

## Television and New Media

### **Cult TV Revival: Generational Seriality, Recap Culture, and the “Brand Gap” of *Twin Peaks: The Return***

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Review

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3 **Cult TV Revival: Generational Seriality, Recap Culture, and the “Brand**  
4 **Gap” of *Twin Peaks: The Return***<sup>1</sup>  
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10 Of late, TV seriality has become not just a matter of textual analysis but also  
11 *intertextual analysis* as texts from the cultural past are variously revived and  
12 reimagined. Critics have sought to name this trend, arguing for the ‘re-quel’ as  
13 a useful term (Pinkerton 2016, 34). For example, writing in *Sight & Sound*  
14 Nick Pinkerton argues that re-quals act simultaneously as sequels and as  
15 restatements of key elements from their previous textual incarnations. By  
16 introducing new, younger characters alongside ageing favourites, franchises  
17 can strategically facilitate a “baton passage of ... [diegetic] worlds from one  
18 generation to the next” (Pinkerton 2016, 34). In such continuations, then, the  
19 issue of cross-generational transfer necessarily becomes significant (Lizardi  
20 2017).  
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34 Cult TV has proffered a number of re-quals (e.g. *Doctor Who*; *Star*  
35 *Trek: The Next Generation*; *The Prisoner*) given that it tends to have  
36 established fan loyalty and brand recognition. Indeed, cult TV can be defined  
37 by its “post-object fandom” (Williams 2015) as dedicated fan cultures continue  
38 to develop their relationships with cult texts long after television cancellation.  
39 Rebecca Williams has observed how post-object fandom can offer  
40 opportunities for textual resurrection (2016, 56; Hills 2013, 297).  
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50 Here, I am interested in one case of cult TV revival: the third season of  
51 *Twin Peaks* (Showtime, 2017), promoted as *Twin Peaks: The Return*. I will  
52 argue that what distinguishes the revival’s seriality is its invocation of  
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57 <sup>1</sup> This article is dedicated to the memory of my father, Robin Hills.  
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3 discourses of generationality (as key characters from the original run are  
4 shown to have children of their own, and/or are represented in terms of visibly  
5 marked ageing). At the same time, *Twin Peaks: The Return* collapses  
6 together the extra-diegetic and diegetic passing of time since its original  
7 1990s incarnation. This is an unusual “gap” in seriality, where such a space  
8 between installments is what “differentiates serial fiction from every other”  
9 form (O’Sullivan 2006, 116). Yet it surely makes a difference to the textual  
10 meaning and (fan) experience of this cult TV “gap” if it lasts twenty-six years,  
11 as was the case for *Twin Peaks* between 1991 and 2017 (cf. Looock 2016,  
12 285–86). Stuart Henderson has explored this mode of sequelisation with  
13 regard to Hollywood film, noting how sequels can “create a more nuanced and  
14 richer engagement between audience and character” by synchronising “the  
15 amount of time which has passed in our lives with that of the characters”  
16 (2014, 165–66). Such generational seriality thereby “offers an excellent  
17 opportunity to measure temporal difference” (Kelleter 2012, 33) between  
18 ‘then’ and ‘now’ (between *Twin Peaks* of the 1990s and 2010s). Long-awaited  
19 cult TV revivals, due to their unusual configuration of seriality’s “gap,”  
20 represent “a product that people will purchase to access their own memories”  
21 (Gordon 2017, 92).

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24 Before focusing on *Twin Peaks: The Return*, however, it is important to  
25 consider what is meant by “generational” in my argument. In ordinary  
26 language, ‘generation’ is usually used interchangeably with age cohort, as “we  
27 talk of ‘thirtysomethings,’ the ‘young generation,’ the ‘1970s generation’”  
28 (Bolin 2017, 30). In this terminology, a generation basically refers to a group  
29 of people born in a specific time period, and who experience similar socio-  
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3 historical events as they move through the life course. However, influential  
4 theories of generationality such as Karl Mannheim's work (1997) have argued  
5 that the mere coincidence of birth year, or even birth decade, is insufficient to  
6 explain generational consciousness. Instead, we need to address the  
7 processes through which "cohorts become generations through acquiring a  
8 collective consciousness" (Edmunds and Turner 2002, 116–17). The  
9 Mannheimian orthodoxy of age cohorts being transformed into self-identifying  
10 generations has been complicated, though, by theories of mediation. Jennie  
11 Bristow points out that generational labels have increasingly been "searched  
12 for and applied in advance of – or in place of – generational self-definition"  
13 (2016, 11), e.g. 'Generation X' being based on a Douglas Coupland novel  
14 (1991) published in the year of *Twin Peaks*' cancellation. And Göran Bolin has  
15 relatedly emphasized how rather than age cohorts transforming themselves  
16 into 'generations,' generational identities can be theorized as having an  
17 "eurythmic character" where rhythms of the life course, age cohort, wider  
18 sociohistorical changes, and developments in media technologies/content can  
19 all resonate harmoniously at specific historical moments (2017, 41–42). The  
20 notion of definite cut-off points, e.g. particular years, existing between  
21 generations remains highly artificial and academically contested (Bolin 2017,  
22 33), despite the widespread use of such thinking.

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25 I will thus treat generationality as a post-Mannheimian cultural  
26 construct that is necessarily mediated and "eurythmic" rather than only being  
27 an emergent matter of collective consciousness. Consequently, generational  
28 seriality can be considered as *relating ongoing serialised narrative partially to*  
29 *matters of the life course and ageing, and partly to matters of socio-historical*

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3 context (comparing ‘then’ and ‘now’), where *two decades as a serial “gap” can*  
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5 *be sufficient – however contested or fuzzy particular generation-based*  
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7 *categories are – to capture a sense of generational shift.* Generational  
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9 seriality operates in excess of purely ‘textual’ content because it *resonates*  
10  
11 *across diegetic and extra-diegetic temporalities, with characters and actors*  
12  
13 *ageing across the same gap in textual production and diegetic time.* Although  
14  
15 the likes of Frank Kelleter (2012) and Stuart Henderson (2014) have usefully  
16  
17 prefigured the term in their analyses of film remakes and sequels, neither  
18  
19 explicitly links seriality to generational meaning-making in the manner I am  
20  
21 setting out here. As a critical tool, the term facilitates a focus on how media  
22  
23 and narrative serialities can be integrated into diegetic (and audience) arcs of  
24  
25 meaning that operate, minimally and culturally, across “the interval between  
26  
27 parents and children” (Bollas 1993, 252).  
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32 I will address generational seriality in two sections. Firstly, I want to  
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34 focus on textual attributes of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, and how these can be  
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36 analysed not simply as a matter of reiterated programme branding but also as  
37  
38 a matter of destabilizing *temporal and textual difference*. Far from acting as a  
39  
40 stable and wholly familiar TV ‘brand,’ this means that *Twin Peaks: The Return*  
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42 can act as a challenge to fan expectations via its repositioning as a  
43  
44 programme brand. I then want to consider how *Twin Peaks’* generational  
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46 seriality has been co-produced by changes in media reception between the  
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48 1990s and 2010s, with emergent discourses of cult fan “legitimation” from the  
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50 90s (Newman and Levine 2012, 27–28) having moved into “the sphere of  
51  
52 mediation” (Teurlings 2017, 5) via widespread recapping and blogging.  
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54 Contemporary TV discourses have positioned *Twin Peaks: The Return* – via  
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3 the popularization of recaps (Falero 2016, 160) – as self-reflexive,  
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5 thematically coherent TV drama, even whilst it is said to resist such readings  
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7 (Hudson 2017). The revival’s cultural distinction relies on forms of othering in  
8  
9 its many US and UK recaps, with the issue of pacing forming one way in  
10  
11 which its generational seriality has been separated out from established  
12  
13 modes of ‘complex TV’ (Mittell 2015) via the outbidding of previous ‘quality  
14  
15 TV.’ Such outbidding involves the “one-upmanship” of popular seriality (and its  
16  
17 audiences), i.e. a “tendency of serial narratives to surpass” each other  
18  
19 competitively and artistically via claims to distinction (Kelleter 2014, 8). Before  
20  
21 considering the role of recaps, however, I will discuss how *Twin Peaks: The*  
22  
23 *Return* has engaged textually in matters of generational seriality. It should be  
24  
25 noted that I’m writing *in media res* after 6 of 18 parts, and hence this analysis  
26  
27 remains provisional.  
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### 34 **Analysing the Return of *Twin Peaks*: Generational Seriality, Programme** 35 36 **Branding, and the ‘Brand Gap’**

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38 Reviewing *The Secret History of Twin Peaks*, a 2016 novel by series co-  
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40 creator Mark Frost, Theresa DeLucci writes for Tor.com that it “is just the thing  
41  
42 to get fans of the show – both OG [‘original gangster,’ i.e. old school] and  
43  
44 Netflix-generation – putting their heads together and theorizing about the fates  
45  
46 of their favorite characters” (DeLucci 2016). But this binary is rather reductive  
47  
48 – there is not just a “dual audience” here (Lizardi 2017, 17). Rather, there are  
49  
50 multiple generations of fans who first encountered *Twin Peaks* upon  
51  
52 broadcast, plus at least one generation who could be thought of as “hiatus  
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54 fans” – those who discovered the show whilst it was in the TV wilderness –  
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3 along with more recent fans who came to it via Netflix, as well as new  
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5 generations following the Showtime revival due to *Twin Peaks*' reputation as  
6  
7 the forerunner of today's 'showrunner' TV (Wells-Lassagne 2017, 126).  
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9  
10 However, by remaining true to "Brand Lynch" (Todd 2012, 108), David  
11  
12 Lynch has taken on a "trickster"-like role (Jenkins 1995) via *Twin Peaks: The*  
13  
14 *Return*, challenging fan expectations. The town/setting of Twin Peaks has  
15  
16 been marginalized in the first six parts and Agent Cooper's familiar  
17  
18 characterisation has remained absent. As Rebecca Williams has noted,  
19  
20 "Lynch's presence on the new series of *Twin Peaks* does not  
21  
22 unproblematically offer fans a sense of security since his authorial brand  
23  
24 connotes ... uncertainty" (2016, 59).  
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28 If *Twin Peaks* is to display textual authenticity in fans' eyes then they  
29  
30 typically expect spatiotemporal continuity and brand consistency, in line with  
31  
32 contemporary media/franchise discourses of world-building that condition  
33  
34 "audiences to pay attention to – and prize – logical continuity. But logical  
35  
36 continuity is not what makes *Twin Peaks* work; this is a storyworld that  
37  
38 functions on pareidolia – the activating, manipulating, and deceiving [of] our  
39  
40 pattern-making tendencies" (Bushman 2016). *The Return*'s generational  
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42 seriality thus confronts a tension between "world-based and auteur-based  
43  
44 cult" (Hills 2015, 24) given that some instances of cult TV seem to rely more  
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46 on an unfolding narrative world rather than an auteurist framing (e.g. the  
47  
48 history of the BBC's *Doctor Who* or Fox's *The X-Files*), whilst others are  
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50 highly author-focused (e.g. Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* or Patrick  
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52 McGoohan's *The Prisoner*).  
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56 The town of Twin Peaks represents a "fully furnished world" that  
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3 enduring fans have studied over the years, meaning that any attempt to  
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5 “unfurnish” this and overwrite established Peakie knowledge (Hills 2015, 30)  
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7 would be likely to provoke considerable fan ire. And yet what Martha P.  
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9 Nochimson terms the “Lynchverse” (2013, 163) has considerably reshaped  
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11 *Twin Peaks*. Nochimson distinguishes between David “Lynch’s first-stage  
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13 work,” including the original *Twin Peaks* (2013, 167), and his “second-stage”  
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15 work (2013, 1, 11 and 169), running from *Lost Highway* (1997) to *Inland*  
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17 *Empire* (2016). For Lynch, returning to *Twin Peaks* has therefore meant  
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19 reworking his “first-stage” TV show, focused on “parallel worlds,” within a  
20  
21 more “disturbing” and quantum-mechanical worldview (Nochimson 2013, 13)  
22  
23 where diegetic worlds can be dissolved into multiverses of indeterminacy. As  
24  
25 an example of auteur-based cult status running ahead of world-based  
26  
27 cultification, i.e. where David Lynch’s experimental vision of the show seems  
28  
29 more significant than coherent world-building, Showtime’s *Twin Peaks* offers  
30  
31 the potential to intensely dismay some of its enduring fans.  
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37 But the Lynchverse-indebted revival has not shied away from revising  
38  
39 the world and the text of *Twin Peaks*. This reinterpretation is evident from the  
40  
41 very title sequence of *The Return* (Fig. 1), which Scott Ryan (2017, 3) has  
42  
43 analysed in relation to the franchise’s previous titles. Ryan notes that by  
44  
45 substituting upwardly flowing red curtains and spinning chevrons for the static  
46  
47 versions of such imagery from the original TV show, Lynch establishes “what  
48  
49 the new series is about – ... we are still in Twin Peaks, but we are shown  
50  
51 things from a new angle” (2017, 3). The newfound dynamism of *Twin Peaks*’  
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53 brand imagery here promises that although the show will be visually and  
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55 stylistically recognisable, it will offer a sense of difference in comparison with  
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3 its earlier incarnation.  
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5           Generationality is one strong marker of this textual difference. The  
6  
7 older Kyle MacLachlan has been described by TV critics as remaining  
8  
9 “preternaturally youthful” (Cooke 2017). But if MacLachlan is said “to have  
10  
11 aged ‘successfully’” (Hamad 2015, 174) in a manner normatively associated  
12  
13 with female stars, other *Twin Peaks*’ celebrities are represented very  
14  
15 differently:  
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20           Twin Peaks ... looks like the original town, but with some  
21  
22 uncanny differences. ... [O]riginally “filled with beautiful women”  
23  
24 – young and pretty faces – [it] is now a different town with torn-  
25  
26 down buildings and “broken beauty.”... The scenes with Sarah  
27  
28 Palmer (Grace Zabriskie) and The Log Lady (Catherine Coulson)  
29  
30 seem to indicate that, and the scenes with Coulson look almost  
31  
32 like a touching intra-diegetic eulogy. (Halskov 2017)  
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38           Coulson filmed her sequences as fan favourite the Log Lady whilst seriously ill  
39  
40 with cancer and before sadly passing away in September 2015; there is a  
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42 sense that her appearance constitutes a loving gift to the show’s fandom.  
43  
44 Long-time Lynch collaborator Harry Dean Stanton also reprises his role as  
45  
46 Carl Rodd in Part 6, appearing “as an absolute image of tranquil seniority. ...  
47  
48 What brought him to this ..., especially considering how brashly he acted in  
49  
50 *Fire Walk with Me*? ... [It] seems a potent image for a show dealing with how  
51  
52 characters have mutated and matured over the course of 25 years” (Loughrey  
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60 2017).

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3 Given these marked changes in characters' appearances (and  
4 sometimes demeanour), *Twin Peaks: The Return* is frequently marked by the  
5 ageing or loss of its older generation. Part of its generational seriality involves  
6 a self-reflexive awareness of "the fact that several of the actors who originally  
7 appeared in *Twin Peaks* have passed away in the years between the second  
8 and third seasons of the show," including Don S. Davis who played Major  
9 Garland Briggs, Jack Nance who portrayed Pete Martell and Frank Silva who  
10 played BOB (Williams 2016, 58–59). Similarly, Roger Luckhurst notes how  
11 "some of the most sustained work of fan-scholars ... has been collected in  
12 places such as Welcome to Twin Peaks, or the Twin Peaks Archive ... This  
13 site contains ... a melancholy blog roll of obituaries of actors from the show"  
14 (Luckhurst 2017, 21). As *Buzzfeed* tellingly remarks:  
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32 None of this is reminiscent of the chirpy coffee-and-cherry-pies  
33 *Twin Peaks* of consensual memory. When familiar faces do  
34 appear, they are fascinatingly aged ... [in] ... a reminder that time  
35 has passed in the real world too. ... And in this present, David  
36 Lynch ... suddenly reads as the one thing nobody has ever  
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Material, human realities of generational shift are not overwritten by  
surrealism or avant-gardist non-narrative; nor are they entirely effaced by  
telefantasy's evasions of chronology and mortality (even when Laura Palmer  
can be both dead and alive in the Red Room). But *The Return's* commitment  
to generational seriality is exhibited in two other ways. Firstly, generational

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3 seriality is made visible through the emergence of legacy characters' children,  
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5 e.g. Wally Brando (Michael Cera), the son of Andy and Lucy Brennan (Harry  
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7 Goaz and Kimmy Robertson); Becky Johnson (Amanda Seyfried), the  
8  
9 daughter of Shelly Johnson (Mädchen Amick); and Richard Horne (Eamon  
10  
11 Farren), who fan speculation suggests is the son of Audrey Horne (Sherilyn  
12  
13 Fenn) (Loughrey 2017). Dougie Jones, whose identity is displaced by Dale  
14  
15 Cooper when he finally emerges out of the Lodge (both played by Kyle  
16  
17 MacLachlan), also has a young child, Sonny Jim (Pierce Gagnon), meaning  
18  
19 that Cooper is fantastically positioned as a father despite his lengthy  
20  
21 imprisonment. Collapsing together the diegetic and extra-diegetic passing of  
22  
23 decades, generational seriality hence moves previously middle-aged  
24  
25 characters into old age, and a number of previously youthful characters into  
26  
27 parental roles. This aspect of generational seriality has been strongly present  
28  
29 in other TV series' revivals, for example the 2012 version of camp-cult oil  
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31 baron/family saga *Dallas* combined legacy characters such as J.R. and Bobby  
32  
33 Ewing (Larry Hagman and Patrick Duffy) with new actors playing the grown-  
34  
35 up children of J.R. and Sue Ellen Ewing (Linda Gray) and Bobby and Pamela  
36  
37 Barnes Ewing (Victoria Principal; who unlike Hagman, Duffy and Gray did not  
38  
39 return to the series). In terms of cult telefantasy, generational seriality was  
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41 less frequently evident in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (despite its title) via  
42  
43 guest appearances from older actors and characters who had previously  
44  
45 featured in *Star Trek: The Original Series*. And the restoration of *The X-Files*  
46  
47 as a television series after 14 years, in 2016, also involved references to the  
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49 ageing of lead characters Dana Scully and Fox Mulder (Gillian Anderson and  
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51 David Duchovny, respectively).  
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3           Returning to *Twin Peaks: The Return*, secondly the “entire Dougie  
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5 storyline might be seen as a sad reflection of this transformation theme ...  
6  
7 reminding the viewers of *Twin Peaks* actor Warren Frost (Mark Frost’s father)  
8  
9 who died in February 2017 after struggling with Alzheimer’s disease” (Halskov  
10  
11 2017). Regardless of whether Dougie/Cooper is read (perhaps fannishly) in  
12  
13 relation to the Frost family, this character’s loss of self-identity, and even  
14  
15 control over bodily functions such as urination, connotes generational  
16  
17 anxieties surrounding ageing and dementia. As Sadie Wearing has argued,  
18  
19 crime dramas tackling the theme of dementia can “demonstrate the  
20  
21 consequences of forgetting for figures – detectives – for whom the ability ... to  
22  
23 re-present actions ... in a way that renders them ... meaningful” is a core part  
24  
25 of their self-identity (Wearing 2017, 127). Moreover, a threatened loss “of  
26  
27 autonomy, self-reliance and power” can “trouble masculine identifications,  
28  
29 gendered roles and the related ability to author(ise) the self” (Wearing 2017,  
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31 140).  
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36           Cooper’s evacuation of characterisation – yet to be restored one third  
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38 of the way through *The Return* – also troubles the established brand of *Twin*  
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40 *Peaks* (Johnson 2012). As various writers have discussed in *The Verge*,  
41  
42 puzzling over the question ‘Should the new season of *Twin Peaks* even be  
43  
44 called *Twin Peaks?*’, the show’s treatment of Agent Cooper “seems to  
45  
46 telegraph that Lynch is not all that interested in how audiences feel about  
47  
48 these older characters” (Bishop in Bishop, Plaugic and Robinson 2017).  
49  
50 Cooper’s escape from the otherworldly space which he was trapped in at the  
51  
52 end of *Twin Peaks*’ original run comes at a high price: whilst the evil version of  
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54 Cooper (MacLachlan’s third different role in the show) is free to go about his  
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3 nefarious business in the 'real world' of the series' narrative, Agent Cooper is  
4 trapped inside a 'shell' of false identity. He is depicted as unable to speak,  
5 beyond repeating the ends of others' sentences, and is unable to recall his  
6 own identity and history. This transformative memory-loss, and its associated  
7 loss of self, severely curtails Cooper's narrative agency – far from setting off  
8 in pursuit of the Bad Cooper, Agent Cooper does not even appear to know  
9 who he is, nor to be able to function as an adult. Gradual glimmers of his old  
10 self, as he dimly remembers "case files," enjoys coffee, and pokes repeatedly  
11 at police badges, therefore play "games with ... [the] fanboy [and fangirl]  
12 heart" (Jensen 2017) as fans wish fervently for the return of the Agent Cooper  
13 that they know and love.  
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27 To be clear, this fantastical depiction of Cooper is not denotatively that  
28 of a dementia sufferer, but the character's impairment remains far greater  
29 than might be expected from any 'realistic' portrayal of mid-life and its  
30 changes. Cooper's loss of overall agency and arguably connoted dementia  
31 raise the narrative issue of whether he "will ever become a functional human  
32 being again" (Robinson in Bishop, Plaugic and Robinson 2017). Given that  
33 this effectively places under erasure the lead character of 1990s *Twin Peaks*,  
34 such generational seriality draws on more than themes of ageing or cognitive  
35 decline: it simultaneously refuses to reinstate a key aspect of the *Twin Peaks*  
36 brand, as beloved by fans, and hence installs what might be called a 'brand  
37 gap' between the show's two realisations. As Celia Lury has argued, brands  
38 typically develop via intervals that are "organized so as to produce branded  
39 products as ... different ..., as new or up to date" (2004, 9). In this instance,  
40 the remarkable gap of 26 years is more contingent than "organized," but  
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3 nevertheless this version of *Twin Peaks* is self-consciously not a replay of  
4  
5 1990s *Peaks*; it knowingly contests the earlier show's core of audience  
6  
7 identification with Agent Dale Cooper.  
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9  
10 There is a "spectatorial destabilisation ... cultivated" (Neofetou 2012,  
11  
12 24) here in relation to what has otherwise been described as the "fan service"  
13  
14 of brief appearances by "legacy characters" (Bishop, Plaugic and Robinson  
15  
16 2017). By contrast, good Coop's diminished narrative role amounts to a form  
17  
18 of *fan disservice*: fandom is challenged, as its expectations of Cooper's return  
19  
20 are thwarted. *Twin Peaks: The Return* is visually on-brand, all billowing red  
21  
22 curtains and dizzying chevrons. But in its narrative debts to the uncertainties  
23  
24 of the "Lynchverse" (Nochimson 2013, 163), and in its generational seriality  
25  
26 connoting an approximation of dementia, *The Return* pits brand values of  
27  
28 auteurist vision against the securities of world-building, coming to resemble its  
29  
30 own televisual doppelgänger.  
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33  
34 Next, I will consider how *Twin Peaks: The Return* has been positioned  
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36 against the US network TV incarnation of *Twin Peaks* within today's culture of  
37  
38 blogged recaps. Here, generational seriality emerges not only through  
39  
40 diegetic material but also through a contrast between 'then' and 'now' in  
41  
42 audience discourses of media content and technology. As I will show, *Twin*  
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44 *Peaks'* cult revival has also been partly set against established conventions of  
45  
46 'quality' TV drama.  
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### 52 **Recapping the Return of *Twin Peaks*: Generational Seriality, Quality TV,** 53 54 **and the 'Quality Other'**

55  
56 Jan Teurlings has made a convincing case for what's described as the  
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3 “*commonification*” of television criticism, “as it has entered the sphere of  
4 mediation rather than mere circulation” (2017, 5), becoming an ordinary  
5 practice and part of the social/creative commons (2017, 4). Teurlings points to  
6 this demotic turn as being centred on the “recap”:  
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14 The arrival of the Internet has made it easier for *aficionados* and  
15 professional TV critics alike to find venues for their analyses. ...  
16  
17 TV critics are not confined to reviewing a show just once but they  
18 can do weekly follow-ups, in which ... that night’s episode is  
19 analyzed in detail and situated within the overall development of  
20 the show – a critical genre which goes by the name of the *recap*.  
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22 (2017, 5).  
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32 One consequence of the “protoprofessionalization of popular television  
33 criticism” (Teurlings 2017, 13) is that it has tended to give rise to blog entries  
34 and fan commentaries emulating those of professional TV critics (Teurlings  
35 2017, 14; Rixon 2011, 227). *Twin Peaks: The Return* has been such a long  
36 time coming, with *Twin Peaks* itself occupying the privileged status of being  
37 positioned as a “cult classic” (Garner 2016), that it was always likely to inspire  
38 an outpouring of TV journalist/fan recapping, despite the fact that “the idea of  
39 recapping *Twin Peaks* is, on some level, absurd. David Lynch’s cult-classic  
40 TV series ... has always resisted literal interpretation” (Hudson 2017).  
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51 Blogged by mainstream pop culture sites in the US such as *Buzzfeed*,  
52 *Entertainment Weekly*, the *A.V. Club*, *Vox* and *Vulture* (McCormack 2017;  
53  
54 Jensen 2017; Stephens 2017; VanDerWerff 2017a; Hudson 2017) as well as  
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3 by fan niche sites and mainstream, broadsheet press-related websites in the  
4 UK (e.g. *GamesRadar+*; *The Independent* and *The Guardian*) – along with  
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6  
7 many other venues – *The Return* has also, unusually, been ‘recapped’ at the  
8  
9  
10 British Film Institute, in a “web exclusive” for the cinephile-academic  
11  
12 crossover magazine *Sight & Sound*, as well as by acafans in *CSTOnline* and  
13  
14 *16:9* (Kelly 2017; Loughrey 2017; Jeffries 2017a; Huddleston 2017; Garner  
15  
16 2017; Halskov 2017). Such a proliferation of recapping has “allowed a space  
17  
18 in between traditional criticism that demands aesthetic distance and fannish  
19  
20 obsession” (Falero 2016, 160), but my interest predominantly lies in how such  
21  
22 commentary has co-produced *Twin Peaks*’ generational seriality.  
23

24  
25 With so many rapid responses to the show paratextually swirling  
26  
27 around, fans and critics were keen to evaluate the “risk that the ... show,  
28  
29 which broke the mold of network television in 1990 would now, ironically, fit  
30  
31 the mold of cable television” all too comfortably (Halskov 2015, 219). Given  
32  
33 the evaluative tendencies of recapping culture, in what follows I want to focus  
34  
35 on qualitative patterns in recaps’ meaning-making rather than claiming any  
36  
37 sampled version of ‘representativeness.’ This is in line with established norms  
38  
39 in qualitative audience research – for instance, Ien Ang’s *Watching Dallas*  
40  
41 (1989) analysed 42 letters written by viewers. Dealing with a comparable  
42  
43 number of blog entries, I will draw on a corpus of 34 recaps from the 11  
44  
45 randomly selected major publications/websites listed above. This set also  
46  
47 covers the groups of recappers listed by Teurlings (aficionados, professional  
48  
49 TV critics, and journalists). The total number of 34 recaps is not a multiple of  
50  
51 current *Twin Peaks: The Return* episodes (6) due to the fact that *CSTOnline*,  
52  
53 *Sight & Sound* and *16:9* coverage was one-off rather than part-by-part (thus  
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3 varying from the standard definition of recapping). Additionally, *The Return*  
4 was broadcast/streamed in a non-traditional pattern: the first two parts were  
5 shown together, with parts 3 and 4 being made available immediately  
6 afterwards via streaming (and then being followed by weekly episodes).  
7  
8 Consequently, none of the sites I am exploring have run six-for-six recaps-for-  
9 parts, usually covering parts 1 and 2 together, and then parts 3 and 4 in one  
10 recap.  
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These US/UK recaps demonstrate a repeated emphasis on positioning *The Return* as 'quality TV' by contextualising its generational seriality as self-reflexive TV commentary (Fig. 2). Ross Garner, for example, discusses the opening double-bill in terms of how its glass box storyline – a mysterious vessel monitored by the character of Sam (Ben Rosenfield) – can be interpreted as “a substitute for the television/viewing screen” (Garner 2017; see also Halskov 2017). The *Sight & Sound* recap relatedly summarises how “the internet is already ablaze with theories. ... Some are hard to refute – the first episode’s focus on a young man staring at a glass box waiting for anything to happen has to be a sly comment on the process of watching television” (Huddleston 2017). Rival self-reflexive readings have been set out: part 6 is supposedly “like sitting on your couch and flicking through the channels. ... Except ... David Lynch is the one in control of the remote. And just when you might feel invested in one story, he flips away to something else” (VanDerWerff 2017b). This too plays with “the idea that the whole show is ... about the act of watching television” (VanDerWerff 2017b).

Recaps also seek coherence at the level of each part, attempting to find thematic structure: part 6 is alternatively said to “explore the idea of

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2  
3 oppositions” (Loughrey 2017) via the characters of Richard Horne and Red.  
4  
5 Or part 5 is supposedly reducible to representations of mechanical ‘humanity’:  
6  
7 “we’re aware that Dougie/Cooper is only an approximation of a human being,  
8  
9 and also that his family and co-workers scarcely notice that evident  
10  
11 uncanniness. Human society ... is what’s really uncanny – a ... simulation that  
12  
13 satirises the real thing” (Jeffries 2017a).  
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16  
17 Such self-reflexive/thematic interpretations aim to secure *Twin Peaks*:  
18  
19 *The Return* as ‘quality TV’ by aligning it with subscription TV drama’s second  
20  
21 wave of “this new ‘golden age’” where the first wave was “inaugurated by  
22  
23 HBO through shows like *The Sopranos*. ... The second is characterized by ...  
24  
25 new rivals to HBO, like ... Showtime” (Shapiro 2016, 182). As Ross Garner  
26  
27 argues, contrasting parts 1 and 2 with the older network TV model of *Twin*  
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29 *Peaks*:  
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34 Whilst ... [Sam and Tracey’s graphic nudity] was ‘new’ for *Twin*  
35  
36 *Peaks*, it also felt like the series negotiating its institutional  
37  
38 context by intertextually locating itself within long-established  
39  
40 trends via shows like *The Sopranos* (HBO 1999–2007). ... The  
41  
42 message communicated was ‘It’s not old *Twin Peaks*, its  
43  
44 *Showtime’s Twin Peaks*.’ (Garner 2017)  
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50 This “message” is also communicated via the pronounced tonal shifts that  
51  
52 recaps focus on when comparing 1990s and 2010s versions. *Buzzfeed*  
53  
54 laments the loss of “chirpy coffee-and-cherry-pies *Twin Peaks*” (McCormack  
55  
56 2017), while 16:9 notes that although the “old *Twin Peaks* combined mystery,  
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3 horror, comedy and melodrama, and was largely built on a conscious soap  
4 opera structure, ... new *Twin Peaks* seems less soapy” (Haskov 2017). And  
5 writing for the commercial fan website *GamesRadar+*, Andy Kelly’s recap  
6 suggests that “although there are traces of the show we know and love ... this  
7 *Twin Peaks* is a very different beast. The melodramatic soap opera is gone,  
8 replaced by a show that has a lot more in common with contemporary TV  
9 drama and Lynch’s cinematic experiments” (Kelly 2017). In *Sight & Sound*’s  
10 terms, “*The Return* refuses to deliver the cosy pleasures some old-school  
11 fans might’ve been hoping for – this is an altogether shiftier beast”  
12 (Huddleston 2017). Such recap readings cluster around differences between  
13 *Twin Peaks* and *The Return* not in order to delegitimize soap opera (Newman  
14 and Levine 2012, 35–36), nor to posit melodrama as outside the ambit of  
15 ‘complex TV’ (Mittell 2015, 246), but rather to securely position subscription  
16 TV drama *Twin Peaks* against the industrial-cultural “other” of network TV  
17 drama *Twin Peaks*.

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When recaps are not busy cementing *The Return*’s position as ‘quality’  
TV, they also work collectively to select out key moments. These can be  
moments that are emphasized as central to *Twin Peaks*’ worldbuilding  
(reducing the series’ pareidolia to normative notions of franchise seriality), e.g.  
the fleeting appearance of Laura Dern as the previously unseen “Diane” in  
part 6. Writing for *The Guardian*, Stuart Jeffries billed this appearance as  
something “we’ve waited over 25 years for” (2017b).

Highlighted moments can also be expressions of excess, flagging up  
David Lynch’s auteurism and the Lynchverse – e.g. Red’s magical coin toss in  
part 6 which suggests a collapsing together of *Twin Peaks*’ realist spaces and

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2  
3 the “indeterminate” realms of the Black Lodge (Neofetou 2012, 78; Pheasant-  
4 Kelly 2013, 99). By selecting out such “moments of excess,” recaps perform a  
5 kind of “textural poaching” (Gillan 2016, 12, 15), extracting a visual-visceral  
6 sense of the series’ textures rather than poaching specific meanings.  
7  
8 However, recapped moments detached from the TV series’ overarching  
9 context can also be collisions between moments-of-mythos and moments-of-  
10 excess, e.g. the reaction that Bobby Briggs (Dana Ashbrook) exhibits to Laura  
11 Palmer’s photograph in part 4:  
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23 the best scene so far is a callback: ... Bobby Briggs – ... now an  
24 officer of the law – walks in on the old homecoming photo of  
25 Laura Palmer that’s been pulled from ... evidence. ... The  
26 camera zooms in on actor Dana Ashbrook’s face as he tenses  
27 and tears up, while, right on cue, the first unforgettable strands of  
28 Angelo Badalamenti’s “Laura’s Theme” swell in. ... Suddenly  
29 we’re back, and it feels crushing. Real magic, as Lynch knows,  
30 resides outside the conventions of storytelling (McCormack  
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This “callback” references abrupt shifts in tonality and melodramatic/comic performance which had accompanied Ashbrook’s “highly physicalized and vocalized outbursts” in 1990s *Twin Peaks* (Lacey 2016, 130; Halskov 2017). But taken as a diegetic moment of excess, Bobby’s reaction seems too powerful and exaggerated, as if he is recalling a very recent event rather than an incident that occurred more than 25 years ago. Synchronised with the re-

1  
2  
3 emergence of Angelo Badalamenti's score (see Norelli 2017), it is almost as if  
4 Bobby is recalling a TV episode that he has rewatched in preparation for the  
5 *Twin Peaks*' revival – that his intensity of feeling seems all-too-recent places  
6 him temporarily and strikingly in the position of a dedicated fan, rather than  
7 plausibly behaving as an in-diegesis character. Bobby's memories of Laura  
8 Palmer – the same image of Laura also ghosts briefly over the revival's title  
9 sequence – feel simultaneously both diegetic and extra-diegetic. Generational  
10 seriality, in this instant, liminally merges the show's extra-diegetic fan  
11 reception and its diegetic world.  
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23 A related complication of diegetic reality occurs at the end of parts 2–6,  
24 when songs performed 'as-live' by musicians at the Bang Bang Bar displace  
25 any typical cliffhanger: "Those performances ... are part of the diegesis, yet  
26 strangely unconnected to the diegetic action. They are part of *Twin Peaks*, yet  
27 strangely removed from it" (Halskov 2017).  
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34 But the first such conclusion, to part 2, pulls audiences back into *Twin*  
35 *Peaks*' diegesis (Hudson 2017), as we are shown James Marshall, playing  
36 James Hurley, looking across at Shelly Johnson before she tells her friends  
37 that "James is still cool. He's always been cool." This plot beat positions now  
38 middle-aged actors and characters as if they remain encapsulated in a  
39 narrative of bashful, youthful desire, even while Shelly also discusses the fact  
40 that her daughter is dating "the wrong guy," cueing fan recollections of her  
41 own prior storyline. Such generational seriality directs audiences to contrast  
42 the 'then' and the 'now,' reading for temporal difference (Kelleter 2012, 33)  
43 rather than only occupying the sensuous "now" of *Twin Peaks*' excess  
44 (Neofetou 2012, 75).  
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3           Recap culture has positioned *The Return* as contemporary ‘quality TV,’  
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5 co-creating the show’s generational seriality as a matter of temporal/textual  
6  
7 difference from the original, rather than viewing new *Twin Peaks* as a  
8  
9 nostalgic “re-tread” (Kelly 2017). However, in some ways the practice of  
10  
11 recapping has simultaneously introduced an element of ambiguity into this  
12  
13 discursive move, since journalist and (aca-)fan bloggers alike have also  
14  
15 sought to position *The Return* against othered ‘quality TV,’ not by way of  
16  
17 devaluing Lynch’s revival, but instead as a matter of valorising it above the  
18  
19 conventionalities of rival subscription TV dramas. *The Return*’s unusual TV  
20  
21 pacing has proven essential here, being noted as a matter of cultural  
22  
23 distinction. For example, Ross Garner argues that “*Twin Peaks* is  
24  
25 differentiating itself from contemporary ‘quality’ TV tropes ... [via] the slow, at  
26  
27 some points almost glacial, pacing of the narrative” (Garner 2017), while J. W.  
28  
29 McCormack suggests that the “pace is so slow, the tension between scenes  
30  
31 so slack, that it is almost anti-entertainment. ... Showtime subscribers have  
32  
33 been tricked into watching video art” (McCormack 2017). And Tom  
34  
35 Huddleston playfully concludes that “we know now why Showtime’s initial  
36  
37 estimate of nine episodes was later doubled – *The Return* moves at  
38  
39 approximately half the speed of most TV” (Huddleston 2017).  
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45           In fact, *Twin Peaks: The Return* has been marked by a number of  
46  
47 highly melodramatic, even thriller-esque narrative events. There is the initial  
48  
49 framing murder of Ruth Davenport (Mary Stofle) explored in parts 1 and 2;  
50  
51 Cooper’s escape from the Black Lodge in part 3 and his doppelgänger’s plan  
52  
53 to avoid being dragged back there; Gordon Cole (David Lynch) and Cooper  
54  
55 (albeit his evil doppelgänger) being reunited in part 4; Dougie’s car being  
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3 blown up in part 5; and 'Ike the Spike' (Christophe Zajac-Denek) brutally  
4 committing murder in part 6 before coming after Dougie/Coop. Yet it is the  
5 delaying of Cooper's return, in the form of his much-loved character, that  
6 creates a sense of narrative slowness and non-progression, as Dougie/Coop  
7 acts in a child-like manner across multiple parts, apparently only capable of  
8 communicating by echolalia. By refusing to restore Cooper, and marking *The*  
9 *Return* with grating linguistic repetition, Lynch/Frost Productions have shaped  
10 a generational seriality resonating with how  
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23 Age, death, and loss loom over this production with searing,  
24 sweet honesty. The camera makes no effort to disguise the lines  
25 on the faces of the returning cast, to conceal the frailty of some  
26 and the robust maturity of others. ... It's rare to see a show  
27 embrace attrition like this, and it touches me deeply. (Stephens  
28 2017)  
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39 By bringing this "attrition" to bear semiotically on MacLachlan as Cooper, *The*  
40 *Return* seeks to distinguish itself from the 'quality other' of established  
41 complex TV, or what Stephen Shapiro has deemed the "second" and "third"  
42 wave of TV drama's latest "golden age" (2016, 182). Although *Twin Peaks:*  
43 *The Return* revisits "the minutiae that represent it in popular memory"  
44 (Stephens 2017), it continually filters moments and icons – e.g. the final  
45 sequence of season two where Cooper smashes his head into a mirror –  
46 through their self-conscious but banal echoes. For instance, Dougie/Cooper  
47 stares at his mirror reflection in a shot framed to resemble the cult show's  
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3 cliffhanger, as if he is remembering (once again, like a good fan) how *Twin*  
4  
5 *Peaks* as a TV show ended in 1991 (Fig. 3).  
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### 9 10 **Conclusion: Returning Fragments and Doppelgängers**

11 By focusing on generational seriality – that is, how the real-world gap of 26  
12 years between *Twin Peaks* and *The Return* has marked its revived textuality,  
13 and especially how extra-diegetic and diegetic temporalities have been  
14 collapsed together within the show’s ongoing seriality – I have sought to read  
15 the revival for its ‘realist’ cultural-serial renderings of ageing and loss. I have  
16 also considered *The Return*’s fantastical connotations of dementia and  
17 fractured self-identity via the figure of Dougie/Coop, assessing how textual  
18 developments install a ‘brand gap’ between new and old *Twin Peaks*.  
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29 In the latter part of my analysis I then addressed how recap culture has  
30 additionally shaped *The Return*’s generational seriality, acting as a mediated  
31 repository of co-created cultural value by splitting ‘good’ subscription TV *Twin*  
32 *Peaks* from both its network TV predecessor and its current ‘quality TV’ rivals.  
33 Although recappers have ludically implied that *Twin Peaks: The Return*  
34 represents “the ultimate defeat of TV recap culture” (VanDerWerff 2017a),  
35 *The Return* is equally marked by multiple others and doppelgängers in its  
36 Showtime text and in its recapped paratexts.  
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47 It is not merely happening again, though; fragments, echoes and  
48 ghostings of *Twin Peaks*’ prior TV brand threaten to emerge across the  
49 opening 6 parts, their present-absence disrupting the branded familiarity of  
50 settings, logo, and music. Jeff Wilser (2017) even suggests that “Where’s [the  
51 original] *Twin Peaks*?’ has replaced the ... question of ‘Who Killed Laura  
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3 Palmer?” Marked by generational seriality, and its differentiations between  
4 then/now, *Twin Peaks: The Return* is not what it seems: rather than a return, it  
5 absorbs David Lynch and Mark Frost’s 1990s “cult classic” into the more  
6 recent Lynchverse.  
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Familiar brand imagery is given a different spin in the title sequence of *Twin Peaks: The Return*.

352x203mm (72 x 72 DPI)

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By showing Sam and Tracey (Madeline Zima) watching a mysterious glass box, *Twin Peaks: The Return* acts as a reflexive commentary on television viewing.

451x300mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Review

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Repeating the cliffhanger framing from the end of *Twin Peaks* season 2 positions Dougie Jones/Dale Cooper as haunted by the past whilst offering up a knowing image of difference-in-repetition.

952x535mm (96 x 96 DPI)

Review