

An Explorative Discussion and Delineation of Television Aesthetics
and Evaluation of *Twin Peaks: The Return*

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Abstract

The primary objective of this thesis is to examine and discuss the theoretical and methodological history, development and purpose of television aesthetics in order to ascertain a pertinent definition demonstrating its value within television studies as media scholars have customarily rejected the notion of combining philosophical aesthetics with the study of television to which it is consequently regarded as a subject of contention. Accordingly, the enduring debate within television studies regarding the validity and efficacy of television aesthetics was examined by way of a comprehensive theoretical and methodological discussion to which the central matters of contention were disclosed. Moreover, through the exploration of television aesthetics' distinctive and evaluative qualities it was determined that if acknowledged and properly integrated they could be of substantial benefit and value to the field of television studies as a whole. Correspondingly, the theory employed has been accumulated from several prominent media scholars in order to facilitate the complex delineation and examination of television aesthetics' qualities of which the extensive works of Sarah Cardwell have been of considerable significance as she is recognised as one of the founders of the field and thereby inextricably linked to the exploration of it.

Due to the multifaceted and complex discussions of theoretical and methodological applicability needed to ascertain its pertinent definition, the delineation of television aesthetics also incorporated the respective characteristics and interrelationship of quality and good TV into its methodological framework as they are reflective of similar attributes of which helped explicate its intrinsic value to the field of television studies. Furthermore, alongside the demarcation of quality and good TV, the qualities of art cinema were delineated as they too are relevant to the pertinent definition of television aesthetics and crucial to the thesis' secondary objective. The secondary objective consists of a concise evaluation of *Twin Peaks: The Return* of which demonstrated how television aesthetics is employed through analytical description and evaluative discussion, facilitated

by the author's own evaluative criteria. However, it should be explicitly stated that the pertinent definition, which was ultimately procured, is not representative of a uniform methodology or definition within the field of television aesthetics as the matter is far too complex and controversial to be covered or resolved within the pages of a single thesis. Rather, what is presented is an examination that strives to expound on the efficacy of television aesthetics' qualities through a theoretical and methodological delineation and discussion of which adds to and expands upon the body of work arguing the validity of its evaluative approach.

Introduction

This thesis will focus on the delineation of television aesthetics and determine the significance of its role and value within television studies through a theoretical and methodological exploration and discussion of its characteristics and unconventional approach to analysis, which will culminate in a concise evaluation of *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Accordingly, this thesis will have a pronounced emphasis on theoretical and methodological demarcations and discussions attributable to the complex and demanding examination needed to ascertain a tangible and pertinent definition of television aesthetics. Moreover, the characteristics and interrelationship of quality and good TV as well as art cinema will be outlined and should be considered methodological additives facilitating a more thorough and intelligible delineation of television aesthetics. Consequently, the evaluation and discussion of *Twin Peaks: The Return* will serve as a secondary focus used to concisely demonstrate the intrinsic and beneficial qualities of television aesthetics through my own engagement with and appreciation of the series.

Considering the controversy created by persistent disagreements of television aesthetics' place within and relevancy to television studies, I have chosen to work with this contentious field as I find its construction and development exciting and worth examining because of its complex and

invigorating methodological approach, which combines philosophical aesthetics' emphasis on evaluation with the study of television. However, bearing in mind that television aesthetics is yet a nascent field of study without a uniform definition, this thesis should be understood as a comprehensive presentation and examination of select theoretical and methodological matters of contention through which the delineation of television aesthetics will be discussed in order to establish a provisional definition that can be engaged with independently and of which the evaluation of *Twin Peaks: The Return* is contingent. Therefore, my delineation of television aesthetics should not be perceived as either theoretically nor methodologically irrefutable or analytically prominent but rather as another study adding to television aesthetics' body of work arguing the practicality and validity of its approach to television studies.

The following will serve as the problem statement and in a concise manner explain what I will set out to achieve with this thesis. Firstly, I want to explore how television aesthetics challenges and differentiates itself from conventional approaches to television studies and why it since its inception continues to be a controversial subject met with considerable opposition and criticism. Secondly, I want to discuss how television aesthetics' emphasis on the authors' transparent engagement with the text may improve the quality and persuasiveness of their produced analyses through evaluative criticism and discussions and how the employment of evaluative criteria can thus be considered beneficial to the field of television studies. Thirdly, I want to demarcate the respective characteristics and interrelationship of quality and good TV and discuss how these attributes can be utilised within and considered part of television aesthetics' methodological framework. Fourthly, I want to define the characteristics of art cinema and subsequently discuss and demonstrate how they may be understood and attentively interwoven with the methodology of television aesthetics despite their intrinsic emphasis on cinematic rather than televisual qualities. Finally, through the ascertained

provisional definition of television aesthetics, I want to concisely evaluate and discuss the qualities of *Twin Peaks: The Return*.

What is Television Aesthetics and How Do We Engage with It?

Within the field of television studies, television aesthetics is a relatively new approach that challenges the conventional practices of thinking about and analysing television, which has been met with criticism by numerous scholars since its inception and continues to be a contentious subject matter. Since the early 2000s, television aesthetics has seen extensive engagement within television studies and been the subject of scrutiny and debate as it ‘denote[s] and demarcate[s] both a particular attitude to the television medium, and a distinctive approach to the study of television programmes’ (Cardwell, 2013, 23). Television aesthetics’ distinctiveness is readily apparent within its name and may be considered provocative to conventional media scholars as ‘the term itself appears to suggest a synergy between an ancient, respected branch of academic philosophy and a relatively modern, technological, mass entertainment medium, where one might more reasonably expect (at best) an uneasy, awkward association’ (Cardwell, 2013, 23-24). As such, television aesthetics’ aspiration of combining philosophical aesthetics with television studies is frequently met with preconceived notions of elitism and irrelevancy to the field and consequently dismissed as self-indulging and lacking in objectivity.

Conventional television studies ‘wherein approaches that focus on sociological, ideological and broader cultural matters, but which neglect stylistic analysis and reject aesthetic evaluation’ (Cardwell, 2013, 23) have been historically dominant and strived for analytical objectivity, which television aesthetics challenges. Rather than disregarding the inherent qualities of stylistic analysis and aesthetic evaluation, television aesthetics embraces and acknowledges these approaches alongside the use of a vocabulary that is found unusual and distinct within the context of television

studies, which includes analytically disputatious subjects such as ‘judgement, criteria, achievements, accomplishments, discrimination [and] art’ (Cardwell, 2006, 72). Moreover, advocates of television aesthetics argue that by way of the aforementioned, often shunned approaches, scholars within the field of television studies will be able to elevate their exploration of television through evaluative criticism, which ‘strengthen our understanding of how a television programme works, how viewers and fans invest themselves in a text, and what inspires them (and us) to make television a meaningful part of everyday life’ (Mittell, 2015, 207). Television aestheticians’ focus on subjective evaluation and discussions of artistic value in preference to analytical objectivity is, however, perceived as detrimental to the field of television studies by several conventional media scholars and can be considered the fundamental cause of contention between these seemingly differing approaches.

In her 2006 article ‘Television Aesthetics’, Sarah Cardwell outlines the early developments in television aesthetics where she accounts for the early-to-mid-2000s’ surge in publications arguing in favour of this new approach to television studies. However, television aesthetics’ rise in prominence was brought into question by its opponents who doubted the validity of its existence as a formal field of study within television studies due to its employment of philosophical aesthetics and theoretically fluctuating and analytically non-conforming approaches, which Cardwell attempts to address. Additionally, it should be noted that Cardwell is considered one of the founding scholars of television aesthetics, which sees her works intrinsically linked to the exploration of this field of study and has publicised widely in this area as well as expanded upon and criticised by several prominent media scholars. Considering television aesthetics was and to some extent still is in its early stages of development, the lack of a rigorously researched methodology and uniform definition meant that the supportive publications touched upon various qualities that only broadly fits within this nascent field but lacked both in terms theoretical precision and in-depth analysis. However, as the majority of the publications share an emphasis on the same set of analytical qualities and key theoretical questions,

Cardwell argues that ‘one can pinpoint sufficient commonalities of vocabulary, concerns and methodology to support the view that the field is becoming established as a stand-alone area of television studies’ (2006, 72), which, in turn, can be used to create a methodological outline for further exploration and discussion.

In an attempt to clarify and unify the early-to-mid-2000 media scholars’ exploration and understanding of television aesthetics, Cardwell argues that the commonalities exhibited in the supportive publications are concerned with and has an emphasis on ‘more frequent and explicit evaluation[s] of programmes, and a more vocal debate about what “good” television is’ (2006, 72). Moreover, the publications highlight ‘[a]n asserted recognition that the field needs more textual criticism and a stronger understanding of what “close textual analysis” means, where the latter is understood to focus on thematic, formal and stylistic elements rather than simply on content or “representation”’ (Cardwell, 2006, 72). This recognition can, furthermore, be juxtaposed with the observation that television aesthetics should be understood as a ‘movement away from approaches that “use” television to study something else (for example, society, ideology, gender politics) and towards a recognition of television as a medium of expression first and foremost, and of programmes as specific artworks’ (Cardwell, 2006, 72). Lastly, Cardwell draws attention to television aestheticians’ interest in the ‘conceptual and philosophical questions that arise from attention to specific television texts’ (2006, 72), which further unshackles the field from the constraints of conventional television studies. While these observations are altogether largely representative of television aesthetics’ distinctive qualities and provide a more focused mode of theoretical and analytical engagement compared to readings prior to the 2000s, they can, nevertheless, be considered general and all-encompassing statements, which will be expanded upon in terms of their defining features by way of concrete examples alongside the critiques that surround and have helped shape them.

Prior to her attempt in quantifying television aesthetics' theoretical and analytical qualities in 2006, Cardwell proposed a methodology of her own in the 2005 article "Television Aesthetics" and *Close Analysis: Style, Mood and Engagement in Perfect Strangers* (Stephen Poliakoff, 2001)', which 'offer[s] a modest starting point for a greater awareness of what might constitute a study of television aesthetics' (p. 180). As a different way of studying television, Cardwell argues that her approach to television aesthetics in its broadest definition draws 'upon a generalised understanding of the key foci of philosophical aesthetics: the criticism and evaluation of art, and the raising and tackling of question that arise from our engagement with works of art' (2005, 180). This definition takes advantage of the same vocabulary and subjects of analysis that define philosophical aesthetics rather than conventional television studies, which would come to be the distinctive qualities associated with television aesthetics as observed in and corroborated by subsequent articles within this field of study as well as its primary cause for disparagement. Moreover, Cardwell offers a more applicable approach that specifies how to engage analytically with television aesthetics, which in practice moves

from a close analysis and critique of thematic, formal and stylistic qualities present in a particular televisual sequence [...] to explore some of the questions that arise from the peculiarities of a single work. [The aim is] to capture something of the individuality and distinctiveness of the programme, evaluate its achievements and also address the more "theoretical" questions the programme raises (2005, 180).

However, through comparison, it becomes apparent how television aesthetics can be regarded as variable and unfixed in its definition considering that the observations from Cardwell's 2006 article add significant qualities to the field, expanding it further, no more than a year following her own attempt to establish a unifying methodology.

Despite television aesthetics having commonalities that can be used to establish an approximate methodological framework, its primary focus on the author's subjective evaluation means that there is no unequivocal way to approach it from neither a theoretical nor analytical

perspective as ‘the aim is not to “apply” a theory to a text, using the text as case study, but to examine and explore the text in itself, and to investigate what broader questions arise from that process of examination and exploration’ (Cardwell, 2006, 73). In general, television aesthetics ‘exhibits an easy-going, all-embracing pluralism’, which can be difficult to navigate for readers and scholars not intimately familiar with its qualities and can, furthermore, account for the ‘exceptionally strong objections from its dissenters’ (Cardwell, 2013, 24) due to its unretentive approach and attitude compared to the established methodology of conventional television studies. Moreover, Cardwell acknowledges the lack of a definitive understanding of television aesthetics in her article ‘Television Aesthetics: Stylistic Analysis and Beyond’ where she ‘admit[s] that those of us who originated and work within television aesthetics have not yet done enough to clarify exactly what we mean, and do not mean, by the term – or to clarify the many different areas incorporated within the field, which no one scholar would claim to cover entirely’ (2013, 26). Due to its lack of a clearly defined methodology, exploring and discussing the value and usefulness of television aesthetics is necessitated, considering the many inconsistent readings that have been produced since its inception, in an effort to clarify its qualities further while also acknowledging that any one conclusive interpretation may not be achievable. Thus, the commonalities that have been and will be presented should rather be understood as an examination and elucidation of select characteristics that can be used to delineate television aesthetics’ qualities and not an indisputable way of engaging with them.

The Value and Fear of Aesthetics within Television Studies

Not unlike Cardwell’s observations and proposed methodology, Jason Jacobs brings forth the notion that television should be recognised as an art form and engaged with accordingly in his 2001 article ‘Issues of Judgement and Value in Television Studies’, which also emphasises the value of close textual analysis and subjective evaluation and how they successively correlate:

As with the analysis of all art, understanding that involvement requires above all concentrated study: minimally, the close observation of texts in order to support the claims and judgements we may wish to make about them. Criticism is a way of articulating why television programmes matter to us and the nature of that significance. Only in this way can we develop meaningful criteria for specific instances of television that may then be applied more generally (p. 431).

Jacobs argues that the intrinsic value of television can only be made known by way of criticism and evaluation, in form of close textual analysis, wherein the author's personal experience with the given televisual text is key in explaining the medium's strengths; by focusing one's attention to a single work within the medium in question, what is revealed through the analysis and evaluation can subsequently be applied more broadly to television in order to explain and expand upon its qualities and the studies thereof. However, television aesthetics' rendering of close textual analysis, which merges thematic, formal and stylistic elements with criticism and evaluation, creates feelings of great apprehension from its opponents who see this approach as 'nothing more than dry formalism' (Cardwell, 2006, 73). Moreover, '[m]isgivings are deepened by the popular use of the term "aesthetics" to mean simply "how something looks" e.g. its formal qualities [...] Whether implicitly or explicitly, this accusation of "formalism" lurks constantly behind critiques of any "aesthetic" approach' (Cardwell, 2013, 26). Television aesthetics being reduced to an instance of 'dry formalism' is understandable if mistakenly believed to be an undemanding display of analytical skills or simply regarded as 'how something looks' rather than a tool for exploring one's own engagement with a televisual text. Additionally, as supported by Cardwell, this can arguably be said about several of the concerns and misinterpretations television aesthetics continues to be met with, which will be elaborated on presently.

In his 2011 article 'Television Aesthetics: A Pre-structuralist Danger', Matt Hills encapsulates 'the great unease felt by sceptics about the resonances of the term "aesthetics" and its implications

for the study of television' (Cardwell, 2013, 25) of which Cardwell responds to and comments on in order to meet his and, by extension, the field's trepidation toward television aesthetics. Hence, considering that Hill's article echoes many of the concerns brought on by the introduction of aesthetics within television studies, which have thus far been established throughout television aesthetics' delineation and will be expanded upon succeeding, Cardwell's engagement with the article should be understood as her addressing aesthetics sceptics in general rather than a direct refutation intended solely for the author. Cardwell argues that Hill's article 'crystallised many comments we television aestheticians have encountered in more informal enquires' (2013, 24) to which she clarifies the general anxieties the field is met with, how to accommodate them and the value of scepticism through the debates it creates. More specifically, Cardwell asserts that

sceptical scholars fear that aspects of aesthetics are reactionary, harking back to old methods and values that have no place in the study of a popular, mass medium. False anxieties proliferate, perhaps, because of the widespread association of aesthetics with supposedly "elitist" notions of beauty, value, taste and high art. Consequently, critics suspect that television aesthetics' scholars are old-school elitists concerned with taste, value and canon-building (2013, 25).

As illustrated by Cardwell, the concerns predominantly amount to media scholars' unfamiliarity with or plain disregard of philosophical aesthetics, which could potentially be alleviated if greater care was taken into explaining how it decidedly interrelates with television aesthetics and could further the field of television studies with its rigorous yet constantly developing methodology. As such, it should be made readily apparent that within philosophical aesthetics,

enduring questions about formal analysis, criticism, interpretation and evaluation, including the issue of formalism and its limitations, are explicitly addressed and robustly debated. Aestheticians constantly examine and reconsider the relationship between a text and its reader/viewer (Cardwell, 2013, 27).

What differentiates philosophical aesthetics from conventional television studies, and what television aesthetics amongst other things strive for, is its emphasis on subjective evaluation as a valid analytical approach and candid willingness to embrace change for the betterment of the field as a whole. The continuously debated nature of its methodology sees philosophical aesthetics ‘repeatedly revitalised, ideas honed, reconsidered, and occasionally abandoned, because of dialogue, disagreement and debate between individual writers’ (Cardwell, 2013, 28), which similarly could be used for the benefit of television studies if acknowledged and allowed to. However, television aesthetics’ continued aversion of a unified methodology, despite its heavy reliance on philosophical aesthetics, remains counterintuitive to the aim of persuading sceptics of its intrinsic value to television studies, which Cardwell suggests could be rectified ‘if television aesthetics were to take more clearly as its model the robust debate and rigorous pluralism found in philosophical aesthetics [to which] media scholars’ fears that “television aesthetics” signals an unthinking relapse into rusty critical methods and reactionary assumptions would be quickly assuaged’ (Cardwell, 2013, 27). Therefore, the accession and integration of philosophical aesthetics does not pose a threat to television studies; rather, it presents the media scholar with an opportunity to be transparent and acknowledge their own personal investment in a televisual text, which allows them to engage with it more intimately through television aesthetics’ emphasis on close textual analysis and evaluative judgements:

A programme that inspires powerful responses in us gives rise to the need to understand it more fully and to understand why it has affected us thus. This need is met by a sustained and committed investigation of the programme’s aesthetic qualities. The need and the meeting of it should be intertwined in our critical writing (Cardwell, 2006, 74).

However, while the evaluative approach that philosophical aesthetics offers television studies by way of television aesthetics allows for more profound and personal engagement, the ‘configuration of television with aesthetics is not without its challenges’, as has been illustrated repeatedly, and ‘tackling these can only help us to develop a fuller, more coherent aesthetics of television’ (Cardwell,

2013, 29). Thus, Cardwell cautions that ‘we television aestheticians must continue to elaborate our aims, and develop and debate our core principles’ and suggests as ‘more work is published that draws upon and expands this exciting and thoughtful field, it can be hoped that much of the trepidation and distrust [...] will dissipate’ (2013, 27).

Evaluation

The term evaluation is, as established, frequently associated with and used within aesthetics, be it of philosophy or television studies, and requires further exploration in order to determine how to properly discuss and appraise its analytical qualities. In his 1987 article ‘Television as an Aesthetic Medium’, David Thorburn argues for the necessity of ‘evaluative criticism aiming to disclose the thematic and formal excellence of programs’ (p. 163) to which he recognises that television aesthetics does not focus solely on the qualities of interpretation but more importantly evaluation and how they interconnect. Furthermore, Cardwell adds to Thorburn’s theoretical exploration and concisely states that ‘evaluation is understood as inextricably linked to (arising from) interpretation’ (2006, 74), which helps illustrate how evaluation is not wholly reserved within discussions of philosophical aesthetics but instead can be considered an intrinsic development of interpretation that is present and readily applicable within several fields of study, including television. Thus, the historically recognised understanding that evaluation is a quality distinct to philosophical aesthetics, which should be kept out of the discourse within television studies, then presents its own intricate challenges.

Despite ostensible hesitation from media scholars to accept evaluation as an appropriate and already present approach within television studies, Charlotte Brunsdon correspondingly argues in her 1990 article ‘Television: Aesthetics and Audiences’ that ‘most academics involved in television studies are using qualitative criteria, however expressed or repressed, and that the constitution of the criteria involved should be the subject of explicit debate’ (p. 69). Moreover, Brunsdon elaborates that

‘[b]ecause issues of judgment are never brought out into the open, but always kept, as it were, under the seminar table, criteria involved can never be interrogated’ (1990, 69). Accordingly, Brunson challenges media scholars to abandon their ostensible hesitation toward television aesthetics’ evaluative approach, which Christine Geraghty expands upon in her 2003 article ‘Aesthetics and Quality in Popular Drama’ and agrees that ‘television studies would, I think, benefit from academics being more explicit about the evaluative judgements we inevitably make’ (p. 40). Additionally, Geraghty adds to Thorburn’s inquiry for further consideration towards the textual dimension of television studies parallel with an emphasis on evaluative criteria by asking for ‘an approach that emphasizes analytical description and evaluative discussion across a range of programmes’ (2003, 41-42), which television aesthetics comply with.

Thorburn, Brunson and Geraghty’s articles can be considered representative of early, supportive discussions regarding the qualities of television aesthetics and how its emphasis on evaluation and a transparent acknowledgment of the author’s role and engagement with any given televisual text is of considerable significance to the analysis. Furthermore, they present the overt acknowledgement of evaluation in television studies as worth deliberating considering evaluative criteria are already utilised when media scholars select texts they deem worthy of analysis whether stated explicitly within their works or tacitly assumed. Television aesthetics gives voice to media scholars’ otherwise silenced attitude toward the author’s imperative role and argues that evaluative qualities and criteria are as critical as interpretative ones and rather than withholding personal engagement behind a pseudo-objective detachment, being forthcoming would in turn be beneficial to the analysis and make for a more persuasive argument.

Contemporary television aesthetician Jason Mittell has dedicated a chapter in his book *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (2015) in which he discusses favourably evaluation’s role and significance in television studies and provides theoretical

discussions and analytical examples in order to contextualise television aesthetics' advantageous qualities, using his own evaluative criteria and analyses as case studies. Inspired by television aestheticians before him, citing and incorporating articles from Cardwell, Jacobs, Brunsdon and Geraghty alongside numerous other scholars into his own mode of analysis, Mittell mirrors and expands upon these observations while remaining critical and keenly aware of not stating his own opinions as irrefutable truths but rather an invitation to discussion and a source of inspiration.

Mittell argues that in 2001 when he was inspired to write his book 'there was then, and still is, little space for a media scholar to make such an evaluative argument within the realm of official scholarly discourse' (2015, 206), which further substantiates both Cardwell and Brunsdon's similar statements. Moreover, expanding upon Brunsdon and Geraghty's observations, Mittell asserts that '[t]he most common tactic among media scholars is to pack [evaluative judgement] away, bracketing it off from our professional writing in the name of analytic objectivity, or at least neutrality' (2015, 206). Consequently, the hiding of one's personal engagement for the appearance of analytic objectivity, or neutrality, proves problematic and awkward and has two major implications for the analysis and discussion of televisual texts according to Mittell. Firstly, not being forthcoming about one's evaluative criteria is dishonest (Mittell, 2015, 206), which in turn obscures the ultimate goal of creating any persuasive arguments about the subject of analysis; being personally invested in a television series does not necessarily cloud one's judgement but instead provides an insight and engagement that is not realisable if examined by scholars who are in direct opposition with or even less enthused about said programme. As admitted by Mittell, while an evaluative analysis rightfully can be considered skewered, television aesthetics' emphasis on transparency allows the produced work to circumvent the notion of having to maintain an impression of objectivity and focus on unimpeded analytical exploration and discussion: 'I make no claims toward objectivity or neutrality,

as I fully acknowledge that my own taste biases shape what programs I analyze and how I approach them' (2015, 207).

The second, more vital implication outlined by Mittell emphasises how rejecting television aesthetics' questions of taste and evaluation negatively affect the quality and persuasiveness of the analysis by consequently ignoring key questions concerning author-reader engagement and television storytelling:

Can we analyze why some programs work better than others for particular viewers? Can we analyze taste as anything more than a reflection of either textually inherent aesthetic value or contextually determined markers of the critic's social strata? In analyzing the poetics of television narrative, can we ask both how something works and how it works *well*? (2015, 207).

Ignoring these questions deprive not only the author an opportunity to produce texts that are profound and reflective of their relationship with any given television series but it also denies the readers to go beyond and expand upon their own understanding and engagement with said series as a result. Additionally, conventional media scholars' disregard of evaluative criteria and its edifying qualities is also mirrored in one of Cardwell's articles in which she asserts that '[t]elevision is one of the primary sources of artworks in Western society today, and television aesthetics opens up to the television audience valuable skills of discrimination and evaluation that are ultimately empowering' (2006, 75). By drawing attention to the value of evaluative criticism and the questions it raises, Mittell proposes that rather than snubbing television aesthetics' qualities and tenaciously abide by an antiquated status quo that only gives emphasis to analytical 'objectivity', embracing evaluative criteria would in turn benefit media scholars and readers alike: 'At its best, evaluative criticism helps us to see a series differently, providing a glimpse into one viewer's aesthetic experience and inviting readers to try on such vicarious reading positions for themselves' (2015, 207).

Having defined and discussed his opinions on evaluation and how he considers it, and by extension television aesthetics, beneficial to television studies, Mittell delineates the evaluative approach by contextualising how one analytically engages with it and asserts that ‘[a]n evaluative critique does not aspire to the status of fact or proof. By claiming that a given program is good or that one series is better than another, I am making an argument that I believe to be true, but it is not a truth claim [...] evaluation is an act of persuasion rather than demonstration’ (2015, 207). Furthermore, Mittell elaborates that due to television aesthetics placing emphasis on the evaluative and, in turn, analytical criteria as demarcated by the author of any given text, evaluation is predisposed to discussion as ‘[e]ven more than other types of analysis, evaluation is an invitation to a dialogue, as debating the merits of cultural works is one of the most enjoyable ways we engage with texts, establish relationships with other consumers, and gain respect for other people’s opinions and insights’ (2015, 207). However, while television aesthetics provides the author with the means of engaging with a television series through their own evaluative criteria, ‘we do not make evaluations to make a definitive statement about the value of any given text; instead, they are contingent claims lodged in their contextual moment that will almost undoubtedly be revised after future viewing and conversation’ (Mittell, 2015, 208).

As illustrated above, Mittell, corroborated by the foundation laid out by television aestheticians before him, substantiates how evaluative criteria are already present and used within television studies and expounds how these, rather than being repressed or dismissed, should be overtly acknowledged and incorporated within media scholars’ works in order to strengthen their quality and persuasiveness. Moreover, Mittell’s attentive and perceptive assessment of evaluation’s role within television studies expands upon Cardwell’s appeal for television aestheticians to be more elaborate in their aims, and develop and debate their core principles in order to advance the recognition and field of television aesthetics. Finally, considering evaluation is defined by the act of persuasion rather

than demonstration, the author defines the criteria of which their work should be evaluated by scholars, namely their own, which lacks the distinctly recognisable characteristics of other, more conventional types of analysis, accentuating dialogue and debate as its primary mode of engagement.

Television aesthetics' lack of a conventional methodology and heavy reliance on discussion, does, however, not exclude it from incorporating characteristics commonly associated with other standardised, analytical approaches if the author deems said qualities necessary to properly appreciate what they find appealing about the televisual text. Thus, while evaluative criteria is of cardinal significance in terms of the aesthetic analysis and bearing in mind that the goal of television aesthetics is not to apply a theory to a televisual text, evaluation can be used in conjunction with other analytical criteria in order to provide the author with tools needed to explain their relationship with said text. Therefore, the following chapters will establish and expound how the characteristics and interrelationship of 'quality TV' and 'good television' and attributes of art cinema are applicable and relevant to television aesthetics and the succeeding evaluation of *Twin Peaks: The Return*.

'Quality TV' and 'Good Television'

The emergence of 'quality TV' was first apparent in the 1980s where media scholars and critics began to take notice of a rise in 'quality' in television programming 'that they thought was better, more sophisticated, and more artistic than the usual network fare' and was initially defined by 'what it is not. It is not "regular" TV' (Thompson, 1997, 12-13). The nascent definition of quality TV is embedded in the television landscape that preceded the 1980s in which television as a medium had 'long [been] considered artless' to which 'quality' would consequently come to be defined by its departure from 'regular' programming as 'the only artful TV is that which isn't like the rest of it' (Thompson, 1997, 13). However, while 'people just seemed to know [quality TV] when they saw it'

(Thompson, 1997, 12-13), quality TV lacked a rigorous methodology that allowed it to be defined and engaged with analytically as the term was often conflated with ‘good’ television.

As a response to the lack of a uniform methodology, the concept of quality TV was later outlined by Robert J. Thompson in his 1997 book *Television's Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER* in which he proposed a list of a dozen characteristics (pp. 13-15) that came to define the term in its infancy. While his list facilitated the delineation of quality TV's characteristics then, Thompson acknowledged that ‘[y]et even today, no one can say exactly what “quality television” means’ (1997, 12), suggesting that his attempt at creating a uniform methodology then was to some extent also afflicted with ambiguity. Following Thompson's demarcation, however, quality and good TV have seceded adequately and quality TV is now commonly perceived as a distinct and established ‘generic category’ (Cardwell, 2013, 25) that does not employ the same evaluative criteria found in discussions of good television, which is a topic he revisits and reflects on in the preface to the 2007 book *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, edited by Janet McCabe and Kim Akass. Thompson states that ‘[n]ow I can find a lot of shows on the air that exhibit all 12 characteristics but in the end, aren't really all that good’ to which he poses the question: ‘What does “quality TV” mean now?’ (2007, xx), which several media scholars have subsequently attempted to define themselves.

In her 2007 article ‘Is Quality TV Any Good?’, Sarah Cardwell attempts to delineate the distinctive characteristics of quality and good TV and how they interrelate but acknowledges the difficulties in producing an unequivocal understanding considering that ‘when we are determined to speak more carefully and reflexively about quality and good television, about evaluation and critical judgement, about criteria and discrimination, our understanding of television as an art form appears to be complicated rather than simplified’ (pp. 19-20). Thus, due to the inherent complexity of discussing quality and good TV, the theoretical exploration will be abridged for conciseness and

intelligibility and demarcate only the characteristics associated with American quality TV, considering its direct correlation to *Twin Peaks: The Return*, but recognises the existence and significance of British quality TV.

In terms of outlining the characteristics of quality TV in general, Cardwell argues that consumers of television are able to discern ‘that something is of high quality based not on our experience or critical judgement of it, but on our recognition of particular aesthetic features it contains’ (2007, 20-21). Expanding upon this understanding, Cardwell asserts that due to quality TV relying on recognisable aesthetic features means that

to label something “quality TV” is more like making a generic classification: it is comparable to agreeing that a certain film is a Western. This part of the process is more dependent upon the observation and apprehension of textual qualities than on our immediate, subjective responses, emotions and evaluations (2007, 21).

By primarily defining quality TV by its textual qualities and distinguishing it from evaluative criteria, Cardwell also suggests that ‘to label something [quality] is not necessarily synonymous with offering a personal endorsement; we can make a distinction between categorising something “generically” as quality television, and offering a considered evaluation that the same programme is “good”’ (2007, 21). While the textual emphasis of quality TV is commonly employed as a tool for analysis, it can, however, also be understood and utilised as part of the evaluative criteria of which particular viewers deem a television series they are engaged and personally invested in good.

Discussing and defining good television is not necessarily contingent on a recognisable set of characteristics as it instead emphasises the evaluative criteria of the viewer and can be juxtaposed with and exemplified through quality TV’s fundamental focus on the textual dimension, which ‘may be perceived as being good *for* its viewers – morally or educationally edifying – but it may still be experienced as worthy, dull, conventional or pretentious’ (Cardwell, 2007, 21). Consequently, the ‘assessment of a programme as *good* television, in contrast – while it is indeed determined by a

programme's particular aesthetic qualities – is more aptly defined by the audience's experience of it' (Cardwell, 2007, 21). Accordingly, while the viewer's experience and by extension their evaluative criteria is the determining factor in terms of defining what they consider good television, the aesthetic and textual characteristics of quality TV can to a certain extent help explain why a programme is good for them particularly, which will be expounded presently.

Jane Feuer expands upon Cardwell's assessment of the interrelationship between quality and good TV in her 2007 article 'HBO and the Concept of Quality TV' in which she states '[t]he judgement of quality is always situated' (pp. 145) and that

[r]eception theory teaches us that there can never be a judgement of quality in an absolute sense but there are always judgements of quality relative to one's interpretive community or reading formation. That is why the term quality TV has to be used *descriptively* if one wants to understand how it operates discursively (pp. 146).

By way of her assertions on quality and its forms, Feuer elucidates how the aesthetic and textual features that define quality TV can be used descriptively in conjunction with one's evaluative criteria and provides further insight into how quality and good TV are interrelated not only with each other but importantly with television aesthetics as well. Appropriately, the notion that television aesthetics is comparable with the textual focus of quality TV is observable and reinforced through its secondary emphasis, which gives precedence to the clarification and use of textual features within the critical evaluation of a televisual text. Similarly, Cardwell elaborates on the purpose and value of analysing and discussing good television in terms of critical evaluation and one's own engagement with the televisual text in which she argues that '[g]ood television is rich, riveting, moving, provocative and frequently contemporary (in some sense); it is relevant to and valued by us. It speaks to us, and it endures us' (2007, 21), which can be juxtaposed with the previous delineation and discussions of television aesthetics and its primary emphasis on the viewer's evaluative criteria. The inclusion and delineation of quality and good TV can accordingly be considered an appropriate, methodological

extension of the previously established outline and discussion of television aesthetics and will thus be examined further.

While Feuer argues that quality is judged and situated by the viewer and thereby parallels it with one's individual evaluative criteria, it should, however, be noted that as a generic category 'classifications of quality television appear to be deeply affected by national context. Contemporary British quality television differs from its American counterpart; similarly, the critical community of scholars and critics appears to take a different stance towards these two groups of programmes' (Cardwell, 2007, 22). Despite having not yet been defined, American quality TV have distinct characteristics that distinguish it from British quality TV where

[t]hose scholars writing about American quality television appear to be less perturbed by the quality/value debate, and seem to be more comfortable offering unequivocally positive evaluations of quality programmes. Less concerned with distinguishing quality television from good television, scholars have been far more willing to accept the categorisation of a programme as quality television as an indication that it is also *good* television worthy of study (Cardwell, 2007, 24).

However, Cardwell nevertheless strove to delineate said characteristics as she perceived '[t]here was a sense of connection, continuity, even development, across the group [of quality television programmes]' and 'that there existed here a sense of "group identity" that typified contemporary American quality television' (2007, 25).

Due to the distinctively recognisable, though not categorised and often conflated, characteristics of American quality TV, Cardwell firstly attempts to delineate its textual qualities explicitly related to content, structure, theme and tone in which she argues

American quality television programmes tend to exhibit high production values, naturalistic performance styles, recognised and esteemed actors, a sense of visual style created through careful, even innovative, camerawork and editing, and a sense of aural style created through the judicious use of appropriate, even original music (2007, 26).

Moreover, Cardwell elaborates that '[t]his moves beyond a "glossiness" of style', which can be coupled with and refutes television aesthetics' frequent critiques as nothing more than dry formalism as '[g]enerally, there is a sense of stylistic integrity, in which themes and style are intertwined in an expressive and impressive way' (2007, 26). Correspondingly, the stylistic integrity of American quality TV may also influence viewer engagement and appreciation as its programmes are 'likely to suggest that the viewer will be rewarded for seeking out greater symbolic or emotional resonance within the details of the programme' (Cardwell, 2007, 26), which will be elaborated upon.

The textual characteristics of American quality TV incorporate and expand upon how viewers engage with a television series through its often 'complex narrative structure, its intricate themes, its use of erudite, technical, oratorical and even poetic language, and its fast-paced style' (Cardwell, 2007, 26). Moreover, the characteristics of and consideration towards viewer participation in American quality TV also extends to the 'foregrounding of the creative impulses and artistic vision of the creator', which 'adds prestige and a sense artistic integrity, and suggests that the series should be more highly valued' (Cardwell, 2007, 26) in which the programme's stylistic integrity may be attributable. Consequently, the heightened emphasis on viewer engagement and appreciation in American quality TV situates that '[w]e are shuttled between scenes, between moments; this implies a more developed creative vision and technical skill, and reaffirms the necessity that the viewer concentrate. This higher level of engagement is considered to be another feature of high-quality television' (Cardwell, 2007, 26-27).

Due to the multi-layered characteristics of American quality TV, which favours and rewards the attentive viewer, it also 'places the viewer into the active position that one takes up when making a critical judgement. The programme encourages us to interpret and evaluate it' (Cardwell, 2007, 27). This can be coupled with Jacobs' assessment of television aesthetics, which he argues require close observation and textual analysis in order to support the evaluative claims and judgements that can be

made of a television series and, moreover, explicates how American quality TV despite its fundamental emphasis on textual qualities may also be considered part of the evaluative criteria in certain circumstances. The merging of textual features and evaluative criteria through active viewer participation not only couples well with the objectives of television aesthetics, however, but is also utilised within art cinema of which American quality TV share certain characteristics.

American quality TV commonly employs '[f]ragmentation in the form of abstraction' as part of its shared aesthetic features, though the produced television series may be considered stylistically diverse, which allows 'the focus to be narrowed to a small detail that is nevertheless connotatively rich and encourages interpretative work on the part of the viewer' (Cardwell, 2007, 28). While the use of fragmentation is generally best exemplified in the opening credit sequence, the technique can, however, likewise be considered integral to the coherency of a television series' thematic, formal and stylistic qualities and, in turn, the work as a whole. Moreover, through its utilisation of fragmentation, American quality TV may 'also exhibit an "art film" aesthetic' (Cardwell, 2007, 28) and can be further reflected in its frequent use of defamiliarisation, which consequently causes the image to not be 'reducible to [...] verbal meaning but expresses the meaning in a particular and emotive form' (Cardwell, 2007, 29). Therefore, by incorporating aesthetic features originating in the art film into its textual characteristics, a discernable relationship between American quality TV and art cinema is revealed, which will be valuable for the evaluation and discussion of *Twin Peaks: The Return*; the explicit exploration and delineation of art cinema will be reserved for its respective chapter, however.

While parts of the respective characteristics and interrelationship of American quality and good TV have thus far been established and their value and function within television aesthetics demonstrated, Cardwell explicitly clarifies that

[t]o notice a programme's signifiers of quality is not to assert anything about its value. Yet I believe these qualities also make them good. That is, I would argue that many of those

attributes that define quality television are also ones that may relatively reliably contribute to making a programme a good one (2007, 29-30).

Cardwell thus cautiously establishes a relationship between quality and good TV but likewise asserts that the characteristics of American quality TV are neither ‘sufficient [nor] necessary to produce good television, but that they are more likely to be correlated with good television’ (2007, 266). Having acknowledged the ostensible limitations of American quality TV in relation to good television, Cardwell nevertheless maintains the value of its characteristics as they ‘enable the viewer to watch the programme repeatedly and to draw and revise various interpretations, and those interpretations reveal the programme to be coherent at the level of *stylistic integrity*’ (2007, 30).

By rendering the attributes of American quality TV part of a television series’ stylistic integrity, Cardwell demonstrates how these qualities are present within the boundaries of good television as

[i]n good television there is a high level of synthesis and cohesion between stylistic choices and the programmes’ “meanings”. The way a camera moves, the moment at which a cut is made, the choice to frame a character in mid-shot rather than close-up, the use of cello rather than a violin on the soundtrack: each of these stylistic choices can be found, upon repeated viewing, to be coherent with the programme as a whole and the moment in which they are contained (2007, 30).

Furthermore, ‘the “meanings” that may be drawn from the programme – the experiences and reflections with which they provide us – enable us to regard our lives differently’ (Cardwell, 2007, 30), which corresponds with the objectives of television aesthetics and thereby allows the viewer to engage with and appreciate the programme through their own evaluative criteria. As a result, it can be argued that many of the characteristics of American quality TV outlined above may be used jointly in order to help define good television considering that a television series is not contingent on any one specific textual feature to be considered good as it

is not that a particular pace or style of camerawork, or level of detail in the *mise-en-scène*, or type of performance, or particular set of themes, make a programme good – though these things may make it quality television – but that the way in which these things are integrated can create a coherent whole that has stylistic integrity (Cardwell, 2007, 30).

While discussions of how programmes exhibiting characteristics of American quality TV may be considered good through stylistic integrity and coherence are theoretically and methodologically integral, questions like ‘[w]hy are such programmes “good”? Why are they “better” than programmes that do not sustain repeated viewings because they lack stylistic coherence and/or thematic importance?’ have ‘concerned aestheticians for centuries’ (Cardwell, 2007, 30) and require reflection as well. As already established, what constitutes good television programming is decidedly contingent on the viewer but Cardwell elaborates on this perception and provides a tentative and personal response to the posed questions in which she argues that ‘these programmes are capable of raising our thoughts and observations above an immersion in the prosaic and quotidian, yet in doing so they may shed light upon, reassess and reshape the significance of the ordinary and the everyday, and they can do this repeatedly’ (2007, 30), which mirrors and adds to her previous statement.

Expanding upon her response, Cardwell asserts that ‘[a]s valuable artworks, the programmes exhibit endurance and flexibility, providing the viewer with the potential for active discovery and ongoing reflection’ (2007, 30) to which the programmes’ textual features may be considered essential to said viewer engagement as it rewards repeated viewings through discoverability and reflection, facilitated by close textual analysis. By establishing close textual analysis as an enjoyable quality within the delineation of good television, the examination of textual features, be they defined by American quality TV or not, may be considered part of the evaluative criteria of good television and their coherent stylistic integrity. Thus, the textual features of American quality TV and evaluative criteria of good television can mutually be considered pertinent to television aesthetics’ delineation

as conveyed in its emphasis on evaluating programmes as specific artworks and how they are engaged with and valued by the viewer.

Although Cardwell argues that the characteristics of American quality TV is of value and related to good television as it produces or adds to the television series' stylistic integrity and thereby integrates itself into the notion of evaluative criteria, she does, however, also present distinct delineations between the two approaches. Good television is 'television that we *experience positively*: we find it engaging, stimulating, exciting, original and so on' and 'though constituted by textual features that open up the potential for rich, repeated viewing, requires something special for its classification: it requires the subjective experience of an appreciative viewer who feels something towards it' (Cardwell, 2007, 31). Moreover, '[u]nlike quality television, we cannot simply categorise good television on the basis of a cursory viewing; we must experience and respond to it' (Cardwell, 2007, 31), which is comparable to the methodology of television aesthetics and thereby urges the viewer to engage with the televisual text through evaluative criteria and critical judgement.

Fundamentally, Cardwell asserts that '[q]uality television can be found through a reasonable level of attention to the text – the seeking out of particular textual features' whereas '[g]ood television can only be discovered through the exercise of critical judgement, a personal decision based upon our considered, sympathetic and (ideally) disinterested response to the details of a text' (2007, 31). Appropriately, Cardwell concludes her demarcation of quality and good TV by emphasising that 'the distinction between quality and good television rests upon the notion of evaluation or critical judgement, and this in turn depends upon the existence of an individual subjectivity taking up an appropriate attitude towards the work' (2007, 31), which is an understanding that is, furthermore, reflective of her later works with television aesthetics. It should be noted, however, that it has been demonstrated repeatedly how American quality TV can be considered both a distinct category and

part of the evaluative criteria of good television, which can be used to express one's engagement with a television series as a transparent act of persuasion.

In terms of demarcating the characteristics of quality and good TV, quality TV 'need only to refer to details of the programme and show that they exhibit fundamental defining features' as opposed to good television where in order '[t]o determine real value – to make a critical judgement and try to persuade others of it – one must both interpret the programme and evaluate it according to explicit criteria' (Cardwell, 2007, 32). This understanding and by extension the interrelationship of quality and good TV couples well with the ultimate goal of television aesthetics, which amenablely emphasises textual qualities and particularly evaluation as a valid, interconnected approach disengaged from television studies' otherwise general focus on sociological, ideological and broader cultural matters. Evaluation is not merely regarded as personal opinion neither in terms of its role in television aesthetics nor in determining what good television is as

the first thing to recognise is that no one need accept anyone else's evaluation, interpretation or indeed classification of a text unless there is coherent, persuasive evidence for it in the text under scrutiny – thus the importance of close textual analysis as an indispensable aspect of evaluation. The one will enhance the other' (Cardwell, 2007, 33).

Moreover, the presence of television aesthetics is readily apparent in certain studies of American quality TV, which feature engaged analyses that embrace the evaluative criteria of good television and draws explicit attention to and consider the incorporation of textual characteristics a vital part of their methodology where '[t]he best of these studies take the view that programmes under scrutiny are interesting not only, or not even, as artefacts of popular culture, but that they are rich, complex artworks worthy of sustained study in themselves' (Cardwell, 2007, 33). Thus, television series being considered and engaged with as specific artworks worthy of study in themselves, removed from questions and scrutiny relating to or reflective of popular culture, reveals how American quality and especially good TV exhibit an intrinsic association and applicability with television aesthetics.

As has been demonstrated throughout the exploration and delineation of American quality and good TV, both the distinct characteristics and interrelationship between the two have been established to be closely related to television aesthetics. Consequently, as with television aesthetics, the delineation and interrelationship of American quality and good TV have required multifaceted discussions of methodological application considering their complexity and frequent instances of conflation as it is ‘clearly unrealistic to hope for an immediate clarification, let alone resolution, of complex and abiding concerns regarding the role of critical judgement within television studies’ (Cardwell, 2007, 19). While acknowledging the lack of a conclusive resolution to the complicated matters of defining the interrelationship and respective characteristics of American quality and good TV alongside their association with television aesthetics, the findings presented have been sufficiently demarcated and can be considered appropriate for analytical use.

Art Cinema

While the inclusion and delineation of art cinema may seem to conflict with preceding discussions purposely dedicated to disclose the value of the television medium, television aesthetics has been and will continue to be the focal point methodologically. As previously established, American quality TV exhibits characteristics originating in the art film, which correspondingly creates a direct correlation between it and art cinema and more importantly television aesthetics too bearing in mind their already ascertained and intrinsic associations. Although art cinema focuses on the medium of film rather than television, the characteristics of art cinema may be readily applicable for the evaluation and discussion of *Twin Peaks: The Return* considering the contributions of its co-creator and sole director, David Lynch. Lynch is a renowned film auteur whose use of narration and cinematography is frequently defined by the narrational and aesthetic qualities of art cinema, the same of which he imbues *Twin Peaks: The Return* with as well. Accordingly, defining art cinema is deemed essential

for the ensuing evaluation considering Lynch's background as a filmmaker and considerable involvement with *Twin Peaks: The Return* and should be considered a methodological additive to the delineation of television aesthetics.

In contrast to the classical Hollywood film and consequently classical narration, art cinema and the art film can generally be defined by narration and textual features that challenge conventional cinematic standards, which David Bordwell outlines in his 1985 book *Narration in the Fiction Film*. In order to define the narration and textual qualities of the art cinema, Bordwell first delineates the classical cinema, which is 'rooted in the popular novel, short story, and well-made drama of the late nineteenth century' where "'reality" is assumed to be a tacit coherence among events, a consistency and clarity of individual identity (1985, 206). Moreover, Bordwell argues that classical cinema narration's '[r]ealistic motivation corroborates the compositional motivation achieved through cause and effect' whereas art cinema narration 'questions such a definition of the real: the world's laws may not be knowable, personal psychology may be indeterminable. Here new aesthetic conventions claim to seize other "realities"' (1985, 206). Accordingly, art cinema introduces different approaches to narration and depictions of reality, which contrary to classical narration seek to 'depict the vagaries of real life, to "dedramatize" the narrative by showing both climaxes and trivial moments, and to use new techniques (abrupt cutting, long takes) not as fixed conventions but as flexible means of expression' (Bordwell, 1985, 206).

In terms of reality and realism, art cinema challenges the conventional portrayals found in classical Hollywood films as 'this new cinema deals with the reality of the imagination as well, but treats this as if it were as objective as the world before us' (Bordwell, 1985, 206). However, the imaginative realism portrayed in art cinema is 'no more "real" than that of the classical film; it is simply a different canon of realistic motivation, a new *vraisemblance*, justifying particular compositional options and effects' wherein '[s]pecific sorts of realism motivate a loosening of cause

and effect' (Bordwell, 1985, 206). As a result, the 'art film's "reality" is multifaceted', which is, furthermore, reflective in its mise-en-scène and 'may emphasize verisimilitude of behavior as well as verisimilitude of space (e.g., location shooting, non-Hollywood lighting schemes) or time (e.g., the *temps mort* in a conversation)' (Bordwell, 1985, 206). Moreover, '[i]n the name of verisimilitude, the tight causality of classical Hollywood construction is replaced by a more tenuous linking of events', which explicates how the 'story reveals enormous ellipses—or rather, great holes. A complex train of action is reduced to three or four brief fragments, in themselves already elliptical enough in comparison with the reality they are unfolding' (Bordwell, 1985, 206). Due to the loosening of cause and effect and tenuous linking of events in the narration, the viewer of art cinema is expected to 'tolerate more permanent causal gaps than would be normal in a classical film' (Bordwell, 1985, 206) and thereby encouraged to engage differently with the art film than with that of the classical Hollywood film.

As has been argued thus far, art cinema narration is generally defined by a loosening of the conventional cause and effect structure associated with the classical Hollywood film in which this tenuous linking of events is further substantiated in its reliance on chance where '[c]ontingency can create transitory, peripheral incidents' (Bordwell, 1985, 206). Characteristic of this mode of narration is how 'scenes are built around chance encounters, and the entire film may consist of nothing more than a series of them, linked by a trip [...] or aimless wanderings' (Bordwell, 1985, 206). Hence the chance-motivated narration of the art film, it can 'thus become episodic, akin to picaresque and processional forms, or it can pattern coincidence to suggest the workings of an impersonal and unknown causality' (Bordwell, 1985, 206), which, accordingly, lends itself well to the episodic format employed within the television medium. Furthermore, the art film's emphasis on narrative progression motivated by contingent events happening upon its characters can be understood as an 'appeal to the plausible improbabilities of "real life"' (Bordwell, 1985, 207), thus establishing this

mode of narration firmly within the aleatoric world of the art cinema's 'objective' reality. Moreover, by abating the significance of or entirely omitting a set goal that the protagonist has to fulfil by the end of the narrative's conclusion, the art film creates 'unfocused gaps and less stringent hypotheses about upcoming actions; it also facilitates an open-ended approach to causality in general. While motivated as "objectively" realistic, this open-endedness is no less a formal effect than is the more tightly "economical" Hollywood dramaturgy' (Bordwell, 1985, 207).

Art cinema's loosening of casual relations is not restricted to narration, however, but is observable in its characterisation as well and while '[c]ertainly the art film relies upon psychological causation no less than does the classical narrative [...] the prototypical characters of the art cinema tend to lack clear-cut traits, motives, and goals. Protagonists may act inconsistently or they may question themselves about their purpose' (Bordwell, 1985, 207). The characters in art cinema are thus frequently products and reflective of the narration, 'which can play down characters' causal projects, keep silent about their motives, emphasize "insignificant" actions and intervals, and never reveal effects of actions' (Bordwell, 1985, 207). Moreover, '[e]quivocating about character causality supports a construction based on a more or less episodic series of events. If the Hollywood protagonist speeds toward the target, the art-film protagonist is presented as sliding passively from one situation to another' (Bordwell, 1985, 207).

Characters in the art film do not necessarily articulate themselves verbally as is often seen in classical Hollywood films but are rather interpretable through the visual information and textual features framed within a scene; '[c]oncerned less with action than reaction, the art cinema presents psychological effects in search of their causes' where even if 'a character remains unaware of or inarticulate about his or her mental state, the viewer must be prepared to notice how behavior and setting can give the character away' (Bordwell, 1985, 208). Correspondingly, art cinema has developed and employs certain *mise-en-scène* cues for expressing character mood, which includes

but is not limited to ‘static postures, covert glances, smiles that fade, aimless walks, emotion-filled landscapes, and associated objects’ (Bordwell, 1985, 208). Moreover, art cinema can also utilise ‘film techniques to dramatize private mental processes’ where the characters’ ‘[d]reams, memories, hallucinations, daydreams, fantasies, and other mental activities can find embodiment in the image or on the sound track’ (Bordwell, 1985, 208). Expressed through the *mise-en-scène* of art cinema, these mental activities ‘can shape spatial representation: optical point-of-view shots, flash frames of a glimpsed or recalled event, editing patterns, modulations of light and color and sound—all are often motivated by character psychology’ (Bordwell, 1985, 209). Furthermore, the effects of a character’s psychological processes can also extend to and be realised in their surroundings and ‘may be construed as the projections of a character’s mind’ to which ‘[s]ubjectivity may also justify the distension of time (slow motion or freeze frames) and manipulations of frequency, such as the repetition of images’ (Bordwell, 1985, 209).

Revisiting the subject of narration, how it is utilised in art films differ greatly from that of the classical Hollywood film as art cinema emphasises ambiguity above narrative resolution to which ‘the “open” ending characteristic of the art cinema can be seen as proceeding from a narration which will not divulge the outcome of the causal chain’ (Bordwell, 1985, 209). While the open-endedness of art cinema has been met with frustration and criticism from viewers primarily accustomed to classical narration, ‘[t]o complain about the arbitrary suppression of the story’s outcome is to reject one convention of the art film’ (Bordwell 1985, 209). Art cinema accentuating the unresolved ending as a defining characteristic of its narration encourages, or unequivocally forces, the viewer to contemplate their experiences with the art film in which a ‘banal remark of the 1960s, that such films make you leave the theater thinking, is not far from the mark: the ambiguity, the play of alternative schemata, must not be halted’ (Bordwell, 1985, 209). Moreover, ‘the pensive ending acknowledges the narration as not simply powerful but humble; the narration knows that life is more complex than

art can ever be, and—a new twist of the realistic screw—the only way to respect this complexity is to leave causes dangling and questions unanswered’ (Bordwell, 1985, 209-210).

When engaging with the art film, the viewer must be prepared to interpret its alterable narration, which requires active viewer participation and attentive observation in order to fully piece together and comprehend its narrative as a ‘scene may end in medias res; gaps are created that are not explicable by reference to character psychology; retardation may result from the withholding of information or from overloaded passages that require unpacking later’ (Bordwell, 1985, 210). Furthermore, ‘[l]acking the “dialogue hooks” of classical construction, the film will exploit more connotative, symbolic linkages between episodes’, which are not necessarily interpretable through the aforementioned *mise-en-scène* cues of art cinema but rather exposition; however, ‘[s]cenes will not obey the Hollywood pattern of exposition, pickup of old line of action, and start of new line’ (Bordwell, 1985, 210). The pattern of exposition employed in art cinema narration differs significantly from and challenges that of the classical Hollywood film’s generally chronological narrative and closely reasoned causal linking in that ‘[e]xposition will tend to be delayed and widely distributed; often we will learn the most important causal factors only at the film’s end’ (Bordwell, 1985, 210). Consequently, ‘art-film narration poses questions that guide us in fitting material into an ongoing structure’ where ‘the very construction of the narration becomes the object of spectator hypotheses: how is the story being told? why tell the story in this way?’ (Bordwell, 1985, 210), which can only be accomplished and answered by the individual viewer.

Although art cinema has recognisable characteristics that are identifiable within and applicable to the majority of its filmography, the narration and aesthetic features of the individual film may also be shaped and defined by the author, i.e. the director, who imbues it with their own distinctive *auteur* style that is not replicable through the standard conventions of filmmaking. As the art cinema also emphasises and encourages the *auteurs*’ distinctive styles and approaches to

filmmaking, the '[d]irectors' statements of intent guide comprehension of the film, while a body of work linked by an authorial signature encourages viewers to read each film as a chapter of an oeuvre' (Bordwell, 1985, 211). While the auteur's style is ultimately not replicable, it is, however, still recognisable as their 'signature depends partly on institutional processes (e.g., advertising a film as "[Federico] Fellini's *Orchestra Rehearsal*") and partly upon recognizable recurring devices from one film to another' (Bordwell, 1985, 211). The recurring devices employed by the auteur in the art cinema are generally distinguishable by but not limited to motifs, camera technique and a signature narrational quality such as a spectacular concatenation of music and mise-en-scène (Bordwell, 1985, 211). Furthermore, '[t]he authorial trademark requires that the spectator see this film as fitting into a body of work' from where 'it is only a short step to explicit allusion and citation', which means the art film may quote, be dedicated to or cite other works within the art cinema or the auteur's own filmography or both as well as allude to classical genre conventions (Bordwell, 1985, 211). Accordingly, intertextual familiarity with the filmography of the auteur and art cinema is expected of the viewer in order to achieve an optimal engagement with the art film as it 'often rests upon a cinephilia as intense as Hollywood's: full understanding of one film requires a knowledge of and a fascination with other films' (Bordwell, 1985, 211).

Bearing in mind the foregoing delineations of art cinema, watching an art film can be demanding of its viewer as it requires them to be familiar with and able to apply 'conventions of objective and expressive realism and authorial address' (Bordwell, 1985, 212) to the film in order to properly grasp its narrational qualities. The need for active viewer participation in art cinema is substantiated further through a considerable use of ambiguity as the 'art film is nonclassical in that it creates permanent narrational gaps' and dynamically draws attention to its narration and aesthetic features, which solicits 'not only denotative comprehension but connotative reading, a higher-level interpretation' (Bordwell, 1985, 212). Consequently, '[w]hen confronted with a problem in

causality, time, or space, we tend to seek realistic motivation. Is a character's mental state creating the difficulty? Is "life" just leaving loose ends? If we are thwarted, we appeal to the narration, and perhaps also the author' (Bordwell, 1985, 212). As a result, '[i]deally, the film hesitates, hovering between realistic and authorial rationales' where '[u]ncertainties persist but are understood as such, as *obvious* uncertainties' (Bordwell, 1985, 212) and are intentionally composed by the author in order to procure narrational ambiguity, which needs to be interpreted by the viewer. Therefore, '[p]ut crudely, the procedural slogan of art-cinema narration might be: "Interpret this film, and interpret it so as to maximize ambiguity"' (Bordwell, 1985, 212), which renders the individual viewer's engagement and interpretation vital qualities of the art cinema. Ideally, art cinema encouraging interpretation allows the viewer's own experiences with the art film to feel personal and valid as they are actively engaging with the narrational gaps created by the author in which they may facilitate the completion of the narrative by contemplating and discussing its meaning or the fates of its characters.

Compared to that of the classical Hollywood film, the art film can generally be considered subversive and innovative in terms of its narrational and aesthetic qualities as 'in many of these films, the narration sustains a complex play within the conventions of the mode. There is the possibility of exploring nonredundant cues and devising new, wholly contextual narrational devices' (Bordwell, 1985, 213). An example of a contextual narrational device in the art film can be expressed in the '[u]ncertainty about story events, generated by causal looseness and gaps' that 'can create [...] "anticipatory caution", a thwarting of the primacy effect and a discouraging of exclusive and likely hypotheses' (Bordwell, 1985, 213), which correspondingly challenge not only the aspect of narration but viewer expectation as well.

Expanding further upon the narrational complexity of and viewer engagement in art cinema, the 'narration can warn us or mislead us. By alternating overloaded with sparse passages, the narration can demand intense attention; and by creating ambiguous organizational patterns, the narration can

make such great demands on memory that it may be necessary to see the film more than once' (Bordwell, 1985, 213). Finally, the self-reflective and subversive predisposition of art cinema can similarly 'undermine norms far more frequently than can a classical film. The art film plays among several tendencies: deviation from classical norms, adherence to art-cinema norms, creation of innovative intrinsic norms, and the greater or lesser foregrounding of deviations from those intrinsic norms' (Bordwell, 1985, 213).

The delineation of art cinema has proven to be a multifaceted endeavour considering its many characteristics and complex approaches to narration, which require a level of active viewer participation and engagement not expected in that of classical cinema or American quality TV in order to comprehend and interpret its multi-layered construction. The narration of the art film being deliberately depicted as ambiguous compels the viewer to partake the role of an active participant, which can be considered one of the most distinctive yet disputatious characteristics of art cinema. The divisiveness of art cinema's emphasis on narrational ambiguity may be explicable within the construction of classical cinema and American quality TV narration, which generally does not demand of its viewers as intense engagement or contemplation nor impede essential narrative information needed to comprehend its narrative fully and can be considered the primary sources of contention between their respective narrational approaches. Thus, in order to appreciate art cinema, the art film has to be approached from a different perspective than that of the classical Hollywood film or an American quality TV programme as its narration is knowingly challenging and resists leisurely engagement and is not designed nor aspire for mass appeal but rather a niche market of which the viewer has to concede themselves to.

Twin Peaks: The Return

Prerequisite to the evaluation of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, the television landscape of which the original 1990-1991 *Twin Peaks* ABC series was created in and the impact it had on the medium has to be established in order to understand the significance of it returning to television in 2017 to which Andreas Halskov's 2015 book *TV Peaks: Twin Peaks and Modern Television Drama* will be utilised. When the original *Twin Peaks* aired in 1990, American television was largely dominated by the three broadcast networks NBC, CBS and ABC, 'all of which produced a rather formulaic and episodic kind of television. The credo of American broadcast television was "least objectionable programming"' (Halskov, 2015, 8) in order to attract the widest viewership possible in a time heavily reliant on and dominated by the pursuit of high viewer numbers. Moreover, 'television was broadly discredited, and the TV set was given such dubious nicknames as "the tube" and "the idiot box", underlining its undesirable position in the *media hierarchy*' (Halskov, 2015, 8), which was then a collective agreement that *Twin Peaks* would come to challenge.

The television landscape in 1990 'was a different time, but it was also in many ways a *transitional phase*, and it was the birth year of a TV show which would quickly become one of the most heavily debated and scrutinized drama series of all time: *Twin Peaks*' (Halskov, 2015, 9). On 'April 8, 1990, the pilot episode of *Twin Peaks* was aired, and 34.6 million Americans were thrilled, horrified and even shocked by this unconventional and genre-bending show – a show which was born in the midst of a transition and which, in itself, might have been a *game changer*' (Halskov, 2015, 9). *Twin Peaks* became an instant success with viewers and critics alike and had a profound impact on pop culture and the recognition of television as medium for artistic expression during its two season run; however, by the end of its second season, '*Twin Peaks* had only 10 million viewers in the US, and finally the show was placed on "indefinite hiatus" by the network and the executives' (Halskov, 2015, 9-10) due to declining ratings. ABC airing a programme as unconventional as *Twin Peaks* to

begin with may be attributable to the period's hierarchy of broadcasts networks where 'the network with the lowest ratings always took risks in its content' (Halskov, 2015, 10) to which its commercial success would initially boost ABC's viewership but was ultimately discontinued on February 15, 1991 when it was no longer profitable (Halskov, 2015, 11).

While '*Twin Peaks* might have been a short-lived phenomenon', it would following its abrupt cancellation soon 'become a TV historical reference point' (Halskov, 2015, 11) of which its influence is evident in the contemporary television landscape. Halskov argues that from the time of its initial airing in 1990, 'television has changed dramatically, and many of the most important changes seem to have been reflected, if not precipitated, by *Twin Peaks*' (2015, 12). Accordingly, Halskov states that since 1990, 'we have seen a rise of cable television – something which is often referred to as the *third golden age* of American television' and 'most shows [then] were generically definable – often easily categorized within a single genre – but in today's TV landscape genre hybridity is something of the norm' (2015, 12). Moreover, Halskov draws attention to the medium's change in storytelling where in 1990 'TV shows were mostly episodic in nature, but in 2015 we have experienced a process of *serialization* or even *hyper-serialization* in American television drama, and many shows are narratively complex and demanding in a way that was uncommon in the nineties' (2015, 12).

Although solely crediting *Twin Peaks* with the above-mentioned changes to the television landscape would be excessive, the 'genre-bending story of *Twin Peaks*, continually switching between different genres, moods and tonalities, was unconventional in 1990, and the same could be said of the show's cinematic style' (Halskov, 2015, 12). Additionally, other unconventional television series of that time that also exhibit characteristics of quality TV include *Hill Street Blues* (1981-1987), *St. Elsewhere* (1982-1988) and *thirtysomething* (1981-1991), which together with *Twin Peaks* would come to inspire many contemporary American television creators years later. Furthermore, '[b]y emphasizing the fact that *Twin Peaks* was created (in part) by a film director, a true visionary, the

executives and the network branded *Twin Peaks* as an example of *auteur TV*, which in 1990 was a somewhat unusual phenomenon' (Halskov, 2015, 12-13), which can be juxtaposed with the previous delineation on art cinema.

Twin Peaks' cinematic style entailed the 'use of filters, long takes, low-angle shots, expressive sound and music', which were all 'attributed to David Lynch as an arthouse director, and *Twin Peaks* was highlighted as an early example of a director migrating from film to television' (Halskov, 2015, 13). Notable directors that have migrated from film to television and helped create, produce and brand new programming include but are not limited to Martin Scorsese's *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-2014), David Fincher's *House of Cards* (2013-2018) and the Wachowskis' *Sense8* (2015-2018). Moreover, during an interview, the creator of *Mad Men* (2007-2015), Matthew Weiner, credited *Twin Peaks* as one of his major influences during the creation of *Mad Men*: 'I was already out of college when *Twin Peaks* came on, and that was where I became [aware] of what was possible on television' (O'Connell). However, it should be noted that film directors migrating to and recognising the artistic qualities of the television medium was an arduous process that required several years to take place, as is illustrated with the preceding examples, which only within the last decade became firmly established as a valid and viable alternative to the quality and prestige formerly associated with film.

Despite its short-lived run on ABC, '*Twin Peaks* was a critically acclaimed TV show that helped *legitimize* television as an art form' (Halskov, 2015, 13) and had a measurable impact on the contemporary television landscape of which led to its 2017 Showtime continuation, *Twin Peaks: The Return*. While the original *Twin Peaks* was cancelled due to declining ratings, *Twin Peaks: The Return* has benefitted from the rise of cable television, 'which is more interested in getting the *right* viewers (i.e. the urban viewers who are willing to pay for a subscription) than in getting the *right number* of viewers' (Halskov, 2015, 15). The consumer freedom available through cable television and streaming services challenge the broadcast phenomenon of old where 'television programs had to be

broadly appealing' (Halskov, 2015, 15) and allow programming that target specific viewers to be profitable. Expanding upon this, Amanda D. Lotz argues in her 2014 book *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* that '[t]elevision has been reconfigured in recent decades as a medium that most commonly addresses fragmented and specialized audience groups' (pp. 5). Correspondingly, 'we might argue that television today is targeted at many different demographics, and that different channels and outlets try to monetize many (different) audiences, all of which demand a certain type of content and televisual style' (Halskov, 2015, 15), which allowed *Twin Peaks*' continuation to be realised despite its niche appeal.

When I first became familiar with and watched the original *Twin Peaks*, I was mesmerised by its narrational complexity, quirky and loveable characters and the dreamy, jazz-infused and melancholic soundtrack that eased me into its equally beautiful and terrifying world, which was imbued with a cinematic style that felt even more invigorating and innovative than the television series that had succeeded it. Moreover, the narrational focal point of solving Laura Palmer's murder, which doubled as a framework for the exploration of the large ensemble cast of characters, had me on the edge of my seat gleefully guessing along which of the characters I had become attached to and invested in could have committed such a horrible act of violence. Furthermore, the structure of its episodes, which would generally depict a single day in the fictional town of Twin Peaks, gave the narrative a sense of natural progression and reinforced the aspect of exploring the daily lives of its inhabitants.

Within the first 15 minutes of its pilot episode where '16 regulars are introduced' (Halskov, 2015, 141), the complexity of *Twin Peaks*' narration was readily apparent, which became more intricate as the series progressed with the introduction of new characters whose motivations and intertwining relationships were gradually established in gratifying and surprising ways. Moreover, towards the latter half of the second season, the complex narration introduced more ambiguous

storytelling, which heavily developed and expanded upon the mythological and supernatural qualities that had been established but primarily alluded to in the first season and was to me a source of unrivalled narrative engagement. All of the above-mentioned qualities coupled with its motifs of Americana, the doppelgänger and the pastoral, to name a few, had a profound impact on me to which my expectations for its continuation in form of *Twin Peaks: The Return* were inevitably high and would come to challenge and subvert my own perception of what I considered good and engaging about the series as completed work. Although I have only briefly touched upon and established certain characteristics of the original *Twin Peaks* that I find appealing, I have done so in order to create a comparative point of departure that allows me to highlight the engaging qualities of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, which will be my evaluative emphasis going forward.

While *Twin Peaks* did facilitate the narrational complexity now associated with quality TV and embraced the aesthetic qualities of the art film due to Lynch's involvement and signature auteur style, it was, however, limited by the time it was created in where the concept of television as a complex art form worthy of study was generally rejected and largely unexplored. However, the ensuing changes in the television landscape and recognition of television as a medium for artistic expression meant that *Twin Peaks: The Return* airing 26 years after the original series' cancellation presented Lynch with an opportunity to not only continue and explore his unfinished work but also to push the boundaries of its already established narrational and aesthetic framework. In its first episode, *Twin Peaks: The Return* establishes its substantial employment of *temps mort*, or dead time, in which it deliberately slows down the pace of its narration and forces the viewer to engage with and contemplate the meaning behind the shot or scene's soundscape, lighting, composition etc., i.e. its *mise-en-scène*, which becomes a prominent feature throughout the series. Moreover, *Twin Peaks: The Return* greatly relies and expands upon the narrational mode of *temps mort* compared to its predecessor, which coupled with its delayed and widely distributed exposition further embraces the

qualities of art cinema and compels the viewer to reflect on the present experience and journey rather than the purpose and destination of it and will be elaborated on presently.

Following the opening credits, the first scene of the first episode ('Part 1 – My Log Has a Message for You', 00:03:39-00:06:06) reintroduces two vital characters from the original series: FBI special agent Dale Cooper, the main character who was originally sent to investigate the murder of Laura Palmer and the supernatural entity known as 'the Giant', later renamed 'the Fireman', that guides Cooper throughout his journey. Contrary to the clearly conveyed and established objective of the original series' premise of solving Laura Palmer's murder, *Twin Peaks: The Return* disrupts the classical cause and effect narration in favour of art cinema's narrational emphasis on ambiguity through delayed and widely distributed exposition, which consequently halts the forward momentum of the narrative. Cooper and the Fireman are introduced in an unknown setting depicted in a monochrome colour palette unlike any the returning viewer will be familiar with where the Fireman's expository dialogue is suppressed and delayed by the implied presence of an evil entity later known as 'Jowday', or Judy, to which he says: 'It all cannot be said aloud now' ('Part 1 – My Log Has a Message for You', 00:04:56-00:05:01). Due to the Judy's presence, the Fireman instead conveys Cooper's objective esoterically, which will only be of partial coherence by the series' conclusion but is highly contingent on the viewer's attentive observation and ability to piece together the widely distributed and fragmented instances of exposition.

By establishing its ambiguous narration within its first scene through the withholding of expository information significant to the viewer's comprehension and conceptualisation of the series, *Twin Peaks: The Return* challenges the established narrational framework of the original series, which may be a source of contention to the returning viewer accustomed to and expectant of a comparable approach to the narration. To me, however, *Twin Peaks: The Return's* emphasis on narrational ambiguity is an enticing and stimulating quality due to its speculative and fragmented narrative that

resists the viewer's initial reading and requires attentive and interpretative exertion, which encourages perpetual re-evaluation and readjustment through repeated viewings and discussion. Accordingly, *Twin Peaks: The Return* maximises the ambiguity of its narration to which the complexity and intricacy of its storytelling becomes more demanding for the viewer, which is, moreover, reflective in its introduction and integration of new settings and characters contrary to the original series' sole emphasis on the setting and inhabitants of Twin Peaks, which widens the narrative scope considerably.

In the original series, the town and setting of Twin Peaks can be considered a character that was explored equally with its inhabitants, which is deviated from significantly in *Twin Peaks: The Return* as it establishes the majority of its narrative and new characters within previously unutilised settings such as Las Vegas, Nevada and Buckhorn, South Dakota. Consequently, the titular town and its inhabitants are no longer the series' fulcrum but rather reconfigured as part of the complex and ambiguous narration built around art cinema's emphasis on chance encounters, which depict Cooper's journey back to Twin Peaks through multiple, seemingly unrelated perspectives. Relevantly, it should be noted that the character of Dale Cooper in *Twin Peaks: The Return* while portrayed by the same actor, Kyle MacLachlan, is rendered into two distinct characters throughout the majority of the series as a consequence of the original series' outcome.

In the original series' final episode, Cooper becomes trapped in the extra-dimensional location known as 'the Black Lodge' after being possessed by the evil entity BOB, which consequently creates a doppelgänger taking his place in the real world of whom is referred to as Mr. C in *Twin Peaks: The Return*. The second character is 'created' when Cooper escapes the Black Lodge, which causes him to enter a low-functioning amnesiac state in which his cognitive functions are exceedingly limited to which he coincidentally and unwittingly proceeds to live the life of man named Douglas 'Dougie' Jones due to their similar appearances. Although the depictions of Mr. C and especially Dougie may

be considered unrealistic to the viewer only familiar with conventional and realistic characterisations, they are products and reflective of the imaginative and absurdist art cinema narration employed in *Twin Peaks: The Return*, which requires the viewer to accept its specific sort of realism in order to engage with and appreciate it.

While *Twin Peaks* primarily emphasises the premise of solving Laura Palmer's murder, *Twin Peaks: The Return* can crudely be separated into three narrative focal points revolving around Mr. C, Dougie and the town of Twin Peaks and its inhabitants. Emphasising three determining narrative threads that intertwine with and expand upon each other in unexpected and disruptive ways exceed the complexity and ambiguity of the original series' narration, which forces, or strongly encourages, the viewer to actively contemplate *Twin Peaks: The Return's* narrational construction of which is distinctive to art cinema narration. Contrary to the majority of *Twin Peaks: The Return's* characters and akin to the Cooper of old, Mr. C has a clearly defined motivation of wanting to obtain a set of coordinates, which establishes an impression of a narrative setup and pay-off, or cause and effect, expected of quality TV. However, the purpose of the coordinates are never revealed to which Mr. C rather becomes reflective of the art film character whose causal projects are downplayed and effects of action never revealed in which the art cinema's suppression of exposition becomes a defining aspect of the narration and once more reinforces the value in the journey rather than the destination.

In accordance with the original series' established motif of the doppelgänger, Dougie can aptly be considered Mr. C's opposite as rather than being motivated and goal-oriented, he embodies the qualities of the prototypical art cinema protagonist to which he passively and aimlessly slides from one situation to another and only fortuitously regains his cognisance in the third to last episode of the series. Moreover, Dougie's lack of a clearly defined goal facilitates an open-ended approach to narrational causality in general as his actions are not contingent on an objective that has to be realised by the end of the narrative's conclusion, which creates an aimless journey consisting of an episodic

series of chance encounters coincidentally leading him back to Twin Peaks. Consequently, the absence of conventional cause and effect narration allows the viewer through anticipatory caution to engage more liberally with Dougie's narrative in which they can create less obvious hypotheses about his upcoming actions through the unfocused and narrational gaps that require interpretation.

The town of Twin Peaks and its inhabitants can generally be separated into two groups: the returning characters of the original series who are or become intertwined with the narratives of Mr. C and Dougie/Cooper and the new characters introduced in *Twin Peaks: The Return* who primarily serve to expand upon the pastoral and Americana motifs. These motifs are developed and expanded upon by drawing attention to the woodlands and daily lives of the inhabitants in Twin Peaks, which corresponds with art cinema's characteristic of dedramatising the narrative by highlighting both climaxes and trivial moments. The new inhabitants are generally representative of the narratively trivial moments that occur throughout the town of Twin Peaks contrary to the majority of the returning characters established in the original series who happen upon findings that coincidentally interweave themselves within the narrative of Mr. C during its climax. Additionally, the remainder of the returning characters within the town of Twin Peaks mainly serve to provide resolutions to the narratives that were never concluded due to the original series' abrupt cancellation but the fates of certain characters are also intentionally left open to interpretation in order to procure narrational ambiguity, which will not be elaborated upon further, however.

Throughout this concise evaluation and discussion of *Twin Peak: The Return*, its narrational qualities and characterisations have been examined through my own engagement with and appreciation of the series coupled with a semi-objective rendering of its expansive and intricate storyworld. Going forward, my evaluative criteria will also be used more reflectively in terms of how *Twin Peaks: The Return* differs from the original series and how this divergence may have been

perceived by returning viewers by way of select examples to which I will consequently present a more general and speculative discussion.

As a viewer, the choice of mentally impairing Cooper, which leaves him unable to fend for himself and consequently being misidentified as Dougie, is on one hand frustrating as all the qualities of his former lovable and capable self are missing but on the other hand it opens up the possibility for a narrational engagement comparable to the investigation of Laura Palmer's murder. During my initial viewing of *Twin Peaks: The Return* I found the depiction of Cooper incredibly frustrating as I wanted an immediate answer and resolution to the original series' cliff-hanger finale, which was continuously delayed and suppressed due to the art cinema narration, but through my subsequent repeated viewings I came to appreciate the journey. While the premise of the original series was immediately intriguing to me, it was the ambiguousness of the latter part of the series that had me coming back again and again to which *Twin Peaks: The Return* appropriately provided me with a narrative that was methodically unfolded and deliberately created to challenge and provoke me through its narrational ambiguity, which was as confusing as it was enthralling even after repeated viewings. The skilfully interwoven narrative consisting of new and interesting as well as old and familiar characters culminated satisfactorily for the character of Dougie and provided a calculated open ending, characteristic of the art cinema narration, for Cooper, which left me with more questions than answers that I still enjoyably engage with and contemplate to this day. Moreover, the juxtaposing rendering of the wicked and cunning doppelgänger, Mr. C, which further developed and expanded upon the supernatural and ambiguous qualities of the series that I enjoy, was immensely rewarding to me and provided a fulfilling conclusion to the cause and effect narrative of BOB who killed Laura Palmer in the original series.

As has been argued, *Twin Peaks: The Return* heavily employs qualities of the art cinema, which contrasts with the original series' greater emphasis on the characteristics of quality TV to which

its narration and characterisations become more ambiguous and chance-motivated than that of its predecessor. Maximising the ambiguity of its narration through a profound utilisation of art cinema characteristics due to Lynch's sole directorial vision and signature auteur style may have created a discrepancy in what was expected of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, which had been cultivating returning viewers' expectations by airing 26 years after the original series' cancellation. As a result of the already established style in narration and characterisations within the original *Twin Peaks*, excited viewers expectant of a return to the familiar universe they had come to know and been acquainted with years prior may have been frustrated with or disappointed by the challenging and ambiguous construction of *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Viewers disappointed with *Twin Peaks: The Return* may not have had their expectations fulfilled due to its evident stylistic change and demanding reliance on characteristics of the art cinema and consequently disregarded the framework established by the original series, which, as theorised by Mittell, contradicts how viewers appreciate and engage with a television series: 'a series must effectively provide a framework for understanding its own storytelling and style to be successful—the text must speak to its viewers in a voice that guides us how to watch it' (2015, 209).

Prior to the release of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, Lynch did not forthrightly communicate its change in narration and style as he wanted to reveal as little as possible to the public to which it was restricted by what had already been established in the original series and in the minds of the viewers, which created a dissonance in what was expected of the new series and what it ultimately was. While the art cinema aesthetic employed by *Twin Peaks: The Return* may to certain viewers have been too different to the original series' aesthetic to be engaged with profoundly and meaningfully as the 'language' utilised within the new series may not have been enjoyable or comprehensible or both, it likewise allowed other viewers to be pleasantly surprised and engage differently with a series they had been expecting for up to a quarter of a century:

Viewers who fail to appreciate a series often have such a sense of not speaking the program's language, creating a layer of miscommunication between what the text is saying and what we might be hearing. Many of the best complex television series work on numerous levels, providing both surface pleasures and deeper resonances for different groups of viewers (Mittell, 2015, 209).

While certain viewers may have been disappointed by *Twin Peaks: The Return* of which I to some extent can relate to due to my own grievances with Dougie/Cooper's characterisation during my initial viewing, as outlined earlier, I thoroughly enjoyed the divergence from the style of original series and subversion of my own expectations. Although I was familiar with Lynch's filmography prior to the release of *Twin Peaks: The Return* to which I expected it to be comparable due to television now being embraced as a medium for artistic expression akin to film, I did, however, not anticipate as significant changes to an already established series as happened to be the case. Beyond my accounted for opinions on Dougie/Cooper's characterisation, my initial viewing was a profoundly amazing experience, which had me stupefied from beginning to end as I constantly re-evaluated and readjusted my perception of where the absurd, beautiful and compelling narrative would take me and what would happen on a week to week basis as it aired. Since its original airing in 2017, my appreciation of *Twin Peaks: The Return* has only intensified as I find it aesthetically exceptional and exceptionally interesting programming that allows me to continuously engage with and discover new avenues of interpretation and is to me the best television has to offer.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have delineated the qualities of television aesthetics through a theoretical and methodological exploration and discussion to which a pertinent definition has been established and its value within television studies demonstrated accordingly. Television aesthetics differentiates itself from conventional approaches to television studies by recognising television as a medium of

expression first and foremost and televisual texts as specific artworks worthy of sustained study in themselves to which philosophical aesthetics' key foci of criticism and evaluation of art are employed and merged with an emphasis on close textual analysis. Consequently, television aesthetics continues to be a source of contention within television studies as sceptical media scholars fear its emphasis on evaluative judgement and close textual analysis is reactionary and a simple display of dry formalism due to its lack of analytical objectivity and a rigorously researched methodology and uniform definition. However, by foregrounding the evaluative judgements media scholars inevitably make when they deem a television series worthy of study, television aesthetics does not arbitrarily withhold personal engagement behind a pseudo-objective detachment but rather allows the author to analyse the televisual text through their own criteria. Accordingly, the media scholar can through their own evaluative criteria not only examine how a televisual text works but also how it works well, which makes for a more persuasive argument and would thereby not only be beneficial to the analysis but to the field of television studies as well if acknowledged and properly integrated.

The pertinent definition of television aesthetics was, furthermore, facilitated by the demarcation of the respective characteristics and interrelationship of quality and good TV and how their attributes can be considered part of and make its methodological framework more intelligible and tangible. The interpretative and textual features of quality TV are required in order to provide coherent and persuasive evidence within the televisual text that support the viewer's judgements to which close textual analysis becomes an indispensable aspect of evaluation as the one will enhance the other, which is reflective of television aesthetics' similar focal points and, moreover, establishes a cautious relationship in which markers of quality TV may also be indicative of good television. Furthermore, the characteristics of art cinema were comparably delineated as they too can be understood within television aesthetics' methodological framework, are observable and employed within quality TV and are decidedly relevant to the evaluation of *Twin Peaks: The Return* due to

Lynch's background as an arthouse director and signature auteur style. Correspondingly, I concisely evaluated *Twin Peaks: The Return* through my own engagement and appreciation of the series of which had a pronounced emphasis on art cinema narration and characterisation and demonstrated how its divergence from the original series' aesthetic qualities had a profound impact on me by subverting my own expectations.

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