

Smashing the Small Screen

*David Lynch, Twin Peaks
and Reinventing Television*

KYLE BARRETT

David Lynch began his career as a fine artist and his films have always had a strong sense of visual style, even within the conventions of narrative cinema, which tends to foreground effects work or script-based character development over aesthetic verisimilitude.

—Odell (163)

Moving into filmmaking with his debut animated short *Six Figures Getting Sick* (1967), David Lynch developed subversive filmmaking techniques that would later be employed in his later live-action shorts and feature films. Many stylistic elements have evolved from his earlier work, including the use of an experimental soundscape, wide-angles, long sustained close-ups and use (and absence) of color. Jane Evans Braziel notes, “His visual style, influenced by artists Francis Bacon, Jackson Pollock and Edward Hopper, balances narrative with non-representational images. The effect is a startling beautiful, if bizarre and sometimes horrifying, montage of sights, sounds, bodies, lights and movement that denaturalises the parameters of space and time, and conventions of embodiment, violence, sex, desire and gender” (108). Both embracing and abandoning conventional production practices, Lynch has created an easily identifiable—“Lynchian”—style, successfully translated to the small screen with the seminal *Twin Peaks* (1990–91).

Lynch’s first feature film, *Eraserhead*, became a cult hit on the midnight movie circuit, leading to directing duties on the Mel Brooks-produced *The Elephant Man*. The critical success of this gave Lynch the chance to direct a big budget science fiction film, *Dune*, the result of which became a box-office

and critical failure. However, his multi-film contract with producer Dino De Laurentiis allowed Lynch to produce the decidedly different, and superior, *Blue Velvet*. This film landed the director back in favor with the critics, and during this period he would begin his collaboration with television writer Mark Frost. They developed a series of aborted projects, including the surrealist comedy *One Saliva Bubble* (1986) and *Goddess* (1988), based on the life of Marilyn Monroe. These projects could be considered precursors that would lead to *Twin Peaks*.

The evolution of Lynch's career from painter to filmmaker shows him to be a practitioner who has been able to adopt and transform creative restrictions that fit within various platforms, observes Allister Mactaggart: "The genesis of his film practice via his 'visionary' engagement with one of his paintings is central ... to an understanding of his body of work. It is not tangential to it or only of minor significance; it helps to place the films within a fine art context and sensibility" (12). Lynch's directing style from his feature film work was assimilated into the restrictions of television production, which would have a lasting influence on the small screen. The purpose of this essay is to evaluate the techniques Lynch employs within the episodes of *Twin Peaks* he directed, including the pilot, episode two, eight, nine, 14 and the series finale. The announcement of a revival series of *Twin Peaks* in 2017 makes it appropriate to analyze what made the series so significant when it first aired, and thorough analysis of its visual style, established by Lynch, will demonstrate the inspired creativity available within the traditionally restrictive network television practices. Jonathan Bignell comments, "The television serial was granted the artistic status of being an experimental work that challenged the norms of television, and was attached to the name of an acknowledged cinema director whose work carried prestige among audiences of art cinema" (175).

Despite certain limitations with regard to television production, Lynch was given a degree of freedom, and *Twin Peaks* marked a significant shift toward a cinematic experience within the confines of the living room.

Lynchian: A Look, a Mood, a Feeling

Firstly, this essay will establish the key parameters of Lynch's style. As stated above, Lynch's practices as a painter fed into his cinematic work, generating visual abstractions with a lens rather than a paintbrush whereby he is able to cultivate his artistic vision within the parameters of film production. As Martha Nochimson observes, "To use narrative as a support for the dream, Lynch takes a page from the painters who inspired him and neutralizes as much as he can of the drive in narrative to take control of a film" (16). While

narrative is also a site for experimentation for Lynch, we first must establish the images, or at least the manner in which he constructs his images: writes Richard Woodward, “From his astonishing feature debut, *Eraserhead*, in 1977, through his first mainstream success with *The Elephant Man* in 1980, . . . Lynch has developed a peculiar signature. Within established moods of dread and mystery, disturbing things happen in the frame or on the soundtrack” (50). The world of *Eraserhead*, for example, is based largely on Lynch’s experience of Philadelphia. The stale, cold, industrial environment in which Henry Spencer (Jack Nance) lives provides Lynch the canvas to gradually introduce various abstractions. Within these abstractions lies the painterly aspects of Lynch’s work where his creative practice as an artist translates into film production. Key examples of this would be the use of framing where Lynch creates precise images including subjects that are often static within the frame, much like a canvas painting. Greg Olson comments, “Lynch’s modus operandi remains that of a painter . . . treating a film set like an unfinished canvas that he’s still actively adding to as the work develops via intuition and experimentation rather than detailed planning” (289). To fill this canvas, Lynch employs an atmospheric, subversive use of sound. Through close collaboration with sound designer Alan Splet, from the short *The Grandmother* (1970) up to *Blue Velvet*, Lynch would continuously manipulate his images with sound design. This is evident as early as *Six Figures Getting Sick*, which was looped with a siren, an effect detached from the images depicted. Although these are two large areas to explore—Lynch’s images and sound—they will be filtered within application to Lynch’s painterly aesthetics. Images will be explored through the use of framing, camera movement and visual content. Sound will be explored through its relationship to these images and how they are utilized, subverted and re-appropriated. Ultimately, the bridge between film and fine art practices within Lynch’s work refashions conventions and, as Mactaggart notes, Lynch’s techniques “reference avant-garde artistic practice and they also operate within mainstream cinema, although at its edges, which perhaps explains, to a degree, Lynch’s status within the Hollywood film industry” (18). I will now consider how some of these abstractions were formed prior to *Twin Peaks*.

Everything Is Fine? Abstractions in the Radiator

Eraserhead features some of Lynch’s most creative abstractions, including the Lady in the Radiator (Laurel Near), who provides a comforting presence for the troubled Henry (Jack Nance), and most famously, the malformed “Baby.” However, despite the grotesque imagery, Lynch captures his world

with smooth tracking shots and sustained wide-angles. Lynch utilizes a wide-angle to follow Henry and to depict his journey home. The angle enables a greater view of Henry's industrial, vacant world as he travels over mud hills and tries to avoid puddles of water.

The absence of conventional coverage, including inserts and close-ups, reinforces the industrial setting as Lynch tries to reveal to the viewer as much as he can through this angle. It also allows Nance to project Henry's awkward mannerisms and body language, which over-emphasizes the absence of dialogue. The near silence of this sequence, and the way in which Henry moves, suggest a reference to silent cinema, with the character similar to Chaplin or Keaton through the awkward manner in which he presents himself.

The static frame, then, acts as Lynch's canvas and thus develops visual abstractions through character, sound, set design and *mise-en-scene*. The familiar zigzag floor pattern, later appearing in *Twin Peaks*, makes an appearance in Henry's apartment building which Lynch, again, reveals through a wide-angle. However, the camera moves closer toward Henry as he enters the escalator, becoming more involved in his personal space until he ultimately arrives home.

Lynch later utilizes close-ups to focus on the grotesque imagery, particularly the infamous dinner scene during which miniature chickens hemorrhage. The combination of these techniques, then, draws the audience deeper into the world and makes them active participants. Observes Isabella van Elferen, "With the help of nonconventional camera use (angles, zooms, fast edits, jump cuts) and alienating extra-diegetic inserts on the one hand, and the reversal and doubling of cinematic motifs on the other, [Lynch's] films foreground the medium of film as an active agent in the blurring of boundaries between reality, fiction, memory, and the unconscious" (176). As van Elferen suggests, the camerawork Lynch employs explores the dynamics of his fictional realms. This style of shooting would later become a tool for his future projects. The dynamics within *Eraserhead* offer a perfect example and suitable introduction to Lynch's techniques—wide-angles, sound, static framing—which would later translate on to the television screen. As noted above, the creation of Lynch's cinematic images, particularly the use of wide-angles, produces the shape of the canvas in which Lynch adds all of the abstractions, using the camera as a paintbrush, the actors as the brush strokes, and the soundscape to layer his images.

Falling through Space: The Aural Field

Since his early shorts, Lynch has utilized the possibilities of an experimental sound design, and in collaboration with Splet, he is able to add further

dimensions to his images: "I know there's a dialogue between the director and the sound designer. There has to be. But how much of a dialogue and how much do you go into that with them? So, it seems to me that the whole thing is to get people on the same track and just keep going so that everything that comes through is fitting into this world" (Lynch 46). Each soundscape reinforces and emphasizes the dream-like nature of every project Lynch has created, thereby enhancing the abstract imagery. The drones, reversals and inversion of everyday sounds suggest other worlds coming into close contact with our own. Writes Martha Nochimson, "We know the power of Lynch's ninety-percent solution from the haunting visual and aural images in his films: curtains and branches rising and falling in the wind, fire, clouds, a hero whose hair literally stands on end, a blue-lipped drowned girl wrapped in plastic, a blonde matron's face smeared with scarlet lipstick, a car wreck lit by headlights on a dark country road" (17). These images that Nochimson identifies, while abstract in their own right, are provided a further layer through the soundscape that Lynch designs which makes his work richer and more seductive than that of other filmmakers.

Twin Peaks was able to demonstrate this further. As discussed later in this essay, the sound design had rarely been so experimental within television production, in order to offer audiences a haunting aural experience: "Audio and visual media cooperate to build the surreal universes of nonlinear narratives and overlapping realities of his dreamscapes, and the combination is typically evaluated as extremely disconcerting" (van Elferen 175).

Lynch himself has discussed the use of sound in his work in relation to the emotional appeal, regardless of how abstract the design may be: "So it's finding those sounds that fit, and yet don't fit. They're just off, but they amplify the emotion, or amplify the feeling" (Lynch 47). Amplifying the emotion through the use of a soundscape pushes beyond conventional melodrama, an association made to *Twin Peaks* on several occasions. Writes Sheli Ayers, "*Twin Peaks* borrowed heavily from both televisual and cinematic genres: soap opera, melodrama, police procedural and *film noir*. At times the series may have called the viewer's attention to these recycled conventions; however, it did not do so in a way that prevented his or her emotional involvement" (96). In typical Lynchian style, the combination of the above genres, styles and themes is presented in a somewhat abstract fashion which can feel disjointed, at times disorienting; however, it never feels never tedious.

The aural field of buzzes, pauses, wind, industrial machinery and pulses maintains the interest of the viewer as it acts as a point of investigation where the audience, at times, is probed to discover where these sounds are diegetic within the environment: "Diegetic sound in Lynch's films is hard to ignore. It is pushed into the foreground of the sound design, emphatically suggesting presence.... Doors are slammed too loudly, cigarettes are lit at deafening

volumes, fires blaze and waterfalls roar as if they are personally communicating a message to the viewer—but the message, invariably, is one whose only content is its own non-signification” (van Elferen 179). By emphasizing the sound design, Lynch places it in the foreground and is able to further challenge the conventions and expectations of the audience, as they can no longer ignore the aural field, so it becomes central to the experience. An example of this can be found in the opening scenes of *The Elephant Man*, which depict the titular character’s birth. Lynch symbolizes the birth by having the mother appear to be struck down by an elephant. This is visualized in slow-motion and made more shocking with the subversion of the sound of the mother’s screams that have been altered to match the movement of the actor.

The muffled screams, the cutting between the mother and the elephant, as well as the heightened use of a “thump” from the elephant’s trunk, bring the viewer into the agony of giving birth to John Merrick. The distortions of both the image and sound reflect Lynch’s painterly attributes, even referring back to his early short *The Alphabet* (1968), which also employed similar use of distorted sound and slow-motion.

Into the Dark: Lynching and Frosting Television

The next project that drew Lynch mass attention from audiences and critics alike was, of course, *Twin Peaks*. During this period, television was struggling to regain the attention of viewers. Some of the most popular shows at that time were *Cheers* (1982–93), *The Simpsons* (1987–present), and *Rosanne* (1988–97), all of which, with the exception of *Rosanne*, were on rival networks to *Twin Peaks*’ eventual home, American Broadcasting Company (ABC). Professor of television history and methodologies at the University of Reading, Jonathan Bignell states, “Following the arrival of cable television as a significant force in the United States in the 1980s, network television viewing in evening prime time had fallen from 91 per cent of the audience in 1979 to 67 per cent by 1989. *Twin Peaks* was an effort to attract cable viewers back to network television by offering them what appeared to be a prestige ‘art’ television programme” (175). Network television’s state during this period, as Bignell suggests, was dwindling due to cable programming providing more adult content.

The shows mentioned above, while successful in their own right, lack the visual elements that Lynch would bring to television production. Writes John Caldwell, “One of the central working concerns in television production in the 1980s concerned the formal potential of the television image, and espe-

cially the question of what can be done within the constraints and confines of the limited television frame.... Some DPs saw in primetime Bertoluciesque cinematic potential; others, melodic sensitivity. TV was inherently like film; TV and film were antithetical” (297). While the above-mentioned shows were able to work successfully despite the constraints of the televisual image at this time, they were maintaining a standard practice. Granted, *The Simpsons* was the most visual show of the lot—it is animation—and was as postmodern as *Twin Peaks* would become. Other television shows at the time were standard fare with regard to a directorial style. Cult sci-fi series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–94), for example, was limited by its budget and could only produce a ‘safe’ visual design with regard to shots and editing choices. During lengthy dialogue sequences there would be mid-shot to close-up to mid-shot, cutting back and forth between characters as they spoke. Additionally, popular sitcom *Cheers* was filmed in front of a studio audience and was a multi-camera directed show, allowing for easy cuts to be made from various shot sizes without too many continuity issues. With a conventional filmic style, the strength of these shows lay in their writing.

Twin Peaks became a breath of fresh air with Lynch’s touches, and his partnership with Frost, co-creator and producer, would only enable him further to refine and refashion the stale environment of television production:

By wrapping their work in the plastic of conventional television storytelling, and then reimagining what the medium could deliver, David Lynch and Mark Frost redefined the boundaries of network TV, creating one of the most influential series in the history of the medium; one that, for a brief moment in time, enthralled an audience that hadn’t known they were hungry for something new until they finally got a taste [Burns 6].

If Lynch was bringing his practices to television, then Frost, who had worked on the influential television series *Hill Street Blues* (1981–87), was able to enhance his skills as a writer and play off of Lynch’s abstractions. As Chris Rodley says,

Some commentators have assumed that the Lynch/Frost partnership was simply one in which the former had exclusive rights on the “weird” factor, while the latter provided the strategies and working practices necessary to the creation and production of the series. However, this ignores some of the more eccentric contributions Frost had made to shows such as *Hill Street Blues*, and the fact that the partnership had already produced a bizarre feature script entitled *One Saliva Bubble* [155].

Lynch’s abstractions were able to merge with Frost’s narrative sensibilities that, at first, appear to be within the conventions of television drama yet are gradually subverted as the series progresses.

Majestic Trees: Situating the Series, Opening Moments and Developing Tropes

Utilizing the soap opera enabled both Lynch and Frost to, at first, present a sense of familiarity to the audience by playing on the elements associated with this genre: “Soap operas ... rely heavily on a host of storytelling conventions that viewers are familiar with and have come to expect, from the evil twin to the cheating husband to the family feud” (Burns 31). While cheating husbands and lookalikes would eventually appear, Lynch and Frost would explore these tropes yet withhold their development as abstractions, and improvisations would prolong narrative progress: “Lynch’s glowing objects illuminate a narrative which purports to require answers conventionally accessed by finite resources of plot, but actually serves only to postpone them, and ultimately resolve the enigma by revealing that its only purpose is to prolong the narrative indefinitely” (Sheen 43). The postponements and subversions of conventional narrative emerge within the first 15 minutes of the pilot. We are introduced to Josie Packard, who sits and hums to herself in her bedroom. Then we see Pete and Catherine Martell conversing before Pete ventures out to fish. Pete discovers Laura Palmer’s body “wrapped in plastic,” and proceeds to inform Sheriff Harry Truman.

The Sheriff arrives on the scene of the crime and establishes the identity of the body for the audience. The pace and relentlessness of the action within these early moments creates a disorienting and intense experience for viewers as they are bombarded with a series of events. We are also introduced to a group of characters that will only expand over the episode’s running time and continue the postponement of the introduction to the main character, Dale Cooper.

At first, it would appear Sheriff Truman is the principle protagonist. He is the primary authority figure the audience has been introduced to so far. However, an additional layer is added when Ronette Pulaski appears beaten and traumatized, crossing over the state line, leading the FBI to send Cooper to investigate. It is here where Lynch and Frost start playing with conventions as well as tone, mood and atmosphere, indicated with the arrival of Cooper. After a series of horrific and perplexing events, the audience is presented with a clean-cut, sharply dressed government agent whose personality contradicts the stereotype of a stern, gruff investigator.

Cooper at first appears to be strictly professional, discussing key case facts as he dictates to his tape-recorder. However, the dialogue shifts into the food he enjoyed and the scenery of Twin Peaks as he drives into town. This undercuts the very first impression the audience can make of the character—a “no nonsense” investigator—and refashions this archetypal detective/inves-

tigator character into something seemingly original: “Lynch’s major achievement in *Twin Peaks* was to play strictly by the dubious rules of elected genre and still find numerous opportunities to display his quirky humor and other forms of aesthetic distancing” (Rosenbaum 26). The idiosyncrasies both Lynch and Frost inject into the pilot episode set the groundwork for the rest of the show, and the design of the town and its inhabitants would be developed further from these eccentricities.

A Wind in the Trees: The Look of the Town

Aside from its ability to reshape the familiar, *Twin Peaks* was a stark contrast to other dramas through its visual style: “*Twin Peaks*’ innovation consisted in its translation of a cinematic technique into televisual terms” (Ayers 96). Lynch’s techniques of slow camera shots, wide-angles and close-ups were filtered into television production to create a cinematic style, as Ayers indicates. It is the episodes that Lynch helmed as director that stand out as the most cinematic:

Lynch directed only a handful of *Twin Peaks* episodes, but all the most resonant set pieces—Cooper’s extracting a tiny letter *R* from under one of Laura’s fingernails, his Tibetan rock throwing, the “Red Room” sequences featuring the tiny Man from Another Place (seen early in the series and again in the final episode), and the disturbing death of Laura’s look-alike cousin, Madeleine, at the hands of Laura’s father Leland Palmer (Ray Wise)—were directed by Lynch. They were also written or co-written by Frost, who, like Lynch, deserves credit for TV boldness on a very large scale [Bianculli 303].

Refusing to adhere to standard televisual style, Lynch was able to translate his practices through a variety of simple, yet effective, means. The classic shooting aspect ratio for television is 1:33, which represents a significant fraction of the scope available for cinematic production. The constraints of working within television were a significant challenge for Lynch: “It’s a terrible medium and you’re just *aching* because you know the way it could be. I’m waiting for a TV that’s not 1:33 ratio, but is able to show different formats” (Lynch 176). However, the visual image limitations would become less of an issue with Lynch who was still able to refashion his cinematic techniques to fit within a smaller scale and, perhaps, develop them further.

The pilot’s first scene opens with a slow pan-shot across Josie’s bedroom. This is a technique Duwayne Dunham would employ as the director for the next episode within the first scene, providing a visual continuity between the first two episodes. This shot in the pilot delays the introduction to Josie as well as maintaining the air of mystery that has been established during the montage over the opening credits, “to transport viewers into the strange town

in a visually memorable calling card, a gateway into the world that David Lynch and Mark Frost have created” (Burns 15). The pan shot is re-employed by Lynch when Sarah Palmer learns of her daughter’s death by way of a phone call from her husband, Leland. Instead of focusing on her as she grieves, the camera moves along the cord of the phone slowly, before cutting to a mid-shot of Sarah screaming. The jolt of this scene disorients the audience as Lynch prolongs Sarah’s agony: “It wasn’t about pushing,” Lynch explains. “It’s watching two people realize something horrible. And it happens in time, in a sequence. And the audience knows much more than they do. And it’s painful” (167). The slowness of these shots builds the visual style Lynch wants to utilize for the series despite acting in complete opposition to the speed in which the narrative has developed.

We can further see his characteristics through the use of a close-up on Laura Palmer’s face, as her body is unwrapped from plastic. To enhance the cinematic aspirations further, Lynch employed tracking shots to add extra dimensions to the restricted image as well as sustain the dream-like atmosphere established in the opening credits:

The tracking shots through the school especially linger over things and people—grieving friends in their desks, an empty desk, the deserted halls, a trophy case with its rows of signified accomplishments, a picture of the dead Homecoming Queen—all neatly arranged, organized according to a familiar principle, replicated in high schools throughout the land, hinting of a pattern or patterns that should be meaningful for the people who usually move through the halls [Telotte 162].

Lynch further demonstrates his painterliness with his smooth camera work. The camera acts as a brush sliding over the canvas of the televisual landscape. An example can be noted as the camera glides through the school, the students unaware that Laura’s body has been discovered. The dramatic irony and sense of dread is contrasted with playful dialogue between classmates and the hypnotic score by Badalamenti. When Laura’s closest friends, James and Donna, realize what has happened, Lynch keeps the camera static and allows the silence to fill the scene before Donna starts to weep.

Something in the Air: Listening to the Town

A central facet of Lynch’s work, as previously stated, is the creative sound design, where problems arose for the series: “The power of most movies is in the bigness of the image and the sound and the romance. On TV the sound suffers and the impact suffers.... For instance, no matter what I tried to do in the sound mix, it never sounded good on TV” (Lynch 175). Despite this drawback, the opportunities Lynch finds within a scene to utilize the aural field create a further dimension to add to the atmosphere. The shots of trees

and the traffic lights changing from green to red, while abstract, are supported by a constant howl of wind. The repetition of this sound throughout the series maintains the atmosphere of the series and, as we find out from Truman in episode four, "There's a sort of evil out there. Something very, very strange in these old woods." Lynch's repetition of the howl supports this proclamation and acts as a reference point for the viewer as the series delves deeper into the secrets of the town.

Electricity also becomes a character unto itself with the use of buzzes and glitches, not least in the scene in which Cooper examines Laura's body for the first time and is distracted by malfunctioning fluorescent lights. Within this scene is a small digression. Cooper asks the orderly to give the Sheriff and himself some privacy. The orderly gives him his name instead, mishearing what Cooper asked. Cooper, hesitant, repeats his request and the orderly leaves. The actor playing the orderly genuinely believed Kyle MacLachlan was asking his name. Instead of leaving this mistake on the cutting room floor, Lynch utilized it to give the scene some sense of realism: "With his weird, incomprehensible scenes and characters, Lynch forces us to let go of our reflective disposition and concepts, and instead to actively create the film for ourselves and set its interpretation as an extension of our own feelings of uneasiness and bewilderment" (Manning 64). The abstract visual of the buzzing, malfunctioning light and the peppy enthusiasm of Cooper are strange enough, and the mistake of mishearing someone gives an air of reality and sense of comedy to a dark scene.

The second episode cements the visual elements Lynch established in the pilot and takes them further. The episode begins with the credits over an unedited wide shot of the Horne family sitting having dinner, with Ben at the head of the table. As cutlery clangs against plates, the only other audible sounds are the moans of Johnny Horne. This scene is interrupted by the arrival of Jerry Horne, Ben's brother. Lynch eases us into the sense of the familiar—a quiet family meal—before Jerry literally bursts into the room but says nothing to the family and directs the bellhops to help him find a sandwich. The scene continues as Ben and Jerry share a sandwich and does little to advance the narrative; it acts as Lynch's first postponement in the episode.

As we learn more about the inhabitants of the town as well as more about the darker elements—such as One Eyed Jacks (simultaneously a brothel and casino)—Lynch begins to chip away the layers of the town as he did previously in *Blue Velvet*. The episode includes the first instance of a dream sequence, which becomes one of the key features for the remainder of the show. Cooper's subconscious is presented to the audience in a disturbing and trance-like fashion.

The abstract visuals Lynch creates open the world of the show even more. Within this sequence Lynch is pushing the boundaries of abstract

imagery and sound within television. As Lynch's earlier work demonstrates, from his first experimental animated short *Six Figures Getting Sick* to *Eraser-head* and beyond, blending the use of film techniques with art practices has informed his style so that regardless of the format, feature film or television, this blend creates a distinctive style throughout his work. This episode of *Twin Peaks* is a prime example, the closing segment in particular, which blends various images seen in the series so far with new abstractions.

We are introduced to other characters/beings who have been glimpsed previously, with an emphasis on the One-Armed Man—MIKE—and BOB. The Red Room has been cited as one of the iconic moments of the show and confounded the audiences' expectations even more: "The transcendental Red Room scenes with the backwards-talking and dancing dwarf swept viewers off of their couches and into *Twin Peaks*' alternate universe. From there began the journey to a place both wonderful and strange" (Clark 9).

The aural field in this scene is best exemplified by the backward talking Man from Another Place. Despite the limitations of the soundscape in television, this was one sequence that was able to demonstrate Lynch's creativity triumphing over these restrictions and creating a fascinating, dreamlike effect transforming the images of which television drama was capable further. The disorienting editing creates flashbacks to earlier scenes from the pilot, which are refashioned to appear fresh and give these points further meaning. The repetition of Sarah Palmer running down the stairs, searching for Laura, is given added resonance here as it continues the agony of the character and the sense of loss, which is communicated to the viewer through Lynch's abstractions. Merging this edit/montage with the Red Room sequences communicates to the audience that within this world, anything is possible.

The impact of this episode, and the last Lynch would direct in season one, would maintain momentum until the end of the series. However, there was a remarkable decline in the use of abstractions subsequent to this point, and other directors could not recreate the Lynchian attributes, which would affect the show in other ways: "By the time we got to the [third] episode, which did without Lynch's direction and his writing, it seemed altogether possible that *Twin Peaks* would become a soap opera with relatively little distinction at all" (Rosenbaum 28). Despite moments of conventionality with regard to the direction, Lynch became *Twin Peaks*' anchor point.

Where's David? Season Two and "Solving" the Mystery

Season two saw the unravelling of *Twin Peaks* as a result of various challenges. Its length of 22 episodes contrasted to season one's eight episodes

including the pilot and its tight narrative, instead exploring the intersections of the town and characters. The major issue with the second season was that the network forced Lynch and Frost to reveal the killer, effectively wrapping up the central storyline. When the central narrative was cut short, it appeared that the surrounding stories, many of which had to be conjured up at very short notice and without Lynch or Frost's close involvement, could not maintain audience interest:

The way we pitched this thing was a murder mystery but that murder mystery was to eventually become the background story. Then there would be a middle ground of all of the characters we stay with for the series. And the foreground would be the main characters that particular week: the ones we'd deal with in detail. We're not going to solve the murder for a long time. This they did *not* like. They did *not* like that. And they forced us to, you know, get to Laura's killer [Lynch 180].

As the narrative began to deteriorate, more bizarre, superfluous characters were introduced. Elements also appeared to be surreal for their own sake (the pine weasel?); yet, there are strong elements to be found within Lynch's episodes.

The extended opening episode of season two reignites the abstract visuals Lynch put in place in episode three. The opening scene has Cooper conversing with a Giant who has come from another realm. The bulk of season one delved into the relationships of the characters and teased out the mystery of Laura's death but left the otherworldly aspects alone. Lynch reintroduced this aspect of the show to draw the viewers in further as well as to postpone the investigation into Laura's murder: "Fully aware that his audience is dying to know who killed Laura Palmer, Lynch begins his direction of episode [8] in a maddeningly perverse vein.... As the director once again stretches time out to absurd lengths, Cooper, though in dire straits, remains true to his character and politely signs the tab for warm milk he ordered and exchanges the thumbs-up with the ancient man" (Olson 348). Delaying the revelation, another postponement, and adding extra layers to the show's mythology was in line with Lynch and Frost's intentions from their initial pitch, as the relationships became more complicated and new characters began to emerge to take the focus off of the investigation. However, with so much in place by this point, it was clear they were faced with a double-edged sword. Of the season two opening episode, Marc Dolan observes, "In just two hours, it transformed nearly every character, plot, and situation in the show so that they were better suited to an ongoing narrative form" (39). The shifts Dolan highlights can be indicated through the darker elements Lynch visualizes this season. As the episode comes to a close, Lynch gives us a truly horrific sequence as we see Ronette Pulaski, whom we have not seen since the pilot, begin to stir as she lies in a coma. Lynch builds the scene up with static shots of hospital corridors, then, using his painterliness of camera movement,

slowly moves the shot through the halls whilst intercutting with a waking Ronette. Greg Olson notes, "Each hallway image has its own distinct, low-level humming sound, and as Lynch's camera starts to move down one of the corridors and pick up speed, the tone becomes higher, as though the point of view of an unstoppable, space-penetrating force was going into overdrive" (351). The sense of dread is created out of the most mundane of images; nonetheless it is the aural field and moving the camera into the unknown that become most effective. This marks the first time since season one that the show delves into the subconscious. It also marks Lynch's first return to the director's chair since episode three, which also contained the infamous dream sequence in the Red Room. The images are more grotesque than before, with the mysterious BOB attacking both Ronette and Laura. Lynch punctuates the scene with a distorted soundscape, and as BOB bludgeons Laura to death with a blunt object, the audience is hit with every loud beat.

Lynch helmed the succeeding episode, and continued to delay the central narrative. A key scene that plays longer than usual occurs as Cooper and Truman go to question Ronette. Conventional narrative would dictate that these characters would immediately pursue the vital questioning. Instead, Lynch delays this point of investigation with an improvised challenge of adjusting hospital stools to the appropriate height to question Ronette. Says Lynch, "When we were shooting that scene in *Twin Peaks*, the chairs were there, but then things started to develop. Cooper and Sheriff Truman have to be quiet; Ronette's obviously very disturbed and so it puts a tension in there and an absurd sort of humour at the same time" (Lynch 21). The absurd humor within this scene continues Lynch's need to draw out any chance of tension. Improvisation while filming has been a staple of Lynch's production methods for years. This technique is significant for many of *Twin Peaks*' more comically absurd moments: "As a filmmaker, David Lynch is always open to inspiration and improvisation, a sensibility uncommon on a network dramatic series, but one that allowed for moments of inspired madness in *Twin Peaks*" (Burns 17). While these moments of madness were infectious throughout the series, Lynch utilizes them more succinctly than other filmmakers helming the series. The previous episode built tension in its final scene by utilizing the mundane environment of the hospital, and Lynch continues this here. Both lead to Ronette having a traumatic relapse after Cooper shows her the sketch of BOB.

Lynch would direct only two more episodes of the second season, both of which had tremendous impact on the show. Episode 14 revealed to the audience the true identity of Laura's killer, and Lynch's treatment of the revelation pushed the show into even darker terrain. With BOB's presence increased this season, it is revealed that Laura's father Leland raped and murdered his own daughter, possibly under BOB's influence.

Throughout this episode, Lynch subtly builds tension to this revelation. The episode opens with a trademark, unedited wide-shot of the Sheriff and his deputies, along with Cooper and his supervisor, Gordon Cole having coffee. The simplicity of the shot and the reluctance to jump-start the primary narrative of the episode—locating BOB—demonstrates Lynch's refusal to pursue more than he has to at this point. As the episode unfolds and we learn more about the relationship between Laura and BOB, we are shown Leland adjusting his tie for a long period of time in front of a mirror. The scenes in the Palmer home feature a constant click from a turntable, which acts as a metronome, counting down to the climax. Maddy, Laura's identical-looking cousin, has been staying with Leland and Sarah. Leland/BOB refuses to let her leave and kills her in one of the show's most violent episodes: "There were some pretty strange and violent things in *Twin Peaks*, and they got by. If it's not quite standard it sneaks through, but it could be that the 'not quite standard' things make it even more terrifying and disturbing: the kind of thing they don't have names for. They're not in the book so they go right through" (Lynch 178). Lynch displays the violence in wide-angles and does not cut away from Leland punching Maddy continuously. The sound is amplified with each punch. Previously, in the first season, the violence was merely implied but never visualized. In the second season, following on from the violent depiction of Ronette's dream, Lynch pushes this further in this episode because he "insisted that he would need to direct that particular episode, which turned out to be the series' most powerful and emotionally charged" (Odell 16). Lynch's insistence on directing this episode and the violent images that erupt within it is in response to both the audience's desire to know the truth as well as the network forcing the writers to reveal the killer this early in the season.

Lynch's absence during much of the second season created a void within the series. In an attempt to bring the show back to its source, and effectively an authorial voice to the show, Lynch would return for the finale. However, it was too late to inject the series once again with his production methods to save it. The final episode is one of the darkest finales in television:

Broadcast on June 10, 1991, *Twin Peaks'* final episode was viewed by 10.4 million people, an impressive number by today's standards but down considerably from the 34.6 million who had viewed the pilot one year earlier.... The episode, directed by David Lynch, was undeniably as strong and hypnotic as anything the series had achieved before; it just came far too late for it to matter to anyone except the diehards [Burns 82].

Lynch reverted to the surreal elements of episode two to explore them further. He brings us back into the Red Room once more as we learn it is part of the Black Lodge, an alternate realm, which acts as a shadow self for the town of Twin Peaks. Lynch condenses many of the scenes into short segments

and primarily focuses on the abstract nature of the Black Lodge as Cooper journeys deeper and deeper inside. Lynch rejected most of the script of the finale episode to improvise alternatives to what had been planned, and to generate new images:

The momentum of the show had turned against his initial creative impulse, a tide he could not stem until the final episode. Taking his last chance, he put Frost's written script aside and improvised with the cast to create a series finale that recaptured the initial faith in the human roots of vision and creativity in the energies beyond language, logic, and reason. But there were only so many changes possible [Nochimson 77].

Abandoning most of the narrative strategies put in place since his departure, Lynch was eager to focus on the core thematic concepts of the series, exploring the nature of the darkness underneath the tranquil. The backward talking inhabitants of the Black Lodge and the appearance of BOB make it one of the most frightening episodes as Lynch adds abstract on top of abstract to create the reality of this realm.

The flashing lights, purposefully inaudible dialogue, and characters looking into the camera defy convention and even appear to mock the audience. As the episode closes and we see BOB's reflection in the mirror, Lynch leaves the camera on Cooper's bloodied face as he laughs just as the credits roll. Lynch has had the last laugh, and has created the ultimate postponement, all in response to the show's cancellation.

"How's Annie?" Final Thoughts

Twin Peaks took network television by the throat and shook it to its core. Lynch's art practices and the painterliness he injected into television production—particularly the use of movement, wide-angles and slow-motion—reformed the visual landscape of the small screen. The abstractions generated from this design were reinforced by his use of sound from the howl of the wind to the noise of electricity. Anything was now possible. Frost's narrative structures shaped and transformed the conventions of drama at a time when audiences began to shy away from television. For its brief two years, *Twin Peaks* demonstrated the capabilities of television drama if given the right support, taking chances on filmmakers who are out of the mainstream and who would not take audiences for granted. The years since its cancellation have seen it influence many cult shows, including *The X-Files* (1993–2002) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) as well as the surreal elements of *The Sopranos* (1999–2006). Lynch returned to *Twin Peaks* in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992) to revisit Laura's final days. Some found it too extreme, favoring the comedic elements of the series rather than the

darker aspects of the film: “*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* opens with a ‘snow show’: a screen filled with blue static. The camera pulls back, a woman screams ‘No!’ and the screen of what we now identify as a television is smashed. *Twin Peaks* helped to destroy the boundaries between media. Assigned the task of inoculating network television with cinema, it ultimately contaminated cinema with television” (Ayers 104). Destroying the television set in the film’s opening moments gave the viewers the sense that this would be completely different from the show, and the film expanded the television show’s mythology further. With an 18-episode series scheduled to air in 2017, and Lynch helming all 18 hours, the audience are ready to visit the town once more. The original series began to drift and become something else entirely during the period of Lynch’s absence: “When *Twin Peaks* was cancelled, it was drifting, sustained by the original actors who labored against increasingly self-conscious dialogue, hackneyed casting of new characters, and emotional and action-orientated storylines that occasionally sank to cult strategies of parodying and commenting on itself” (Nochimson 93).

Lynch’s production methods and visual abstractions were a core facet of the show. Without them, and as demonstrated by the lack of interest from the audience after his departure, the directors who succeeded him could not replicate his style. Refashioning the painterly aspects of Lynch’s art practice and cinematic techniques for television not only expanded the possibilities for filmmakers working within small screen production but also allowed for more risks to be taken. Television was reformatted, reimagined and revised. Bringing a painter’s eye to the small screen created a vast canvas on which to experiment, and the blend of images, hypnotic music, and subversive sound design provided new opportunities for future writers, directors and producers. Lynch and Frost created a world of dark dreams, backward talking beings and slices of cherry pie. Though it descended into parody, it still remains one of the key, if not *the* key, television shows in history.

WORKS CITED

- Ayers, Sheli. “Twin Peaks, Weak Language and the Resurrection of Affect.” *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*. Ed. Erica Sheen and Annette Davison. London: Wallflower Press, 2004. 93–106.
- Bianculli, David. “Twin Peaks.” *The Essential Cult TV Reader*. Ed. David Lavery. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010. 307–13.
- Bignell, Jonathan. *An Introduction to Television Studies: Second Edition*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2008.
- Brazier, Jane Evans. “‘In Dreams...’ Gender, Sexuality and Violence in the Cinema of David Lynch.” In *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*. Ed. Erica Sheen and Annette Davison. London: Wallflower Press, 2004. 107–18.
- Burns, Andy. *Wrapped in Plastic: Twin Peaks*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2015.
- Caldwell, John Thornton. “Modes of Production: The Televisual Apparatus.” *The Television Studies Reader*. Ed. Robert Clyde Allen and Annette Hill. London: Routledge, 2004. 293–310.

64 Approaching Twin Peaks

- Clark, Shara Lorea. "Peaks and Pop Culture." *Fan Phenomena: Twin Peaks*. Ed. Marisa C. Hayes and Franck Boulegue. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2013. 8–15.
- Dolan, Marc. "The Peaks and Valleys of Serial Creativity: What Happened to/on *Twin Peaks*." *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Ed. David Lavery. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995. 30–50.
- Lynch, David. *Lynch on Lynch*. Ed. Chris Rodley. London: Faber and Faber, 1997.
- Mactaggart, Allister. *The Film Paintings of David Lynch: Challenging Film Theory*. Bristol: Intellect, 2010.
- Manning, Russell. "The Thing about David Lynch: Enjoying the David Lynch World." *The Philosophy of David Lynch*. Ed. William Devlin. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011. 61–76.
- Nochimson, Martha P. *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997.
- Odell, Colin. *David Lynch*. Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2007.
- Olson, Greg. *David Lynch: Beautiful Dark*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008.
- Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "Bad Ideas: The Art and Politics of *Twin Peaks*." *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Ed. David Lavery. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995. 22–29.
- Sheen, Erica. "Going into Strange Worlds: David Lynch, *Dune* and New Hollywood." *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*. Ed. Erica Sheen and Annette Davison. London: Wallflower Press, 2004. 35–47.
- Telotte, J. P. "The Dis-Order of Things in *Twin Peaks*." *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*. Ed. David Lavery. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995. 160–72.
- Van Elferen, Isabella. "Dream Timbre: Notes on Lynchian Sound Design." *Music, Sound and Filmmakers: Sonic Style in Cinema*. Ed. James Wierzbicki. New York: Routledge, 2012. 175–88.
- Woodward, Richard. "A Dark Lens on America." 1990. In *David Lynch: Interviews*, edited by Richard Barney. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009. 49–59.