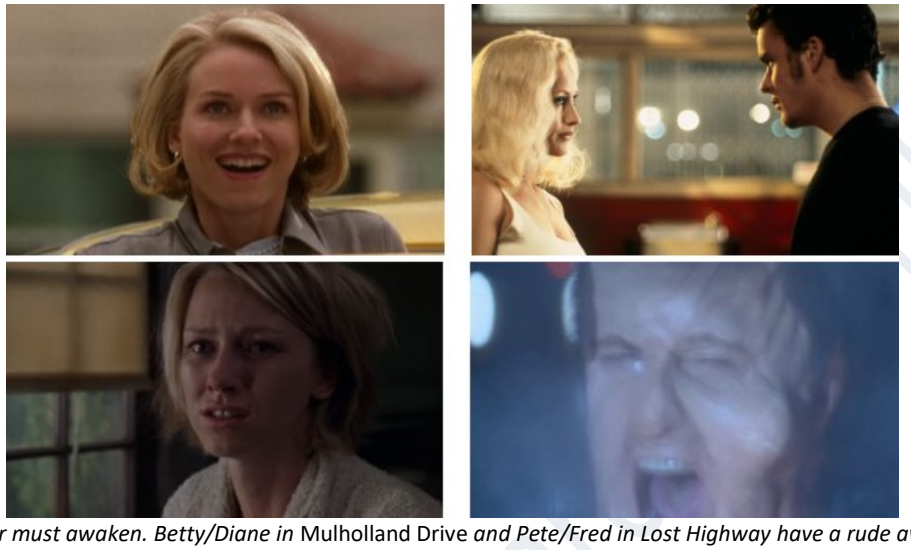
Nick (Julian Sands) in Boxing Helena.

But what if dreams have ramifications in a character's waking life? In THE WIZARD OF OZ (Victor Fleming, 1939), IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (Frank Capra, 1946) and any adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, the main characters realize their ordeals were just dreams (or were they?) and embrace how wonderful life, being home, or treating others with kindness can be.



The sleeper must awaken. James Stewart as George Bailey in It's a Wonderful Life*, George C. Scott as Ebenezer Scrooge* in A Christmas Carol *(1984), and Judy Garland as Dorothy in* The Wizard of Oz *are happy to be awake and alive.*

The main characters of both MULHOLLAND DRIVE and LOST HIGHWAY experience the exact opposite: their dreams or fugue states allow them to reinvent themselves as more assured, the ones they despise as fools, and the people they love as attached and willing. When they wake up, they can't handle the unbearable starkness of reality, and the effect on the viewer is powerful.



The sleeper must awaken. Betty/Diane in Mulholland Drive *and Pete/Fred in Lost Highway have a rude awakening.*

The final episode of the medical drama series ST. ELSEWHERE (1982-1988) ends with the reveal that Dr. Westphall (Ed Flanders) is a construction worker and that the entirety of the show was his autistic son's elaborate fantasy. TV curator David Bushman described it as:

A reaffirmation that St. Elsewhere was 'merely' a work of fiction. In other words, try not to be too crushed that it's ending, because it never really existed to begin with.[xcvi]

Nothing is real. The imagined St. Eligius Hospital versus its equally fictional inspiration in St. Elsewhere.

Put differently, the twist ending doesn't change anything. Showrunner Bruce Paltrow along with writers Tom Fontana, Channing Gibson, and Mark Tinker merely created a character, existing in another fictional world, to credit intertextually with the creative process.

Another film worth mentioning here is MOTHER! (Darren Aranofsky, 2017). Audiences and critics

alike have wondered what is real and what isn't in this absurd tale that personifies, and thus makes literal, God the Father and Mother Nature. MOTHER! never establishes an objective reality from which the narrative either flows or segues into.

An abstraction in a human form. Jennifer Lawrence on a poster for Mother!

THE RETURN informs the viewer intermittently that it is all a dream, but we don't get to know where the dream begins or ends, let alone how the dream affects the characters' waking life.

What about Dream *Logic*? Lynch isn't the first filmmaker to utilize it, and THE RETURN is indebted to the Italian giallo genre.

Professor Sam Broadhead of Leeds University began her 2011 lecture about Italian Vernacular cinema[xcvii] (as part of a series on film theory) with the following quote from Werner Herzog: "Cinema is not the art of scholars, but of the illiterate." Broadhead doesn't necessarily agree with Herzog's blanket statement, but she does categorize three types of Italian movie theaters in the immediate post-fascist era:

- **Prima visione** and **seconda visione**: located in major cities and attracting sophisticated audiences with films by the likes of Frederico Fellini.
- **Terza visione**: An avenue to meet with friends, these theaters showed formulaic movies pandering to the working class spectator's basest interests.

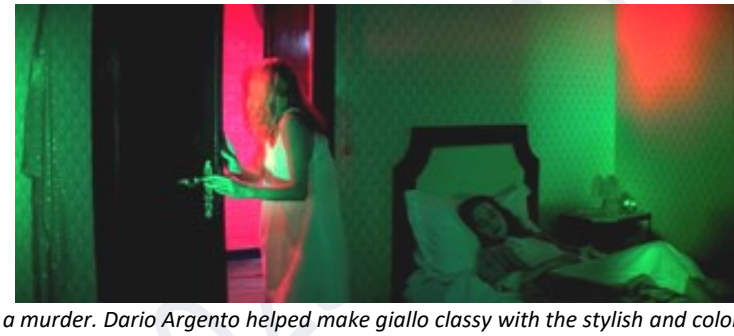
Film scholar Mikel J. Koven coined the phrase "vernacular cinema" as a replacement for the term "popular cinema" in his 2006 book *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*:

To look at a film from a vernacular perspective removes the a priori assumptions about what constitutes a "good" film, how a particular film is, in some way, "artistic." Vernacular cinema asks, to paraphrase Tina Turner, "what's art got to do with it?" Vernacular cinema seeks to look at subaltern cinema not for how it might (or might not) conform to the precepts of high-art/modernist cinema, but

for what it does in its own right. Vernacular cinema does not care if we see these movies. These films are an insider's discourse among themselves. We do not matter.[xcviii]

The most popular terza visioni genre was the giallo. Inspired by pulp novels with distinctive yellow spines, these films were erotic whodunits characterized by grotesque violence, wooden acting, underwritten characters, stilted dialogue, goofy humor, gratuitous nudity, continuity errors, inappropriate music cues, the sudden removal of secondary characters, and a happy abandonment of logic. Character motivation is largely nonexistent in giallo films; the genre uses characters as pawns to make plot twists and suspenseful set pieces possible.

It was Dario Argento who legitimized the giallo by infusing it with artistry and visual flair: lush widescreen cinematography accentuated by saturated colors and unorthodox camera setups. In his 1977 magnum opus, SUSPIRIA, Argento let fairy tale elements and dream logic overshadow the giallo template.



Prelude to a murder. Dario Argento helped make giallo classy with the stylish and colorful Suspiria.

In 1982, Argento directed and co-wrote TENEBRE, a return to "giallo proper." Argento kept the dream logic of SUSPIRIA and its first sequel, INFERNO (1980), but abandoned the cinemascope process, instructing cinematographer Luciano Tovoli to simulate the pedestrian camera setups and realistic lighting and color grading of television police procedurals; Argento allowed himself to go for broke visually only in scenes where the killer strikes.

Luciano Tovoli's sterile 1.85: 1 spherical cinematography for Tenebre.

In TENEBRE, Rome isn't the bustling metropolis with ancient landmarks but a sparsely populated

concrete jungle. In a series of interviews with Alan Jones, Argento claimed TENEBRE takes place in the near future, after a disaster—an atomic blast—no one remembers or wants to remember.[xcix] [c] This might explain why everyone acts a little "off": background characters can be seen arguing and fighting on several occasions; bystanders respond oddly subdued to murder in broad daylight. "It's like there are two people in me, and sometimes the other one just takes over," remarks a kindhearted woman after cutting up her ex-husband's luggage. Yet another character revealed to have a secret side quotes Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

There are some notable metatextual elements to be found in TENEBRE: Peter Neal (Anthony Franciosa), the lead of this horror film by a director regularly accused of misogyny, is a horror writer regularly accused of misogyny. Grilled by a feminist journalist about his latest novel, also titled *Tenebre*, Neal (and, by proxy, Argento) is quick to gainsay these imputations by firing off the usual sophisms: he isn't sexist, he doesn't despise women, he's supported the equal rights amendment, and he doesn't condemn homosexuality.

How telling that Neal turns out to be the (second) killer, motivated in part by an incident that took place in his formative years: a resentful girl violated him orally with the stiletto heel of her shoe. (Conversely, or perhaps *significantly*, the girl is portrayed by transgender actress Eva Robbins.)

The film ends with a woman screaming outside a house where bad things have happened. She is not in any immediate danger, but the realization of what transpired has taken its toll. Her screams continue after the screen has faded to black.

TENEBRE displays ironic self-consciousness without the need to declare intertextually that the entirety of the narrative constitutes a literal dream. It would have lost a lot of its power if it had.

Anne (long-time Argento collaborator Daria Nicolodi) lets out a blood-curdling shriek at the end of Tenebre.

American pop culture has flirted with metatextuality too. Let's take a brief look at two examples.

The first one is WES CRAVEN'S NEW NIGHTMARE (Wes Craven, 1994), the 7th *Nightmare on Elm Street* film. It recognizes the franchise's previous installments for what they are: fiction. NEW NIGHTMARE deals with actress Heather Langenkamp's reluctance to star in yet another sequel. Triggered by L.A. earthquakes (in an instance of serendipity, the crew was able to shoot footage of damage caused by the Northridge earthquake), her young son has nightmares about the first film and might be under the spell of an ancient demon using the Freddy persona. Other actors, director Craven, producer Robert Shaye, and New Line Cinema personnel play themselves. To further mess with the audience, Craven has Lin Shaye, who portrayed a schoolteacher in the first film, turn up as a physician.

Freddy isn't quite himself. Heather Langenkamp and Robert Englund in Wes Craven's New Nightmare.

The other film is BOOK OF SHADOWS: BLAIR WITCH 2 (Joe Berlinger, 2000). This rushed but ambitious sequel to the found-footage hit that made extensive use of online marketing—its arcane website suggested the thing was a real documentary—goes full meta by treating the first film as what it is: a piece of fiction. Five fans on a tour of Maryland expect to encounter, and *do* encounter, the ruins of the "murder house." Considering the college kids in THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT believed to find ruins but discovered a house (courtesy of unconscious time travel), what the BOOK OF SHADOWS gang should have found was the actual shooting location. The film has fun exploring fan obsession and blurring the line between fact and fiction.

What TENEBRE, NEW NIGHTMARE, and BOOK OF SHADOWS have in common is a lack of commercial success. As Robert Henri said, "People want peace." A product that deconstructs itself and peels away the layer between fact and fiction to create something that is both yet neither isn't the sort of cultural text craved by casual audiences.

THE RETURN is influenced by Lynch's previous works, and that includes his use of visual effects. Before the advent of digital editing, Lynch had a predilection for celluloid and in-camera effects: "CGI can easily look like plastic next to beautiful wood." [ci] This is why the apparent cut-price visual effects in THE RETURN took viewers aback.

Budget limitations shouldn't be an excuse. In 2009, a college kid from my hometown created a short subject fx extravaganza that ran him less than €200.[cii] Visual effects for television productions have come a long way, and THE RETURN delivered in scenes where authenticity was needed: Mr. C seeing Bob's reflection in the mirror, the detonation of the Trinity bomb, and new footage of a 17-year-old Laura.

When Lynch began creating original content for his website in the early aughts, Adobe After Effects made it possible for him to take the same DIY approach to visualize abstraction as when he used crude animation in his early shorts.

The Grandmother *(1970)*

Neither shoddiness nor realism was Lynch's goal in the sixties and seventies, and they aren't now. He just likes things to look a certain way.

This, in itself, is nothing new. Director Ken Russel was adamant that Peter Donen's optical effects for ALTERED STATES (1980) should look good, not *real*. Donen said:

They wanted to fool around with what I call compressed time/expanded time, where you have the foreground shot in slow motion and the background shot in time-lapse. The result is not quite right. It tends to suck you into the hallucination even more.[ciii]

Jessup (William Hurt) and Emily (Blair Brown) stroll toward a mushroom cloud in Altered States.

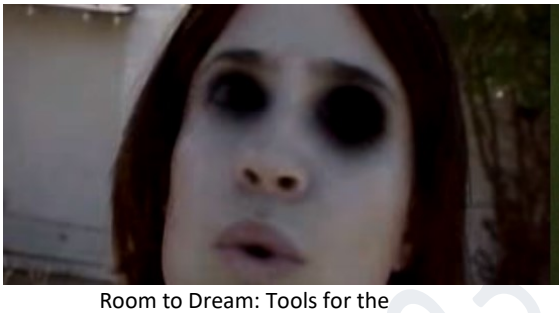
Gary Jones, hired to do miniature work on EVIL DEAD II (Sam Raimi 1987), was surprised that the director lingered on effects intended to be glimpsed.

After three seconds the trees begin to look fake. We put 2000% into making some serious effects. When we saw what Sam was doing, we realized he was after a

campy comedy and not the horror of the first movie.[civ]

I'll see you in the trees. The miniatures of Evil Dead II.

A lot of visual cues and visual effects designs from Lynch's shorts, both old and new, have found their way into THE RETURN.



Room to Dream: Tools for the Independent Filmmaker *(2005)*

Inland Empire *(2006)*

Rebekah Del Rio as Jane in Rabbits *(2002)*

Memory Marathon *(2015)*

How are you today? The inflatable horror of Pierre and Sonny Jim *(2001) "starring Eli Roth"*

Michael Jackson's face appears in a gold sphere surrounded by flames and cacti. Teaser for the pop singer's 1997 Dangerous tour.

Set to music by Krzysztof Penderecki, a zombie-like man man with a painted face (Jack Fisk) proceeds imposingly through a barren landscape in An Absurd Encounter with Fear *(1967)*

A Bug Crawls *(2007)*

A man's head floats away from its body In the commercial Playstation 2: The Third Place (2000)

Dream #7 *(2010). A gold orb emerges from a cracked eggshell in front of drapes*

Lynch has referenced his own work before. In the DVD extra *Dell's Lunch Counter*, WILD AT HEART's cinematographer Frederick Elmes talks about how Lynch deemed a Big Tuna camera set-up too "barren" and dyed a length of hose for an extra to carry around.

And look what can be spotted in the background of this scene from MULHOLLAND DRIVE:

Both INLAND EMPIRE and THE RETURN contain scenes where characters enter a theater to watch previous sequences.


The home media release of INLAND EMPIRE came with 90 minutes of deleted scenes assembled as the piece *More Things that Happened*, which is just as coherent, or incoherent, as the feature presentation. The 2008 Lime Green Box's deleted scenes from WILD AT HEART built on a subplot excised from the film itself: Johnny Farragut repeatedly running into Reggie and Drop Shadow. In 2011, long-lost scenes from BLUE VELVET were included on the film's 25 anniversary Blu-ray. We finally got to see the much-mentioned "Flaming Nipples" scene, but also an arguably more compelling introduction to Jeffrey: hidden in the shadows of a boiler room, he witnesses an attempt at date rape and doesn't step in until discovery is imminent.



More things that happened. Deleted scenes from Inland Empire, Wild At Heart, *and* Blue Velvet.

The biggest influence on THE RETURN is probably *The Missing Pieces*, 90 minutes of deleted footage from FWWM.

I sure missed the creative input of Mark Frost and staff writer Harley Peyton, but I liked FWWM just fine back in 1992, and I like it just fine today. Faint praise, perhaps, but I was still in clover when the lost footage became available in 2014. This admission doesn't mean I considered every single deleted scene a gem. Take the moment where disagreeable Sheriff Cable instigates a bare-

knuckled free-for-all over what's to happen with Teresa Banks's corpse. Chet Desmond manages to plant one right on Cable's schnoz, causing the poor lawman to stumble about in openmouthed shock. I sort of liked it, but I understood why it was chucked out.

Getting to see more of Cooper and regulars from the show was a real treat, but I'm glad the material isn't part of the final cut, which has a more focused plot. It's fine when characters from ERASERHEAD and WILD AT HEART behave as though they've just arrived from Altair IV, but it's depressing when established characters do this. These scenes underpin Lynch's habit to go for "the moment" at the expense of plot, character consistency, and organic character development.

Examples of gratuitous weirdness involving locals in *The Missing Pieces:*

- The first time Cooper shows up, he's flirting with an off-screen Diane. Our favorite G-man acts as if he's had one too many cans of Georgia, doing cardio exercises and referring to himself as "dashing."

- Nadine and Big Ed, all smiles, enter the RR Diner. Upon spotting Norma behind the counter, Nadine turns on her heel and barges out, snapping at Ed that she's changed her mind about breakfast. It's great to see the Hurleys, but the scene is nonsensical: Nadine knows Norma owns the diner and may serve them, so why did she even (agree to) go there?

- Doc Hayward tries to perform a magic trick (seemingly without knowing how magic tricks work), and Eileen boasts about putting no fewer than seven huckleberries in each homemade muffin. Even though I have mixed feelings about the scene, Doc claiming the prescription in his hand is a message for Laura ("When you see the angel that's meant for you, you'll weep with joy") is cheesy but effective foreshadowing.

- Down at the Sheriff's Station, Deputy Andy has an inexplicable staring contest with Truman, and Lucy mumbles to herself behind her desk. It is cringeworthy to see none-too-bright yet lovable characters reduced to creepy morons.

My favorite scene from *The Missing Pieces* is an extended version of "Above the Convenience Store". Philip Jeffries checks into a posh Buenos Aires hotel and somehow ends up at the FBI headquarters in Philadelphia. Nonplussed, Jeffries tells his former colleagues about attending a conference of Black Lodge regulars and assorted new friends: The Electrician, two woodsmen with fake beards, plus a black dwarf. Jeffries is then teleported back to Argentina, where his sudden reappearance literally scares the crap out of a bellhop. The theatrical version of the sequence was trimmed down to such an extent that it perhaps should have been removed *in toto.* (But, hey, a director must be a chowder-head yokel to cut David Bowie from his film.)

Calvin Lockhart (The Electrician), who played Reggie in Lynch's Wild At Heart*, here quotes a chapter title from Barry Gifford's source novel. Gifford, who also collaborated with Lynch on* Hotel Room *and* Lost Highway*, may have reinforced Lynch's interest in standalone vignettes featuring sketchy types talking smack.*

"¡Ayúdame!" Previously unseen footage from FWWM. Time-hopping Philip Jeffries (David Bowie) materializes on an Argentinian hotel's staircase.

One lengthy subplot from FWWM of which there's even more in *The Missing Pieces* is "Drug Deal Gone Amiss." James mentions in the pilot that, according to Laura, Bobby had killed a guy. It's the first and last time it's brought up, prompting viewers to assume it was an idea for a storyline Lynch and Frost scrapped. It's not unusual to tweak elements between submitting a pilot and commencing production on the series proper: HAPPY DAYS pretended Richie Cunningham's older brother, Chuck, never existed; Fonzie, originally a minor character, proved so popular that he became the show's star; Buena Vista Television tossed aside siblings Steve and Ruth when it retooled the quirky sitcom THE TORKELSONS as the more conventional ALMOST HOME. TWIN PEAKS is no exception. Minor characters—Janek Pulaski, Johnny Horne—were recast; Kimmy Robertson went from bit player to main cast member (and was credited accordingly); Lynch and Frost concluded that Donna's sister Harriet wasn't needed after all. (In a move typical for Lynch, he brought Harriette back once and even introduced a third, heretofore unseen and unmentioned Hayward sister, Gersten, whom we never see or hear about again in the original show). FWWM shows us that Bobby committing murder is canon: he shot a drug dealer, Deer Meadow's deputy Cliff, in self-defense. (THE RETURN ignores this, possibly to accommodate the show's feel-good "Bobby Became A True Man" angle.) To further complicate matters, all this went down in the presence of Laura, who then helped Bobby bury the corpse while laughing. Goddamn, these people are confusing. And why did Jacques Renault set them up with the deranged Cliff? Was it the Canadian's intention to get rid of Bobby, not knowing Laura would be there? Why doesn't Laura confront Jacques about what happened? And how come Bobby knows what baby laxative tastes like? More unanswered questions in a world of blue.

More selective trimming would have meant more room for scenes with Laura and Teresa. *The Missing Pieces* certainly contains enough of those:

- Laura stands under the fan on the stairwell, taunted by Bob's disembodied voice. Too fatigued to rebuff the evil entity's insistence to "taste through [her] mouth," a toothy, unsettling grin creeps onto Laura's face. This powerful scene would have provided a nice

counterpoint to Laura smiling and laughing sincerely in The Black Lodge at the end of the film.

- Leland teaches his family how to introduce themselves in Norwegian. The scene's gaiety establishes what the final cut overlooked: The Palmers loved each other.

- Laura remarks that she hates asparagus. It's the teen's only first-world problem.

- A lengthy sequence fleshes out the subplot of Teresa Banks blackmailing Leland Palmer. A dark-haired Leland (or his doppelganger) stated in the S2 finale that he didn't kill anybody. Maybe that was just a bit of surreal improvisation on Lynch's part, but it's possible that Bob killed Jacques to throw the scent off Leland and murdered Teresa Banks because she'd become a liability.

The credits identify Lynch, not FWWM's Mary Sweeney, as the editor of *The Missing Pieces*. In other words, it isn't so much a collection of scenes completed back in '92, but Lynch's 2014 take on them. Their dissolves, overlays, sound effects, and digital zooms showcased Lynch's new artistic and aesthetic sensibilities and foreshadowed what was to come.

The Missing Pieces indicates that Lynch has taken a shine to the idea that out-of-context scenes and sequences that don't advance the plot can be powerful and worth your while. Discussing INLAND EMPIRE, Lynch said the following to Chris Attwood and Robert Roth from Healthy Wealthy nWise:

> *It's a risk, but I have this feeling that because all things are unified, this idea over here in that room will somehow relate to that idea over there in the pink room.*[cv]

Tongue planted firmly in cheek, THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT helmers Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez have referred to their brand of guerilla filmmaking—sending actors out into the woods with cameras and a bunch of notes—as "Method Directing."[cvi] Lynch's belief that the Transcendental Meditation idea of a unified field of consciousness[cvii] will make a narrative surface organically could be called "Method Plotting." When editing THE RETURN, he kept the many

instances of extemporization in the feature presentation instead of including them as supplemental material on the home media release. Even if I had enjoyed the digressions and cul-de-sacs of THE RETURN, I'd still believe they seriously hurt the show's flow and pacing.

The Missing Pieces also influenced how Lynch dealt with the plot and characters of THE RETURN. In *The Missing Pieces*, Lucy doesn't seem to understand how intercoms work; in THE RETURN, she has difficulties figuring out cell phones. In *The Missing Pieces*, both the dwarf and Laura talk about "going home," a phrase of no small importance in THE RETURN.

The emphasis on "Is it future or is it past?" in *The Missing Pieces* reoccurs in THE RETURN and underlines that The Black Lodge exists outside of time and space. In FWWM, Cooper's already entrapped in The Black Lodge, comforting Laura after her death, before he arrives in town; The One-Armed Man knows that Leland is Bob, and Cooper tells Albert: "When the next murder happens, you will help me solve it." Oh, and look carefully at the last scene of *The Missing Pieces*: it recreates S2's pivotal final moments. Much care has gone into making sure the new version matches the old one, down to the smallest prop and its placement … save for the eye-catching wall lamps.

The lamps are not what they seem. The last scene from the S2 finale versus its recreation from The Missing Pieces.

The Missing Pieces, which, as we would learn soon after its release, saw the light of day when THE RETURN was already in the pipeline, underscore that even though FWWM takes place *before* the events of the original show, it likely takes place in an alternate version of the past, a past dictated by a future we've already witnessed.

The TWIN PEAKS pilot was lensed in 1989 and takes place in the late winter and early spring of that year. *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* changes Laura's age from seventeen to eighteen (ditto for *The*

Secret History) and ends in 1990. In THE RETURN, Cooper's date of birth is given as September 15, 1973 (impossible, as he would have been a high schooler when investigating Laura Palmer's murder). In the theatrical cut of FWWM, Philip Jeffries' visit to the Philadelphia office takes place in 1988. In *The Missing Pieces* and THE RETURN, the year of his appearance has been bumped to 1989. Lynch begins the last scenes of *The Missing Pieces* with the subtitle "Some Months later," but from the discovery of Laura's body to Cooper's smashing the mirror, a little over one month has passed. *The Secret History of Twin Peaks* takes place in 2016 and *The Final Dossier* in 2017, effectively undermining THE RETURN's "25 Years Later" hook. In *My Life, My Tapes*, it's Cooper who investigates Teresa Banks' murder, not Chester Desmond.

The discrepancies and contradictions between the original show, the film, THE RETURN, and Frost's book may have been the result of the butterfly effect. And, mind you, the phrase "Secret History" means "A revisionist interpretation of either fictional or real history." [cviii] Frost's first *Twin Peaks* book's title lets you in on its intentions and warns you upfront that not all will add up. A synonym for "Secret History" is "Shadow History," which should remind us of the "Dweller on the Threshold" or "Shadow Self" Hawk told Cooper about. Derived from the Jungian notion of an ego-dystonic complex, it here refers to doppelgangers and tulpas.

What to think of bit players from the old days returning as new characters?

Matt Battaglia as a cop in S2 and as a cowboy in The Return

Brian Ginney as a trucker in FWWM *and as a guard in* The Return

Lynch regular Bellina Logan as Louie in S2 and as a doctor in The Return

THE RETURN contains more meta goodness:

- Why would such popular bands and artists as Nine Inch Nails and Eddie Vedder perform at some backwater burg's dive? They wouldn't. Simply by having the emcee put "the" in front of Nine Inch Nails, the band becomes a fictionalized version of itself. The emcee does a similar thing with Eddie Vedder, whom he introduces as "Edward Louis Severson" (the

singer's given name). Also worth bringing up: the emcee calls an instrumental piece by its non-diegetic title: "Audrey's Dance."

- Cooper's resurfaced room key bares the text "Clean place, reasonably priced," which isn't The Great Northern's slogan but one of Cooper's lines from the pilot.

- Gordon Cole's doodles look exactly like Lynch's.

- Monica Bellucci appears as herself in Cole's dreams.

- Alice Tremond is played by Mary Reber, the actual owner of the house doubling as the Palmer residence.[cix]

- Cooper's photo in *Part 5: Case Files* and many of the pictures in *The Secret History*—the Savings & Loans newspaper clipping, Andrew Packard's passport photo, the author photograph on Dr. Jacoby's book, the snapshot of Norma Jennings and Ed Hurley at the Roadhouse—are screen grabs and publicity stills from the original show.

Note: the last example's caption mistakenly identifies the venue as the RR Diner. Should this oversight be attributed to *The Secret History*'s fictional accumulator or Mark Frost? More meta!

Frost said about the Drugged-Out Mother chanting "one one nine" that people with one foot in "another world" have the tendency to speak backward.[cx] But she just reverses the order of the words; shouldn't her line, when spelled phonetically, be something like "naw naw nyan"? A similar gaffe occurred in S2 with Garland Briggs's line "That gum you like is coming back in style"; the Frost-approved script by Harley Peyton and Robert Engels had the Major say each word backward ("Taht mug uoy …") instead of the entire sentence ("elyts ni kcab …"). And Lodge Speak isn't even actual backward speech to begin with—having actors read their lines in reverse and then playing the footage backward is just a means to make the resulting forward speech sound "off." To quote Donna when she read from Laura's diary in the S2 episode *Arbitrary Law*: "My words came out slow and odd."

Just because an artist is a perfectionist (and neither Lynch nor Frost ever made such claims), it doesn't mean they're indeed perfect and incapable of error.

It makes me hesitant to explain away *every last one* of THE RETURN's many discrepancies, inconsistencies, continuity errors, or goofs with a convenient "done deliberately." It equally diminishes my willingness to accept some of the retrofitting: In FWWM and *The Missing Pieces*, it's

more than hinted at that the unseen Judy is a young lady. In THE RETURN, she's "an extremely negative force." What to think of the claim that Coop entered the black lodge as part of a plan to locate and destroy Judy? Or what about Laura unloosening a scream when she spots Cooper behind a tree during her heart-to-heart with James in *Part 17*'s update of a scene from FWWM? In response, fans have wondered afresh what Laura screamed at in the original sequence. Was it an unseen version of Cooper who got cold feet and didn't follow through on his plan to take Laura home? (I now believe that, in FWWM, Laura cried out because her drug-addled brain made eerie pictures to go with her fear and paranoia.)

Hardcore fans often know more about the show than its creators. After all, they're the ones obsessing over every little detail and watching the show dozens or even hundreds of times and spending hour upon hour discussing them. **Frost has said that he and Lynch had forgotten all about the line "I'll see you again in twenty-five years" until they revisited the S2 finale when prepping THE RETURN.**[cxi]

George R.R. Martin, author of the *Song of Ice and Fire* books that inspired the show GAME OF THRONES, often calls upon superfans Elio García and Linda Antonsson to help him get his facts straight.[cxii] Vlogger Lindsay Ellis mentions in her analysis of Peter Jackson's J.R.R. Tolkien adaptations how THE HOBBIT: THE DESOLATION OF SMAUG incorporates the essential musical motif *The Revelation of the Ringwraiths* from LORD OF THE RINGS: FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING as incidental music; she posits that Jackson underestimated or didn't grasp the weight of the piece.[cxiii] In 1973, Robin Hardy released THE WICKER MAN, which deftly juggles elements of mystery, police procedural, dry humor, and even musical. Strangely enough, Hardy himself thinks the reason for its success was the humor.[cxiv] In 2011, he released THE WICKER TREE, a $7.75 million sequel that looks like it was shot for pocket change and focuses exclusively on lowbrow humor. THE WICKER TREE was a commercial and critical flop.[cxv] Tobe Hooper peaked early with his 1974 feature film debut, THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE. He told interviewers on the set of the 1986 sequel that while moviegoers consider the original an atmospheric, low-on-gore, vérité style scarer, it's actually a black comedy.[cxvi] The sequel makes a mockery of what people loved about the first film by amping up the comedy, inserting gross-out effects, and nixing the gritty visuals. It was greeted with negative reviews and bombed at the box office.[cxvii] After refusing to immediately direct a sequel to his Steven Spielberg-produced 1984 hit, GREMLINS, Joe Dante finally agreed to do GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH in 1990 when Warner Bros granted him complete creative freedom. Dante shamelessly made a film for himself: a live-action Looney Tunes cartoon that failed to capture the hearts of critics and audiences. In STAR WARS EPISODE V: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (Irvin Keshner, 1980) Yoda imparts to Luke that the physical body is inconsequential—The Force is what gives one strength. Nevertheless, in STAR WARS EPISODE II: ATTACK OF THE CLONES (George Lucas, 2002) Yoda brandishes a lightsaber, a highly impractical weapon for some alien species, and somersaults around

the place while battling a Sith Lord. After the success of the first Indiana Jones film, 1981's RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, director Spielberg set out to make its follow-up, 1984's INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM, as different as possible in terms of story and mood. Critics and audiences alike were taken aback by its mean-spiritedness and grotesque violence.[cxviii] And because they made TEMPLE OF DOOM, which deals with all sorts of supernatural situations, a prequel, Indy's atheism and skepticism in RAIDERS makes no sense. (Bemused by the backlash TEMPLE OF DOOM received, Spielberg decided to play things safe and stick close to the RAIDERS template for 1989's INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE. If it came out today, it would probably be called a "soft reboot." LAST CRUSADE received positive reviews, but many critics did note its lack of innovation and originality.[cxix cxx cxxi cxxii])

It's unfortunate when filmmakers don't have a full grasp on what made their material work and tweak things to such a point that the meaning of elements changes or becomes illogical.

Nothing Lynch and Frost did here approaches the cardinal sins of George Lucas, who tinkered incessantly with STAR WARS throughout the decades, but fans have no obligation whatsoever to either laud whatever creators do with the material or forever hold their peace.

Who shot first? In the original 1977 release, Han took the first (and only) shot. Establishing the smuggler as ruthless made it all the more surprising when he showed up again to save Luke. Depending on which home media release you own, Han either shoots back in self-defense or shoots at the same time as Greedo.

George Lucas added digital boulders to R2's hiding place for the 2015 "Complete Saga" Blu-ray release. Looks great, but there's no way R2 could've squeezed his tin posterior in there.

Do you know who I am? *For this shot from the DVD rerelease of 1983's* Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*, Lucas replaced original Anakin Skywalker Sabastian Shaw with prequel actor Hayden Christensen. The reason for the change is wonky at best, illogical at worst, certainly insulting to the late Sebastian Shaw's legacy, and most of all downright confusing to those watching the films in order of release.*

NINE

LEARNING LYNCH
(ABOUT MARKETING & HONESTY, INTERPRETATIONS & INTENTIONS)

I love mysteries, including those with unpredictable and airtight solutions. A great example is the 2018 Flemish miniseries DE DAG, which starts with what looks to be a dime-a-dozen hostage situation. (Spoiler alert: it ain't!) I also adore mysteries with ambiguous particulars and open endings. Examples of films that nail it are PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK (Peter Weir, 1975), based upon the book by Joan Lindsey; THE VIRGIN SUICIDES (Sofia Coppola, 1999), from the novel by Jeffrey Eugenides; and THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sánchez, 1999). The last two inform the viewers upfront what happened: five sisters took their own lives, and three filmmakers disappeared without a trace while shooting a documentary in the woods of Maryland. In PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK, three female boarding school students go missing while exploring the titular geological formation.

Nice day for a Picnic at Hanging Rock.

The problems of our entire society are of a sexual nature. The Virgin Suicides.

There's a sort of evil out there. Something strange in the hills. It takes different forms, but it's been there for as long as anyone can remember. Heather Donahue in The Blair Witch Project.

All three films present us with a clearly defined mystery and keep us engaged by letting the events unfold before our very eyes (THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT), showing us the mystery's impact on the community (PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK and THE VIRGIN SUICIDES), introducing us to amateur gumshoes—represented by a single (unreliable) narrator—becoming obsessed with the case (THE VIRGIN SUICIDES), and making us care about the involved parties. The same goes for the recent novels *A Head Full of Ghosts* by Paul Tremblay and *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* by Iain Reid.

It doesn't matter if they're about both the journey and the destination or only one of the two. They're spooky and keep us wondering, with knotted stomachs and bated breath, what happened

exactly, why did it happen, how did it happen? What we don't ask ourselves, something I did plenty during THE RETURN, is: *What* is going on here? *What* is the mystery? THE RETURN, which I feel provided neither a great journey nor a great destination, laconically introduces fragments of an implied mystery, a suggestion that *something* is at stake here.

Films involving conspiracies and heists often keep us in the dark as to what the (anti-)heroes' plans are. Twists and turns revealed during the actual execution of the heist keep us on the edge of our seats. These films make use of what Alfred Hitchcock termed "fridge logic"—plot holes that are recognized by viewers only in retrospect: "After you've gone home and start pulling cold chicken out of the icebox [you realize that the plan hinged on luck, happenstance, and assumption]." [cxxiii] Examples are FEMME FATALE (Brian De Palma, 2002), FLIGHTPLAN (Robert Schwentke, 2005) and THE GAME (David Fincher, 1997). Other films about schemes, such as Steven Soderbergh's three OCEAN'S 11 films, *do* clue us in upfront, drive home how failsafe the intricate plan is, and then let us enjoy how things go array after all during its execution.

In FEMME FATALE and THE GAME, surprise is the goal; in OCEAN'S 11/12/13, suspense. In THE RETURN we initially get to hear from those investigating the Briggs/Ruth case and, later, Cooper's whereabouts, that they don't know what's going on, that they don't understand any of this at all, only to reveal in the 11th hour that a plan has been set in motion. But we don't get to know what this plan entails or why it failed or succeeded, and that doesn't make for engrossing storytelling.

Some detractors called THE RETURN eighteen hours worth of trolling, Lynch and Frost having a laugh at our expense. I doubt the world works like that, you know, wasting four years and however many millions of dollars just to get on people's bad side. I won't write off the possibility that Frost was first and foremost eager to churn out a doorstopper or two about the town's history. Perhaps he figured it wouldn't do any business without the accompaniment of new episodes; perhaps the publisher he pitched the book(s) to told him as much. And Lynch must have loved the idea to return to TWIN PEAKS without time restrictions, without the possibility of being canceled, without the rules and regulations of network television, without anyone telling him what he can and cannot do, without the fear of having to do away with spur-of-the-moment ideas, without having to divulge what Laura whispers in Coop's ear this time.

It's been hinted in interviews that Frost gave Lynch a plot outline—going out of town, letting Coop show up in one of those housing projects built during the economic boom and subsequently abandoned during the 2008 financial crisis, showing the origin of evil and the devastating consequences of time-travel and white-knighting—and let him finish and direct the humungous script to his liking.[cxxiv]

Lynch and Frost have different creative sensibilities: Frost masters the art of dialogue and structured

storytelling; Lynch is one of the finest surrealists. Back in the day, these gents complemented each other in the best way possible. Frost wasn't too pleased every time Lynch larked about,[cxxv] but he did succeed in making those tangents plot-related: When Lynch was off making WILD AT HEART, Frost took the red room sequence Lynch had shot as the pilot's closed ending, to be used if TWIN PEAKS didn't go to series, and retooled it as a dream of clues: The Lodge's red curtains and the lines "Where we're from, the birds sing a pretty song and there's always music in the air" and "Sometimes my arms bend back" now referred to Jacques's red-draped cabin, where the debauchees listened to Julee Cruise records while myna bird Waldo serenaded a tied-up Laura.

Frost did something similar when he and Lynch wrote THE RETURN. Many of FWWM's abstract elements became integral to the plot: we got to know more about Blue Rose cases and Philip Jeffries. But seeing as Frost's contributions to the script were completed before THE RETURN was shot, there was no opportunity to take the fruits of Lynch going rogue and tweak them for future episodes. (He *did* take the opportunity to clarify some elements in *The Final Dossier*, published after THE RETURN's conclusion.) This is another reason why, for me, the original show works better than THE RETURN.

It wouldn't be the first time a film doesn't live up to its potential when the (co-)scenarist and the director aren't on the same wavelength. In his review of 1997's THE EDGE, James Berardinelli makes the case that director Lee Tamahori failed to grasp the satiric nature of David Mamet's screenplay and delivered a straight-faced action-adventure film.[cxxvi] When novelist James Dickey discovered on the set of DELIVERANCE that director John Boorman was deviating from his script, it came to blows.[cxxvii] Screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky found himself banned from the set of ALTERED STATES when he kept objecting to the way director Ken Russell dealt with his dialogue-heavy script.[cxxviii] Feminist Rita Mae Brown, known for her seminal novel *Rubyfruit Jungle*, wrote the script for SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE, which Amy Holden Jones turned, or so critics claimed, into the very thing Brown sought to satirize: a redundant slasher catering to the male gaze. Jones has since contested this.[cxxix] [cxxx]

Satire lost. Nubile girls strip to their basics while hiding from a madman in The Slumber Party Massacre.

People have pointed out that Frost and Lynch, both present at the L.A. premiere of THE RETURN's first two hours, weren't seen or photographed together. While Frost has lionized Lynch's work on THE RETURN, Lynch has never volunteered praise for *The Secret History of Twin Peaks* or *The Final Dossier* in interviews; when asked about Frost's companion book, he routinely answers with a curt "I haven't read them; they're *his* versions of TWIN PEAKS."[cxxxi] Did old tension flare up somewhere along the way? One can only speculate.

And yes, cast and crew have sung the praises of THE RETURN, but as Dov Simons stressed during one of his filmmaking seminars I attended: "Showbusiness is a gig economy. We lie; that's marketing." I'm not saying that those involved with THE RETURN secretly hated it; I think most of them are proud of their work—justifiably so, I hasten to add. That said, modesty and nuance have no place in marketing. Cast and crew always resort to spouting interchangeable compliments: their co-stars were a delight to work with, the director a one-of-a-kind visionary. (In the case of THE RETURN, it was all the cast could say; only MacLachlan had read the entire script, and none of the actors had seen more episodes than the public.) Sometimes studio and network contracts even include non-disparagement clauses to prohibit cast and crew from criticizing the project for a period following its release. We usually don't find out how those involved really feel about it until much, much later.

In the featurette *Secrets From Another Place*, from the 2007 Definitive Gold Box Edition, Kyle MacLachlan and Kimmy Robertson could speak openly about S2:

***MacLachlan**: As the second season progressed, after about three minutes of guest star cast lists, I would be really frustrated and say, 'We had such a phenomenal core cast of people … why don't we just stay in town?'*

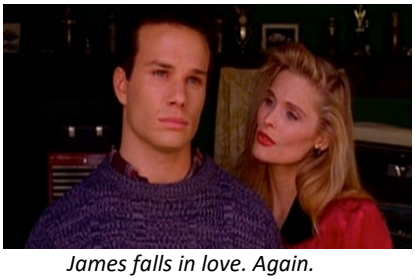
***Robertson**: I thought the whole second season pretty much sucked. I stopped watching because I didn't know who anyone was. Who was that lady that James was with and who was that … ugh!*

These remarks could easily apply to THE RETURN.

Viewership of THE RETURN has been modest, and even though many professional critics have given the show favorable reviews, the majority of these are based on the two-hour premiere, not the series as a whole.[cxxxii] [cxxxiii] More interesting (and telling) is that, unlike the original show, THE RETURN has had no cultural impact. So far, it hasn't inspired pastiches, homages, parodies, or similar shows.

I don't, however, believe detractors for a nanosecond when they claim that those who love THE

RETURN (in some cases even more than the original show) are lying to themselves. Denial can be a powerful and sometimes beneficial coping mechanism, but sooner or later one always lands on the home plate of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of grief: acceptance. Just look at how quickly legions of fans who'd lauded STAR WARS EPISODE 1: THE PHANTOM MENACE started singing a different tune and lowered their expectations for the sequel, ATTACK OF THE CLONES. It's been years since THE RETURN premiered, and none of the fans I know have had a change of heart. Good on them. I'm envious! Detractors have also claimed that those who loved THE RETURN wouldn't have been so pleased with the show had it been somebody else's brainchild. With Roger Ebert's assessment of Scorsese's THE COLOR OF MONEY in mind, more benign claims would be that detractors may have liked it more and admirers mightn't have analyzed it as obsessively. (And perhaps memes dealing with some of THE RETURN's dead-end or abandoned storylines and forgettable new characters would have been as prevalent as those about those of S2: James Hurley's dalliance with Eveline Marsh, the Little Nicky debacle,[cxxxiv] and the civil war antics of a temporarily insane Ben Horne.)



James falls in love. Again.

Little Nicky is a problem child.

Ben Horne wanted the Confederacy to win the American Civil War.

Of course, some fans *do* find it hard to be *entirely* truthful. Back in the day, when we wanted to interact with TWIN PEAKS actors, we had to find out who represented them, write and send a letter, and then hope to get a reply or an autographed photo. Now we just befriend them on social media, like their posts, leave gushing comments, and tag them in our own posts in the hope to score a shout-out. We also get to hang out with them at festivals or signings. And, let's cut the bull, we *do* tend to be sycophantic around them, don't we?

Many fans responding to critics in brief won't use ad hominem attacks but will instead reaffirm their appreciation of THE RETURN and its director with such empty catchphrases as "It's a masterpiece," "Lynch is a genius," and even "The show isn't enjoyable, but we're not meant to enjoy it." Others have said "Eschewing traditional narrative is bold; subverting expectation courageous," but these are mere gerund phrases, not signifiers, much less irrefutable proof, of artistic excellence.

I'll address the persistent claim that Lynch simply prefers open, downbeat endings indirectly: When Lynch's exhibition *Someone is in My House* came to the Bonnefanten Museum in Maastricht, Netherlands, in late 2018, the man himself did a Q & A via Skype and was asked by a young woman

why such an ebullient person would wish to conjure up nightmarish visions.[cxxxv] Lynch smiled resignedly and said he gets this a lot. I'll bet. It's a question as uninspired as "Where do you get your ideas?" and "Suppose someone imitated the acts of violence from your films?" First off, the woman makes the mistake of not differentiating between content and intent: by implication, she thinks comedians are jolly around the clock. As Smokey Robinson and the Miracles pointed out in their 1967 chart-topper *The tears of a Clown*, don't let a glad expression give you the wrong impression. And what does the young woman's logic say about us, fans itching for more Lynch material? Is merriness alien to us? (I encourage those interested in why people embrace dark art to read *The Frighteners*, by horror connoisseur and ordained minister Peter Laws.[cxxxvi]) But what renders the question nonsensical is that it's simply untrue that a distinct absence of hope, light, joy, and love characterizes Lynch's work. With such tongue-in-cheek titles as *Bob loves Sally until she is blue in the face, This Man Was Shot 0.9502 Seconds Ago,* and *All I Want for Christmas is my Two Front Teeth*, his mixed media paintings exude playfulness.

On the subject of Lynch's cinematic oeuvre, despair and narrative experimentation are *recurring* elements, not *constants*. DUNE, BLUE VELVET, THE STRAIGHT STORY, and INLAND EMPIRE have happy endings. In WILD AT HEART, love conquers all, which is not the case in Barry Gifford's source novel. ERASERHEAD, THE ELEPHANT MAN, and FWWM conclude with the leads finding peace in death. Only LOST HIGHWAY and MULHOLLAND DRIVE end on a bleak note. THE ELEPHANT MAN, DUNE, BLUE VELVET, WILD AT HEART, THE STRAIGHT STORY, and most of S1 and S2 feature straightforward narratives. As mentioned, the ending of S2 was supposed to be a *season* finale, not a *series* finale.

Happily ever after. Sailor (Nicolas Cage) sings for Lula (Laura Dern) in Wild at Heart.

Of all the terse responses to critics, "Learn Lynch, learn cinema" is the most patronizing. It's also a piece of advice some had better take themselves, for even paying cursory attention to Lynch's media appearances makes it clear that he isn't who and what they would want him to be. Let me back this up with some articles, starting with Luke Ford's 2002 interview with Mark Frost:

***Frost**: It started as a conversation David and I were having about a sequel to Twin Peaks. We wanted to take the Audrey Horn character, played by Sherilyn Fenn, to Hollywood. I proposed Mulholland Drive, which I lived on, as a title. He sold it as a pilot to ABC and then convinced the French that if he shot 45 more minutes, he could make something out of it. I haven't seen it. I heard it was a mess. I knew that the pilot was a mess. David's strength and weakness is that he is often able to transcend story because he's such a master creating mood. His failing is that he's not a strong storyteller. He doesn't have a lot of interest in telling a story. He's not as interested in character as fragments of personality. He's a surrealist.*

***Ford**: He's got a great eye for hot looking women.*

***Frost**: That was always one of his strengths. The mistake that people make about David is that they assume he's an ironist, saying the opposite of what he means. He's not. He's a sincere simple guy. He doesn't work things out. He's not that good in logic. When people spend a lot of energy trying to figure out exactly what he meant by Mulholland Drive, I can assure you that he didn't know. I exchanged emails with Roger Ebert at one point. He was conducting an online seminar about the meaning of Mulholland Drive. David works like a painter. He throws a canvas up there and you interpret it any way you want. He doesn't have a strong point of view. It's about sensation and feeling and arousing emotions.*[cxxxvii]

After spending a week on the set of LOST HIGHWAY, novelist David Foster Wallace wrote:

David Lynch's movies are often described as occupying a kind of middle ground between art film and commercial film. But what they really occupy is a whole third kind of territory. Most of Lynch's best films don't really have much of a point, and in lots of ways they seem to resist the film-interpretative process by which movies' (certainly avant-garde movies') central points are understood. This is something the British critic Paul Taylor seems to get at when he says that Lynch's movies are 'to be experienced rather than explained.' [cxxxviii]

Here Wallace all but paraphrases David Bordwell, the film scholar whose innovative work, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, distinguishes three modes of narrative.[cxxxix]

1. **Classical Hollywood narration**:

- Goal-oriented heroes;
- Continuity editing (meaning the camerawork, direction, editing, and sound shouldn't draw attention to themselves.)
- A three-act structure with a clear resolution.

Note that these films do not necessarily exclude fantastical elements. SUPERMAN (Richard Donner, 1978), too, is Classical Hollywood: it sets up rules—Superman can fly, Lois Lane cannot—and adheres to them.

2. **European Art -cinema narration**:
- Not everything adds up narratively.
- Uses "noticeable" camerawork, editing, and stylistic choices often unmotivated by plot.

3. **Historical-materialist narration**:
- Political in nature, it addresses domestic or even global issues. The most famous example would be Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN.

In an October 1986 article for Fangoria (starting with the sentence "The ideas just pop into [Lynch's] head and he strings them together without figuring them out—if he already knew what they meant, he says, there would be no point to make the film"), reporter William Rabkin asked Lynch what BLUE VELVET is about.

***Lynch**: I'm not an intellectual person, and all the things that I go by are things that are hard to talk about.*

***Rabkin**: There's something about your films that make people think you're an intellectual, and will be able to articulate your ideas. I know this isn't just me, because I remember an interview in the LA Reader in which the interviewer was also frustrated.*

***Lynch**: Some people work in reverse, where they've captured ideas about certain things, they can articulate them tentatively with words, and they say, 'Now, I would like to write a script, make a film and show those ideas in cinema, to manifest a certain theme in film and to prove a point or something.' It's not the right way for me to go about it.* [cxl]

During Mark Cousins' televised interview with David Lynch for the 1999 BBC docuseries *Scene by Scene*, the Scottish film scholar's initial disappointment with Lynch's succinct answers to his academic questions gave way to embracing that Lynch's films are indeed better experienced than explained[cxli]

But not unlike UFO enthusiasts maintaining that crop circles are proof of extraterrestrial visitations, many fans insist obstinately that Lynch is just being cute when he says things like "I don't have a clue what [the blue key and box from MULHOLLAND DRIVE] are."[cxlii]

So, when Lynch gave an interview to Salome Asatiani in late 2017, he had to go through the same routine yet again.

***Asatiani**: The question what are you trying to say with your films—*

***Lynch**: I'm not trying to say anything—some people don't like not knowing. Others like something that kicks in a dream, even though it's very abstract, and that person is me as well. But I'm not trying to say anything. I turn to staying true to ideas I've fallen in love with and translate those ideas—and try to have fun translating those ideas—to one medium or another with the hope that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and I like stories that hold concrete things and I like stories that hold abstract ideas.*

***Asatiani**: What would be your perspective on cinema or art interfering actively with existing power structures, political, social—*

***Lynch**: You don't even think about it.*

***Asatiani:** But your films have made great impact—*

***Lynch**: No—*

***Asatiani**: The Elephant Man deals with the marginalized people—*

***Lynch**: Some people say, "Okay, I'm going to make a film about the marginalized people," and you start to think "Well, what could that be …" and you go like that. That's not the way I work. I heard about The Elephant Man in a restaurant. As soon as I heard that name, an explosion went off in my brain: that's the film I want to make. And that happened, I got to make it. But I didn't make it to send any message.*

***Asatiani**: But what about the opening scene of Blue Velvet, which has become overquoted now? You brought the colors of the American flag to toxicity with the red, blue, and white and the fences and the flowers and the sky and the whole idea that this beautiful façade covers so much. Was that not a political or social—*

***Lynch**: No, no, no, no.*[cxliii]

To understand THE RETURN is to acknowledge, and accept, that abstraction is not the same as profundity. It's not a (pseudo-)intellectual competition, not a puzzle only the keenest minds may

solve and wholly appreciate. Lynch isn't a Michael Haneke, Julia Ducournau, Agnès Varda, or Rainier Fassbender, who use, or used, the language of cinema and genre tropes as tools to convey their stances on sociopolitical issues. The truths of Lynch's art are contrasts, moods, happy accidents, intuition, feeling rather than thinking, and the marriage of sounds and oneiric imagery. This is what Marshall McLuhan called "The medium is the message." [cxliv]

Here an interesting question arises: if a work of art contains no critique or message by design, does this mean we should not be afforded to look for it, still less *excavate* it? Of course, "excavate" is the wrong word in this context. Here, it's not about what you take from it but what you bring to it: conjecture. Lynch has often stated that once a project is completed and released, what happens to it next is beyond the creator's control. Theorist Roland Barthes' 1967 essay *The Author is Dead* calls it limiting to assign a single interpretation, relying on the author's identity, to a text.[cxlv] This is also where Stuart Hall's 1973 encoding/decoding model of communication comes into play.[cxlvi] It asserts that there are three ways of interpreting cultural texts:

- **The preferred reading**, also known as the dominant/hegemonic position (accepting the text's authorial intent);
- **The negotiated reading** ("Yes, but—");
- **The oppositional reading** (completely rejecting the text's authorial intent).

All three readings are subject to personal experiences and predilections. Back in 2005, a former college professor of mine asked me to take a look at his new book on postmodern cinema. One chapter stated that BEING JOHN MALKOVICH (Spike Jonze, 1999) ends with Craig Schwartz (John Cusack) becoming the most powerful puppeteer of all time, able to possess the soul of his bi-sexual lover's child just to mess with them. I contacted per email the professor to ask him about this oppositional reading. After all, the hegemonic position makes it obvious that it was Craig's objective to take control of *Malkovich*—expositional dialogue clarifies that Craig has now become a powerless marionette trapped inside a child's body. This didn't go over well with the professor, whose chagrined reply to my remarks boiled down to "Quiet, you!"

There's nothing wrong with an individual settling on the reading that allows them to get the most out of the text and, why not, pat themselves on the back for their intellectual acuity. I appreciate and enjoy the numerous think pieces (and videos with "explained" in their titles) devoted to THE RETURN, but what matters in the end is this: does the show draw me in and keep me engaged? It's a prerequisite no theory, however elegant, can override. (Take Gustav Courbet's 1866 painting *L'Origine du monde*: there's enough mental nourishment on display, but it wouldn't look nice on my wall.) The fun stops when fans present their theory as the de facto hegemonic position and use it to invalidate other interpretations or to tell detractors that they aren't intelligent enough to

understand, and "thus" love, the text.

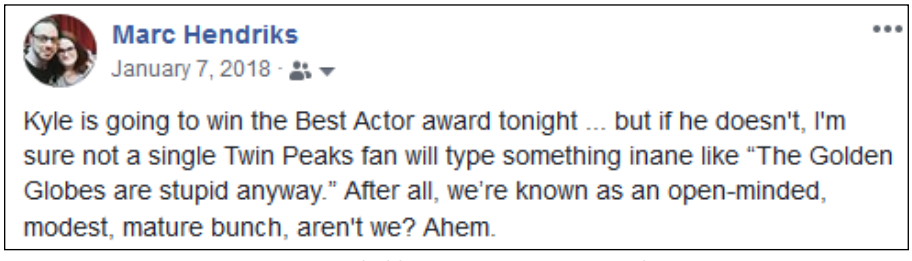
Make what you will of what Professor Ray Carney, the previously mentioned film professor and John Cassavetes connoisseur, had to say about MULHOLLAND DRIVE:

> *People would rather play games, do crossword puzzles, watch tricks than face reality and deal with hard questions. It's a form of intellectual escapism. Decoding puzzle-films is a way of flattering themselves that they are smart and hip and "with-it." These movies are for teenagers who are too young to understand much about life or for adults too intimidated by the complexity of adult life to want to grapple with it […] Most of my grad students can't understand meanings that won't stand still. They try to nail everything down.*[cxlvii]

Let the record show that TWIN PEAKS is far from the only franchise bringing out the worst in a number of fans. As Andrea Braithwaite of the Institute of Technology at the University of Ontario told The Telegraph in an article about the RICK AND MORTY fandom:

> *Dedicated fans establish a particular perspective on a show as the way to read a show, and other takes on it are 'poorly informed' or 'miss the point.'* [cxlviii]

The relatively small group of people who disliked what Lynch and Frost cooked up can be equally hotheaded, but *their* furor is typically directed at THE RETURN itself. Besides, it's understandable to vent your disappointment in something you'd been longing for. Less clear is why people who fell head over heels for THE RETURN, and thus have eighteen hours of new Lynch material to savor, often go into conniptions when encountering naysayers. Why do some need to proclaim their appreciation of THE RETURN by looking down on (fans of) popular shows such as GAME OF THRONES and STRANGER THINGS, either with variations on "they are dumb and for the masses" or with a cautiously positive review that often concludes with something along the lines of "But it's no TWIN PEAKS"? Why do some root for THE RETURN to snag all the Emmys but pen an article titled "Twin Peaks was too good for the Award Show anyway" when it wins none?[cxlix]



Behold my precognitive powers!

In an article for *Teen Vogue*, Brianne Wiest states the following:

> *Fandoms do generally offer a sense of belonging and community.*[cl]

With this in mind, it is likely that, in the case of THE RETURN, vilifying naysayers and/or redeclaring undying love for the show is less about defending the art/its creator(s) and more about revalidating the congregation's legitimacy (and, thereby, one's treasured place in it). But as Wiest puts it:

> *There is a difference between obsession and genuine ardor. The difference isn't necessarily who is more impassioned, it's whether or not you can maintain a healthy perspective.*

Film historian Leonard Maltin has received enough hate mail to repaper his house. Allowing your emotions to get the better of you by calling Maltin the sort of idiot who wouldn't recognize cinematic supremacy if it dry-humped his wife is a breeze when you can hide behind a private/empty account, a made-up username, and a placeholder avatar, but what if he was standing right in front of you? Intrigued, Maltin organized a series of events titled *You're Wrong, Leonard Maltin*, allowing ornery folks to confront him in person with his unfavorable reviews of cult favorites—BLADE RUNNER, TAXI DRIVER, THE DARK KNIGHT.[cli] Instead of approaching Maltin with the verbal equivalents of ALL CAPS and a dozen exclamation points, those in attendance put getting angry over another human being's opinion of art in perspective and were more interested in constructive, good-natured discourse.

Count to ten! *Leonard Maltin and his daughter, Jessie.*

Back to Mark Cousins, who concluded his *Scene-by-Scene* interview by saying, "A critic once said of

your work: 'David Lynch seems to care more about penetrating your head than about what he does once he's in there.'" (From the *Premiere* article by the late David Foster Wallace, here misattributed to the late Serge Daney.) When Lynch admitted that he didn't understand the paraphrase, Cousins remarked: "I think he meant that your films make people dream but that there's no message there." Lynch, with a smile: "That's okay then."

It sure is, Mr. Lynch. It sure is.

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