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In Focus: Returning to the Red Room: *Twin Peaks* at 25

Introduction

Ross P. Garner and Karra Shimabukuro

Twin Peaks (1990–1991) debuted on America’s ABC network on the 8th April 1990. The pilot episode, which was directed by David Lynch and co-written by Lynch and Mark Frost, garnered the highest viewing figures for a TV movie for the 1989–1990 season resulting in the series quickly becoming a cultural phenomenon of the early 1990s. The show was infamously received by critics as “the series that will change television”, and actively promoted under similar terms by ABC, whilst also sparking a national demand for cherry pie and coffee and raising many of its off-beat characters (such as Catherine E. Coulson’s Log Lady), and the stars who played them, to widespread recognition. Outside of the US, *Twin Peaks* also attracted a small-but-dedicated following in many of the countries where it became distributed. Yet, *Twin Peaks* ultimately ran for just thirty episodes, succumbing to cancellation in June of 1991 as a result of poor domestic ratings. This was despite seemingly setting itself up for a third series by ending on an unresolved (and heart-breaking) cliff-hanger where lead character and continual beacon of purity Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) had become possessed by the murderous evil spirit BOB (Frank Silva) as a result of his journey into the otherworldly Black Lodge.¹ In 1992, a prequel movie, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (David Lynch, 1992), was released to (in the view of us editors, unfair) negativity and that seemed to signal the end. Lynch carried on directing unnerving cinematic masterpieces, Frost continued to work as a screenwriter

for both film and television, and members of the cast had varying degrees of visibility and success in the screen industries.

Then, unexpectedly, 6th October 2014 brought the announcement that *Twin Peaks* would be returning as a limited episode series for the premium-rate subscription cable network Showtime. Although the show has gone through a tumultuous pre-production phase where Lynch departed from, and then returned to, the revival, this period has demonstrated two noteworthy points. Firstly, the nostalgia for the show (a point Dana Och also alludes to at the start of her essay here) was signified by the cast-produced video “*Twin Peaks* without David Lynch is like...” which generated many shares and reactions from fans across different digital platforms. Secondly, elements such as the additional “No Lynch, No Peaks” campaign and the Official *Twin Peaks* Cast run site on Facebook indicates the continued centrality of Lynch-as-auteur to the show amongst cultural sites of both production and fandom. However, with these behind-the-scenes issues now resolved, it seems certain that the audiences will soon be revisiting *Twin Peaks*’ inhabitants amongst the branches that blow in the breeze.

As the above indicates, the years since *Twin Peaks*’ cancellation and its now-revival have seen it build and maintain a dedicated fan community through a variety of practices.² These have included early fanzines (*Wrapped in Plastic*), long-running conventions on both sides of the Atlantic (e.g. *Twin Peaks* Fest and the *Twin Peaks* UK Festival) and, as Rebecca Williams discusses here, now social media forms. *Twin Peaks* has also remained a highly visible programme within the academic study of television, though. Whilst this has partly occurred through an ongoing interest in Lynch’s *oeuvre* and perspectives indebted to differing inflections of *auteur* criticism within Film Studies, the show has also accrued a pivotal position in ongoing TV Studies debates.³ Although postmodernist readings of the series have waned,⁴ the

programme's status as an ongoing point of reference in analyses of both "quality" and "cult" forms continues and enshrines its reputation for television scholars and beyond.⁵

Recognising these trajectories, this In Focus section uses *Twin Peaks* to examine wider issues regarding how the legacy of an iconic TV programme becomes constructed. In considering this, two areas of focus arise: firstly, an ongoing interest in the text of *Twin Peaks* is demonstrated as scholars return to the series from emergent or hitherto overlooked perspectives to provide new insights. Karra Shimabukuro begins this collection by using ideas of the folkloric to analyse the series' narrative and aesthetic representation of its trees and forest, arguing that the construction of these locations provides thematic continuity across the show's two televised series. Then, Stephen Lacey examines *Twin Peaks* from the neglected perspective of television performance by focusing on how the show combines and cuts between the requirements of melodramatic and comedic modes and so assists in creating its off-beat tone. Secondly, in addition to textual re-readings, these essays demonstrate that understanding *Twin Peaks*' legacy also requires examining the discursive and material practices that adapt and rework the series' meanings across shifting industrial, reception and technological contexts. For example, Dana Och adopts a feminist perspective towards the critical reception of *The Killing* (AMC, 2011–14) and *Pretty Little Liars* (ABC Family, 2010–)—both of which explicitly cite *Twin Peaks* in terms of their content—and argues that *Twin Peaks* and Lynch work as gendered signifiers of "quality" that are avoided and so contribute to the low cultural status afforded to both shows. Adopting a similar discursive lens, Ross Garner reflects upon *Twin Peaks*' positioning as "classic" television and, using Bourdieuan field theory, argues that the show's classification as this arises from its ongoing re-appropriation within culturally-valued discourses that build its temporal capital.⁶ Finally, Williams draws upon Anthony Giddens' concept of ontological security to consider how

Twin Peaks' transition to social media forms provides the programme's fans with a sense of stability and continuity in recent years.⁷ Cumulatively, these papers contribute towards expanding emerging scholarly discourses on televisual remembrance, as well as paratextuality and fandom, by arguing *Twin Peaks* has endured as an object of interest to both fans and academics not through any objectively-verifiable features of "the text itself" but by its continuing re-appropriation and adaptation to ever-changing discursive formations and cultural sites.

¹ See also Andy Burns, *Wrapped in Plastic: Twin Peaks* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2015), 1-6.

² Marisa C. Hayes and Franck Boulègue, eds., *Fan Phenomena: Twin Peaks* (Chicago and Bristol: Intellect, 2013).

³ See, for example, Todd McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 129–153 or Martha P. Nochimson, *David Lynch Swerves* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

⁴ See Jim Collins, "Postmodernism and Television," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Allen (London: Routledge, 1992), 341–349 and Jimmie L. Reeves et al., "Postmodernism and Television: Speaking of *Twin Peaks*," in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*, ed. David Lavery (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995).

⁵ In discussions of "quality" television, see Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen* (London: BFI, 2004) or Linda Ruth Williams, "Twin Peaks: David Lynch and the Serial–Thriller Soap," in *The Contemporary Television Series*, ed. Michael Hammond and Lucy

Mazdon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 37–56. For cult TV debates, see Stacey Abbot, ed., *The Cult TV Book* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

⁷ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).