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

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

Of late, TV seriality has become not just a matter of textual analysis but also intertextual analysis as texts from the cultural past are variously revived and reimagined. Critics have sought to name this trend, arguing for the ‘re-quel’ as a useful term (Pinkerton 2016, 34). For example, writing in Sight & Sound Nick Pinkerton argues that re-quals act simultaneously as sequels and as restatements of key elements from their previous textual incarnations. By introducing new, younger characters alongside ageing favourites, franchises can strategically facilitate a “baton passage of … [diegetic] worlds from one generation to the next” (Pinkerton 2016, 34). In such continuations, then, the issue of cross-generational transfer necessarily becomes significant (Lizardi 2017).

Cult TV has proffered a number of re-quals (e.g. Doctor Who; Star Trek: The Next Generation; The Prisoner) given that it tends to have established fan loyalty and brand recognition. Indeed, cult TV can be defined by its “post-object fandom” (Williams 2015) as dedicated fan cultures continue to develop their relationships with cult texts long after television cancellation. Rebecca Williams has observed how post-object fandom can offer opportunities for textual resurrection (2016, 56; Hills 2013, 297).

Here, I am interested in one case of cult TV revival: the third season of Twin Peaks (Showtime, 2017), promoted as Twin Peaks: The Return. I will argue that what distinguishes the revival’s seriality is its invocation of

1 This article is dedicated to the memory of my father, Robin Hills.
discourses of generationality (as key characters from the original run are shown to have children of their own, and/or are represented in terms of visibly marked ageing). At the same time, *Twin Peaks: The Return* collapses together the extra-diegetic and diegetic passing of time since its original 1990s incarnation. This is an unusual “gap” in seriality, where such a space between installments is what “differentiates serial fiction from every other” form (O’Sullivan 2006, 116). Yet it surely makes a difference to the textual meaning and (fan) experience of this cult TV “gap” if it lasts twenty-six years, as was the case for *Twin Peaks* between 1991 and 2017 (cf. Loock 2016, 285–86). Stuart Henderson has explored this mode of sequelisation with regard to Hollywood film, noting how sequels can “create a more nuanced and richer engagement between audience and character” by synchronising “the amount of time which has passed in our lives with that of the characters” (2014, 165–66). Such generational seriality thereby “offers an excellent opportunity to measure temporal difference” (Kelleter 2012, 33) between ‘then’ and ‘now’ (between *Twin Peaks* of the 1990s and 2010s). Long-awaited cult TV revivals, due to their unusual configuration of seriality’s “gap,” represent “a product that people will purchase to access their own memories” (Gordon 2017, 92).

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

I will thus treat generality as a post-Mannheimian cultural
construct that is necessarily mediated and “eurythmic” rather than only being
an emergent matter of collective consciousness. Consequently, generational
seriality can be considered as relating ongoing serialised narrative partially to
matters of the life course and ageing, and partly to matters of socio-historical
context (comparing ‘then’ and ‘now’), where two decades as a serial “gap” can be sufficient – however contested or fuzzy particular generation-based categories are – to capture a sense of generational shift. Generational seriality operates in excess of purely ‘textual’ content because it resonates across diegetic and extra-diegetic temporalities, with characters and actors ageing across the same gap in textual production and diegetic time. Although the likes of Frank Kelleter (2012) and Stuart Henderson (2014) have usefully prefigured the term in their analyses of film remakes and sequels, neither explicitly links seriality to generational meaning-making in the manner I am setting out here. As a critical tool, the term facilitates a focus on how media and narrative serialities can be integrated into diegetic (and audience) arcs of meaning that operate, minimally and culturally, across “the interval between parents and children” (Bollas 1993, 252).

I will address generational seriality in two sections. Firstly, I want to focus on textual attributes of Twin Peaks: The Return, and how these can be analysed not simply as a matter of reiterated programme branding but also as a matter of destabilizing temporal and textual difference. Far from acting as a stable and wholly familiar TV ‘brand,’ this means that Twin Peaks: The Return can act as a challenge to fan expectations via its repositioning as a programme brand. I then want to consider how Twin Peaks’ generational seriality has been co-produced by changes in media reception between the 1990s and 2010s, with emergent discourses of cult fan “legitimation” from the 90s (Newman and Levine 2012, 27–28) having moved into “the sphere of mediation” (Teurlings 2017, 5) via widespread recapping and blogging. Contemporary TV discourses have positioned Twin Peaks: The Return – via
the popularization of recaps (Falero 2016, 160) – as self-reflexive, thematically coherent TV drama, even whilst it is said to resist such readings (Hudson 2017). The revival's cultural distinction relies on forms of othering in its many US and UK recaps, with the issue of pacing forming one way in which its generational seriality has been separated out from established modes of 'complex TV' (Mittell 2015) via the outbidding of previous ‘quality TV.’ Such outbidding involves the “one-upmanship” of popular seriality (and its audiences), i.e. a “tendency of serial narratives to surpass” each other competitively and artistically via claims to distinction (Kelleter 2014, 8). Before considering the role of recaps, however, I will discuss how Twin Peaks: The Return has engaged textually in matters of generational seriality. It should be noted that I’m writing in media res after 6 of 18 parts, and hence this analysis remains provisional.

**Analysing the Return of Twin Peaks: Generational Seriality, Programme Branding, and the ‘Brand Gap’**

Reviewing The Secret History of Twin Peaks, a 2016 novel by series co-creator Mark Frost, Theresa DeLucci writes for Tor.com that it “is just the thing to get fans of the show – both OG [‘original gangster,’ i.e. old school] and Netflix-generation – putting their heads together and theorizing about the fates of their favorite characters” (DeLucci 2016). But this binary is rather reductive – there is not just a “dual audience” here (Lizardi 2017, 17). Rather, there are multiple generations of fans who first encountered Twin Peaks upon broadcast, plus at least one generation who could be thought of as “hiatus fans” – those who discovered the show whilst it was in the TV wilderness –
along with more recent fans who came to it via Netflix, as well as new
generations following the Showtime revival due to *Twin Peaks*’ reputation as
the forerunner of today’s ‘showrunner’ TV (Wells-Lassagne 2017, 126).

However, by remaining true to “Brand Lynch” (Todd 2012, 108), David
Lynch has taken on a “trickster”-like role (Jenkins 1995) via *Twin Peaks: The
Return*, challenging fan expectations. The town/setting of Twin Peaks has
been marginalized in the first six parts and Agent Cooper’s familiar
characterisation has remained absent. As Rebecca Williams has noted,
“Lynch’s presence on the new series of *Twin Peaks* does not
unproblematically offer fans a sense of security since his authorial brand
connotes … uncertainty” (2016, 59).

If *Twin Peaks* is to display textual authenticity in fans’ eyes then they
typically expect spatiotemporal continuity and brand consistency, in line with
contemporary media/franchise discourses of world-building that condition
“audiences to pay attention to – and prize – logical continuity. But logical
continuity is not what makes *Twin Peaks* work; this is a storyworld that
functions on pareidolia – the activating, manipulating, and deceiving [of] our
pattern-making tendencies” (Bushman 2016). *The Return*’s generational
seriality thus confronts a tension between “world-based and auteur-based
cult” (Hills 2015, 24) given that some instances of cult TV seem to rely more
on an unfolding narrative world rather than an auteurist framing (e.g. the
history of the BBC’s *Doctor Who* or Fox’s *The X-Files*), whilst others are
highly author-focused (e.g. Gene Roddenberry’s *Star Trek* or Patrick
McGoohan’s *The Prisoner*).

The town of Twin Peaks represents a “fully furnished world” that
enduring fans have studied over the years, meaning that any attempt to 
“unfurnish” this and overwrite established Peakie knowledge (Hills 2015, 30) 
would be likely to provoke considerable fan ire. And yet what Martha P. 
Nochimson terms the “Lynchverse” (2013, 163) has considerably reshaped 
*Twin Peaks*. Nochimson distinguishes between David “Lynch’s first-stage 
work,” including the original *Twin Peaks* (2013, 167), and his “second-stage” 
work (2013, 1, 11 and 169), running from *Lost Highway* (1997) to *Inland 
Empire* (2016). For Lynch, returning to *Twin Peaks* has therefore meant 
reworking his “first-stage” TV show, focused on “parallel worlds,” within a 
more “disturbing” and quantum-mechanical worldview (Nochimson 2013, 13) 
where diegetic worlds can be dissolved into multiverses of indeterminacy. As 
an example of auteur-based cult status running ahead of world-based 
cultification, i.e. where David Lynch’s experimental vision of the show seems 
more significant than coherent world-building, Showtime’s *Twin Peaks* offers 
the potential to intensely dismay some of its enduring fans.

But the Lynchverse-indebted revival has not shied away from revising 
the world and the text of *Twin Peaks*. This reinterpretation is evident from the 
very title sequence of *The Return* (Fig. 1), which Scott Ryan (2017, 3) has 
analysed in relation to the franchise’s previous titles. Ryan notes that by 
substituting upwardly flowing red curtains and spinning chevrons for the static 
versions of such imagery from the original TV show, Lynch establishes “what 
the new series is about – … we are still in Twin Peaks, but we are shown 
things from a new angle” (2017, 3). The newfound dynamism of *Twin Peaks’ 
brand imagery here promises that although the show will be visually and 
stylistically recognisable, it will offer a sense of difference in comparison with
its earlier incarnation.

Generationality is one strong marker of this textual difference. The older Kyle MacLachlan has been described by TV critics as remaining “preternaturally youthful” (Cooke 2017). But if MacLachlan is said “to have aged ‘successfully’” (Hamad 2015, 174) in a manner normatively associated with female stars, other Twin Peaks’ celebrities are represented very differently:

Twin Peaks … looks like the original town, but with some uncanny differences. … [O]riginally “filled with beautiful women” – young and pretty faces – [it] is now a different town with torn-down buildings and “broken beauty.” … The scenes with Sarah Palmer (Grace Zabriskie) and The Log Lady (Catherine Coulson) seem to indicate that, and the scenes with Coulson look almost like a touching intra-diegetic eulogy. (Halskov 2017)

Coulson filmed her sequences as fan favourite the Log Lady whilst seriously ill with cancer and before sadly passing away in September 2015; there is a sense that her appearance constitutes a loving gift to the show’s fandom. Long-time Lynch collaborator Harry Dean Stanton also reprises his role as Carl Rodd in Part 6, appearing “as an absolute image of tranquil seniority. … What brought him to this …, especially considering how brashly he acted in Fire Walk with Me? … [It] seems a potent image for a show dealing with how characters have mutated and matured over the course of 25 years” (Loughrey 2017).
Given these marked changes in characters’ appearances (and sometimes demeanour), *Twin Peaks: The Return* is frequently marked by the ageing or loss of its older generation. Part of its generational seriality involves a self-reflexive awareness of “the fact that several of the actors who originally appeared in *Twin Peaks* have passed away in the years between the second and third seasons of the show,” including Don S. Davis who played Major Garland Briggs, Jack Nance who portrayed Pete Martell and Frank Silva who played BOB (Williams 2016, 58–59). Similarly, Roger Luckhurst notes how “some of the most sustained work of fan-scholars … has been collected in places such as Welcome to Twin Peaks, or the Twin Peaks Archive … This site contains … a melancholy blog roll of obituaries of actors from the show” (Luckhurst 2017, 21). As *Buzzfeed* tellingly remarks:

None of this is reminiscent of the chirpy coffee-and-cherry-pies *Twin Peaks* of consensual memory. When familiar faces do appear, they are fascinatingly aged … [in] … a reminder that time has passed in the real world too. … And in this present, David Lynch … suddenly reads as the one thing nobody has ever accused him of being: a realist. (McCormack 2017)

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
seriality is made visible through the emergence of legacy characters’ children, e.g. Wally Brando (Michael Cera), the son of Andy and Lucy Brennan (Harry Goaz and Kimmy Robertson); Becky Johnson (Amanda Seyfried), the daughter of Shelly Johnson (Mädchen Amick); and Richard Horne (Eamon Farren), who fan speculation suggests is the son of Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn) (Loughrey 2017). Dougie Jones, whose identity is displaced by Dale Cooper when he finally emerges out of the Lodge (both played by Kyle MacLachlan), also has a young child, Sonny Jim (Pierce Gagnon), meaning that Cooper is fantastically positioned as a father despite his lengthy imprisonment. Collapsing together the diegetic and extra-diegetic passing of decades, generational seriality hence moves previously middle-aged characters into old age, and a number of previously youthful characters into parental roles. This aspect of generational seriality has been strongly present in other TV series' revivals, for example the 2012 version of camp-cult oil baron/family saga Dallas combined legacy characters such as J.R. and Bobby Ewing (Larry Hagman and Patrick Duffy) with new actors playing the grown-up children of J.R. and Sue Ellen Ewing (Linda Gray) and Bobby and Pamela Barnes Ewing (Victoria Principal; who unlike Hagman, Duffy and Gray did not return to the series). In terms of cult telefantasy, generational seriality was less frequently evident in Star Trek: The Next Generation (despite its title) via guest appearances from older actors and characters who had previously featured in Star Trek: The Original Series. And the restoration of The X-Files as a television series after 14 years, in 2016, also involved references to the ageing of lead characters Dana Scully and Fox Mulder (Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny, respectively).
Returning to *Twin Peaks: The Return*, secondly the “entire Dougie storyline might be seen as a sad reflection of this transformation theme … reminding the viewers of *Twin Peaks* actor Warren Frost (Mark Frost’s father) who died in February 2017 after struggling with Alzheimer’s disease” (Halskov 2017). Regardless of whether Dougie/Cooper is read (perhaps fannishly) in relation to the Frost family, this character’s loss of self-identity, and even control over bodily functions such as urination, connotes generational anxieties surrounding ageing and dementia. As Sadie Wearing has argued, crime dramas tackling the theme of dementia can “demonstrate the consequences of forgetting for figures – detectives – for whom the ability … to re-present actions … in a way that renders them … meaningful” is a core part of their self-identity (Wearing 2017, 127). Moreover, a threatened loss “of autonomy, self-reliance and power” can “trouble masculine identifications, gendered roles and the related ability to author(ise) the self” (Wearing 2017, 140).

Cooper’s evacuation of characterisation – yet to be restored one third of the way through *The Return* – also troubles the established brand of *Twin Peaks* (Johnson 2012). As various writers have discussed in *The Verge*, puzzling over the question ‘Should the new season of *Twin Peaks* even be called *Twin Peaks*?”, the show’s treatment of Agent Cooper “seems to telegraph that Lynch is not all that interested in how audiences feel about these older characters” (Bishop in Bishop, Plaugic and Robinson 2017). Cooper’s escape from the otherworldly space which he was trapped in at the end of *Twin Peaks’* original run comes at a high price: whilst the evil version of Cooper (MacLachlan’s third different role in the show) is free to go about his
nefarious business in the ‘real world’ of the series’ narrative, Agent Cooper is trapped inside a ‘shell’ of false identity. He is depicted as unable to speak, beyond repeating the ends of others’ sentences, and is unable to recall his own identity and history. This transformative memory-loss, and its associated loss of self, severely curtails Cooper’s narrative agency – far from setting off in pursuit of the Bad Cooper, Agent Cooper does not even appear to know who he is, nor to be able to function as an adult. Gradual glimmers of his old self, as he dimly remembers “case files,” enjoys coffee, and pokes repeatedly at police badges, therefore play “games with … [the] fanboy [and fangirl] heart” (Jensen 2017) as fans wish fervently for the return of the Agent Cooper that they know and love.

To be clear, this fantastical depiction of Cooper is not denotatively that of a dementia sufferer, but the character’s impairment remains far greater than might be expected from any ‘realistic’ portrayal of mid-life and its changes. Cooper’s loss of overall agency and arguably connoted dementia raise the narrative issue of whether he “will ever become a functional human being again” (Robinson in Bishop, Plaugic and Robinson 2017). Given that this effectively places under erasure the lead character of 1990s Twin Peaks, such generational seriality draws on more than themes of ageing or cognitive decline: it simultaneously refuses to reinstate a key aspect of the Twin Peaks brand, as beloved by fans, and hence installs what might be called a ‘brand gap’ between the show’s two realisations. As Celia Lury has argued, brands typically develop via intervals that are “organized so as to produce branded products as … different …, as new or up to date” (2004, 9). In this instance, the remarkable gap of 26 years is more contingent than “organized,” but
nevertheless this version of Twin Peaks is self-consciously not a replay of 1990s Peaks; it knowingly contests the earlier show's core of audience identification with Agent Dale Cooper.

There is a “spectatorial destabilisation … cultivated” (Neofetou 2012, 24) here in relation to what has otherwise been described as the “fan service” of brief appearances by “legacy characters” (Bishop, Plaugic and Robinson 2017). By contrast, good Coop’s diminished narrative role amounts to a form of fan disservice: fandom is challenged, as its expectations of Cooper’s return are thwarted. Twin Peaks: The Return is visually on-brand, all billowing red curtains and dizzying chevrons. But in its narrative debts to the uncertainties of the “Lynchverse” (Nochimson 2013, 163), and in its generational seriality connoting an approximation of dementia, The Return pits brand values of auteurist vision against the securities of world-building, coming to resemble its own televisual doppelgänger.

Next, I will consider how Twin Peaks: The Return has been positioned against the US network TV incarnation of Twin Peaks within today’s culture of blogged recaps. Here, generational seriality emerges not only through diegetic material but also through a contrast between ‘then’ and ‘now’ in audience discourses of media content and technology. As I will show, Twin Peaks’ cult revival has also been partly set against established conventions of ‘quality’ TV drama.

Recapping the Return of Twin Peaks: Generational Seriality, Quality TV, and the ‘Quality Other’

Jan Teurlings has made a convincing case for what’s described as the
“commonification” of television criticism, “as it has entered the sphere of mediation rather than mere circulation” (2017, 5), becoming an ordinary practice and part of the social/creative commons (2017, 4). Teurlings points to this demotic turn as being centred on the “recap”:

The arrival of the Internet has made it easier for aficionados and professional TV critics alike to find venues for their analyses. … TV critics are not confined to reviewing a show just once but they can do weekly follow-ups, in which … that night’s episode is analyzed in detail and situated within the overall development of the show – a critical genre which goes by the name of the recap. (2017, 5).

One consequence of the “protoprofessionalization of popular television criticism” (Teurlings 2017, 13) is that it has tended to give rise to blog entries and fan commentaries emulating those of professional TV critics (Teurlings 2017, 14; Rixon 2011, 227). Twin Peaks: The Return has been such a long time coming, with Twin Peaks itself occupying the privileged status of being positioned as a “cult classic” (Garner 2016), that it was always likely to inspire an outpouring of TV journalist/fan recapping, despite the fact that “the idea of recapping Twin Peaks is, on some level, absurd. David Lynch’s cult-classic TV series … has always resisted literal interpretation” (Hudson 2017).

Blogged by mainstream pop culture sites in the US such as Buzzfeed, Entertainment Weekly, the A.V. Club, Vox and Vulture (McCormack 2017; Jensen 2017; Stephens 2017; VanDerWerff 2017a; Hudson 2017) as well as
by fan niche sites and mainstream, broadsheet press-related websites in the UK (e.g. GamesRadar+; The Independent and The Guardian) – along with many other venues – The Return has also, unusually, been ‘recapped’ at the British Film Institute, in a “web exclusive” for the cinephile-academic crossover magazine Sight & Sound, as well as by acafans in CSTOnline and 16:9 (Kelly 2017; Loughrey 2017; Jeffries 2017a; Huddleston 2017; Garner 2017; Halskov 2017). Such a proliferation of recapping has “allowed a space in between traditional criticism that demands aesthetic distance and fannish obsession” (Falero 2016, 160), but my interest predominantly lies in how such commentary has co-produced Twin Peaks’ generational seriality.

With so many rapid responses to the show paratextually swirling around, fans and critics were keen to evaluate the “risk that the … show, which broke the mold of network television in 1990 would now, ironically, fit the mold of cable television” all too comfortably (Halskov 2015, 219). Given the evaluative tendencies of recapping culture, in what follows I want to focus on qualitative patterns in recaps’ meaning-making rather than claiming any sampled version of ‘representativeness.’ This is in line with established norms in qualitative audience research – for instance, Ien Ang’s Watching Dallas (1989) analysed 42 letters written by viewers. Dealing with a comparable number of blog entries, I will draw on a corpus of 34 recaps from the 11 randomly selected major publications/websites listed above. This set also covers the groups of recappers listed by Teurlings (aficionados, professional TV critics, and journalists). The total number of 34 recaps is not a multiple of current Twin Peaks: The Return episodes (6) due to the fact that CSTOnline, Sight & Sound and 16:9 coverage was one-off rather than part-by-part (thus
varying from the standard definition of recapping). Additionally, *The Return* was broadcast/streamed in a non-traditional pattern: the first two parts were shown together, with parts 3 and 4 being made available immediately afterwards via streaming (and then being followed by weekly episodes). Consequently, none of the sites I am exploring have run six-for-six recaps-for-parts, usually covering parts 1 and 2 together, and then parts 3 and 4 in one recap.

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
oppositions” (Loughrey 2017) via the characters of Richard Horne and Red. Or part 5 is supposedly reducible to representations of mechanical ‘humanity’: “we’re aware that Dougie/Cooper is only an approximation of a human being, and also that his family and co-workers scarcely notice that evident uncanniness. Human society … is what’s really uncanny – a … simulation that satirises the real thing” (Jeffries 2017a).

Such self-reflexive/thematic interpretations aim to secure Twin Peaks: The Return as ‘quality TV’ by aligning it with subscription TV drama’s second wave of “this new ‘golden age’” where the first wave was “inaugurated by HBO through shows like The Sopranos. … The second is characterized by … new rivals to HBO, like … Showtime” (Shapiro 2016, 182). As Ross Garner argues, contrasting parts 1 and 2 with the older network TV model of Twin Peaks:

Whilst … [Sam and Tracey’s graphic nudity] was ‘new’ for Twin Peaks, it also felt like the series negotiating its institutional context by intertextually locating itself within long-established trends via shows like The Sopranos (HBO 1999–2007). … The message communicated was ‘It’s not old Twin Peaks, its Showtime’s Twin Peaks.’ (Garner 2017)

This “message” is also communicated via the pronounced tonal shifts that recaps focus on when comparing 1990s and 2010s versions. Buzzfeed laments the loss of “chirpy coffee-and-cherry-pies Twin Peaks” (McCormack 2017), while 16:9 notes that although the “old Twin Peaks combined mystery,
horror, comedy and melodrama, and was largely built on a conscious soap opera structure, ... new Twin Peaks seems less soapy” (Haskov 2017). And writing for the commercial fan website GamesRadar+, Andy Kelly’s recap suggests that “although there are traces of the show we know and love ... this Twin Peaks is a very different beast. The melodramatic soap opera is gone, replaced by a show that has a lot more in common with contemporary TV drama and Lynch’s cinematic experiments” (Kelly 2017). In Sight & Sound’s terms, “The Return refuses to deliver the cosy pleasures some old-school fans might’ve been hoping for – this is an altogether shiftier beast” (Huddleston 2017). Such recap readings cluster around differences between Twin Peaks and The Return not in order to delegitimate soap opera (Newman and Levine 2012, 35–36), nor to posit melodrama as outside the ambit of ‘complex TV’ (Mittell 2015, 246), but rather to securely position subscription TV drama Twin Peaks against the industrial-cultural “other” of network TV drama Twin Peaks.

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
the “indeterminate” realms of the Black Lodge (Neofetou 2012, 78; Pheasant-Kelly 2013, 99). By selecting out such “moments of excess,” recaps perform a kind of “textural poaching” (Gillan 2016, 12, 15), extracting a visual-visceral sense of the series’ textures rather than poaching specific meanings.

However, recapped moments detached from the TV series’ overarching context can also be collisions between moments-of-mythos and moments-of-excess, e.g. the reaction that Bobby Briggs (Dana Ashbrook) exhibits to Laura Palmer’s photograph in part 4:

> the best scene so far is a callback: ... Bobby Briggs – ... now an officer of the law – walks in on the old homecoming photo of Laura Palmer that’s been pulled from ... evidence. ... The camera zooms in on actor Dana Ashbrook’s face as he tenses and tears up, while, right on cue, the first unforgettable strands of Angelo Badalamenti’s “Laura’s Theme” swell in. ... Suddenly we’re back, and it feels crushing. Real magic, as Lynch knows, resides outside the conventions of storytelling (McCormack 2017).

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-
emergence of Angelo Badalamenti’s score (see Norelli 2017), it is almost as if Bobby is recalling a TV episode that he has rewatched in preparation for the *Twin Peaks*’ revival – that his intensity of feeling seems all-too-recent places him temporarily and strikingly in the position of a dedicated fan, rather than plausibly behaving as an in-diegesis character. Bobby’s memories of Laura Palmer – the same image of Laura also ghosts briefly over the revival’s title sequence – feel simultaneously both diegetic and extra-diegetic. Generational seriality, in this instant, liminally merges the show’s extra-diegetic fan reception and its diegetic world.

A related complication of diegetic reality occurs at the end of parts 2–6, when songs performed ‘as-live’ by musicians at the Bang Bang Bar displace any typical cliffhanger: “Those performances … are part of the diegesis, yet strangely unconnected to the diegetic action. They are part of *Twin Peaks*, yet strangely removed from it” (Halskov 2017).

But the first such conclusion, to part 2, pulls audiences back into *Twin Peaks*’ diegesis (Hudson 2017), as we are shown James Marshall, playing James Hurley, looking across at Shelly Johnson before she tells her friends that “James is still cool. He’s always been cool.” This plot beat positions now middle-aged actors and characters as if they remain encapsulated in a narrative of bashful, youthful desire, even while Shelly also discusses the fact that her daughter is dating “the wrong guy,” cueing fan recollections of her own prior storyline. Such generational seriality directs audiences to contrast the ‘then’ and the ‘now,’ reading for temporal difference (Kelleter 2012, 33) rather than only occupying the sensuous “now” of *Twin Peaks*’ excess (Neofetou 2012, 75).
Recap culture has positioned *The Return* as contemporary ‘quality TV,’ co-creating the show’s generational seriality as a matter of temporal/textual difference from the original, rather than viewing new *Twin Peaks* as a nostalgic “re-tread” (Kelly 2017). However, in some ways the practice of recapping has simultaneously introduced an element of ambiguity into this discursive move, since journalist and (aca-)fan bloggers alike have also sought to position *The Return* against othered ‘quality TV,’ not by way of devaluing Lynch’s revival, but instead as a matter of valorising it above the conventionalities of rival subscription TV dramas. *The Return*’s unusual TV pacing has proven essential here, being noted as a matter of cultural distinction. For example, Ross Garner argues that “*Twin Peaks* is differentiating itself from contemporary ‘quality’ TV tropes … [via] the slow, at some points almost glacial, pacing of the narrative” (Garner 2017), while J. W. McCormack suggests that the “pace is so slow, the tension between scenes so slack, that it is almost anti-entertainment. … Showtime subscribers have been tricked into watching video art” (McCormack 2017). And Tom Huddleston playfully concludes that “we know now why Showtime’s initial estimate of nine episodes was later doubled – *The Return* moves at approximately half the speed of most TV” (Huddleston 2017).

In fact, *Twin Peaks: The Return* has been marked by a number of highly melodramatic, even thriller-esque narrative events. There is the initial framing murder of Ruth Davenport (Mary Stofle) explored in parts 1 and 2; Cooper’s escape from the Black Lodge in part 3 and his doppelgänger’s plan to avoid being dragged back there; Gordon Cole (David Lynch) and Cooper (albeit his evil doppelgänger) being reunited in part 4; Dougie’s car being
blown up in part 5; and ‘Ike the Spike’ (Christophe Zajac-Denek) brutally committing murder in part 6 before coming after Dougie/Coop. Yet it is the delaying of Cooper’s return, in the form of his much-loved character, that creates a sense of narrative slowness and non-progression, as Dougie/Coop acts in a child-like manner across multiple parts, apparently only capable of communicating by echolalia. By refusing to restore Cooper, and marking *The Return* with grating linguistic repetition, Lynch/Frost Productions have shaped a generational seriality resonating with how

> Age, death, and loss loom over this production with searing, sweet honesty. The camera makes no effort to disguise the lines on the faces of the returning cast, to conceal the frailty of some and the robust maturity of others. ... It’s rare to see a show embrace attrition like this, and it touches me deeply. (Stephens 2017)

By bringing this “attrition” to bear semiotically on MacLachlan as Cooper, *The Return* seeks to distinguish itself from the ‘quality other’ of established complex TV, or what Stephen Shapiro has deemed the “second” and “third” wave of TV drama’s latest “golden age” (2016, 182). Although *Twin Peaks: The Return* revisits “the minutiae that represent it in popular memory” (Stephens 2017), it continually filters moments and icons – e.g. the final sequence of season two where Cooper smashes his head into a mirror – through their self-conscious but banal echoes. For instance, Dougie/Coop stares at his mirror reflection in a shot framed to resemble the cult show’s
cliffhanger, as if he is remembering (once again, like a good fan) how *Twin Peaks* as a TV show ended in 1991 (Fig. 3).

**Conclusion: Returning Fragments and Doppelgängers**

By focusing on generational seriality – that is, how the real-world gap of 26 years between *Twin Peaks* and *The Return* has marked its revived textuality, and especially how extra-diegetic and diegetic temporalities have been collapsed together within the show’s ongoing seriality – I have sought to read the revival for its ‘realist’ cultural-serial renderings of ageing and loss. I have also considered *The Return*’s fantastical connotations of dementia and fractured self-identity via the figure of Dougie/Coop, assessing how textual developments install a ‘brand gap’ between new and old *Twin Peaks*.

In the latter part of my analysis I then addressed how recap culture has additionally shaped *The Return*’s generational seriality, acting as a mediated repository of co-created cultural value by splitting ‘good’ subscription TV *Twin Peaks* from both its network TV predecessor and its current ‘quality TV’ rivals. Although recappers have ludically implied that *Twin Peaks: The Return* represents “the ultimate defeat of TV recap culture” (VanDerWerff 2017a), *The Return* is equally marked by multiple others and doppelgängers in its Showtime text and in its recapped paratexts.

It is not merely happening again, though; fragments, echoes and ghostings of *Twin Peaks*’ prior TV brand threaten to emerge across the opening 6 parts, their present-absence disrupting the branded familiarity of settings, logo, and music. Jeff Wilser (2017) even suggests that “‘Where’s [the original] Twin Peaks?’ has replaced the … question of ‘Who Killed Laura
Marked by generational seriality, and its differentiations between then/now, *Twin Peaks: The Return* is not what it seems: rather than a return, it absorbs David Lynch and Mark Frost’s 1990s “cult classic” into the more recent Lynchverse.

**References**


Bushman, Jay. 2016. “‘Twin Peaks’: Everything We Learned about Season 3 from Mark Frost’s ‘The Secret History.’” *IndieWire*, November 18.


Kelly, Andy. 2017. “*Twin Peaks* S3.01 and S3.02 Review: ‘It’s Been a Long Wait, But It Was Worth It.’” *GamesRadar+*, 22 May.


Familiar brand imagery is given a different spin in the title sequence of Twin Peaks: The Return.

352x203mm (72 x 72 DPI)
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)
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.