

# "'Ladies and gentlemen [...] The Nine Inch Nails': Twin Peaks and Fictional World and Alternative Earth"

By David Sweeney

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## “Ladies and gentlemen [. . .] The Nine Inch Nails”: *Twin Peaks* as Fictional World and Alternative Earth

David Sweeney

*In one sense, all fictional worlds, no matter how ‘realistic’, are alternative earths, populated as they are with characters who either do not exist in the real world or are invented versions of people who do, but alternative history fiction requires a point of divergence in order to ask ‘what if?’ questions. While none of the installments of the *Twin Peaks* franchise explicitly address a point of divergence, the scenes set in 1945 and 1956 in *The Return* provide a historical context previously absent from the series. This article argues that the alternative earth in which *Twin Peaks* is set diverged from our own with the supernatural incursion created by the Trinity explosion. One characteristic of this alternate universe is ‘retromania,’ pop culture’s fascination with its past, which in the world of the series seems less exercises in nostalgia than signifiers of the milieu of an alternative earth, one which is similar to yet different enough from our own to make us consider the history of the real world anew.*

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The addition of the definite article to the name of the band Nine Inch Nails when they are introduced at the Roadhouse in part 8 of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, and also in its closing credits with the definite article in quotation marks, serves as an example of *divergence* from the actual world: although it features the same personnel performing a song released prior to the episode, “She’s Gone Away” from the 2016 EP *Not The Actual Events*, this is not ‘our’ Nine Inch Nails but an alternative version, which is an indication that the series is set in a world familiar to but significantly different from our own. In one sense, *all* fictional depictions of the actual world, no matter how realistic or mimetic, create alternative earths, populated with characters that either do not exist in the real world or are invented versions of real people, as in the case of historical fiction. Realist and historical fiction depend upon a fidelity to

actual events for their efficacy. To an extent this is also true of alternative history fiction, but this sub-genre also requires a point of divergence in order to ask ‘what if?’ questions—as in, for example, the novel *Lion’s Blood* by Steven Barnes (2002), which presents us with a world in which Islam colonized North America around the year 1000 AD, naming it Bilalistan and using abducted Europeans, such as one of the novel’s two protagonists, the Irish youth Aidan O’Dere, as slave labor.

While *Twin Peaks* never presents a point of divergence comparable in the magnitude of its consequences to that of *Lion’s Blood*, the scenes in part 8 of *The Return* set in 1945 and 1956 provide both a historical context for its world and a creation narrative previously absent from the series, context which is expanded in Mark Frost’s two companion texts to *The Return*, *The Secret History of Twin Peaks* (2016) and *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier* (2017). The nuclear bomb test at the Trinity Site, New Mexico, in 1945 is clearly of fundamental importance to the narrative as it results in the entrance of both the demon BOB and the soul of Laura Palmer to the earthly plane through a kind of dimensional tear created by the blast. The 1956 scene, also set in New Mexico, shows other supernatural entities at work, implicitly as a result of the Trinity test. We might argue then that the alternative Earth in which *Twin Peaks* is set diverges from our own with the supernatural incursion created by the Trinity explosion (although Frost’s two texts detail the presence of supernatural entities on earth long before the blast). As in our world, the test resulted not only in the allied victory in World War II but subsequently the rise, beginning in the 50s, of American consumer-driven popular culture, which came to dominate first the West and then the globe. Grant Morrison’s comic book series *The Invisibles* (1994-2000) presents a similar incursion involving the Trinity explosion; however, despite its use of science fiction and horror tropes, *The Invisibles* is more realistic than *Twin Peaks* and (most of) *The Return* in its depiction of contemporary society. As a monthly periodical, composed as it was being published, the publication schedule of

*The Invisibles* allowed Morrison to respond swiftly to real world changes in politics, music, fashion, and popular culture in general to make the series, a central theme of which is the symbiotic relationship between fiction and reality, as *au courant* as possible. As such, *The Invisibles* can be considered a work of *meta-fiction*, as exemplified by a scene in which the character King Mob, based visually on Morrison himself, reads an earlier issue from the series and criticizes it for being “too far-fetched” (No. 7).

While not as explicitly meta-fictional as *The Invisibles*, both *Twin Peaks* the series and *The Return* draw attention to their artificiality through the pervasive use of a 1950s aesthetic in set and costume design, art direction, dialogue, and diegetic music. The series also includes its own nested narrative, the soap opera *Invitation to Love*, watched obsessively by residents of Twin Peaks, which provides a satirical commentary on elements of the series. Like comics such as *The Invisibles*, episodic television, particularly soap operas, can respond swiftly to, and imitate, events and changes in the real world, so Lynch’s decision to present an anachronistic aesthetic in *Twin Peaks* is clearly a deliberate choice. In our world, 50s styles went out of fashion the following decade, but this does not seem to have been the case in the world of the series: as Greil Marcus wryly observes, Laura Palmer’s outfits “suggested that the Twin Peaks department store hadn’t reordered since 1959” (149). Indeed, in this world, retro elements seem to be less exercises in nostalgia than signifiers of the milieu of an alternative Earth where American popular culture exists in a kind of aesthetic stasis. Lynch deploys similar signifiers in *Blue Velvet* (1986) to expose the corrupt truth beneath the pristine surface of white, suburban, post-World War II America. Likewise, the use of these elements in *Twin Peaks* presents the viewer with a seemingly perfect environment that is revealed to be a charade. Both series and film evoke the myth of 50s American prosperity and its enduring appeal—particularly in American politics—as a simpler, better time before the perceived cultural degradation caused by the rise of the ‘permissive society’ in the 60s.

The preoccupation with, and endurance of, the pop cultural

past in *The Return* may seem more realistic today than perhaps it did in the 1990s of the original series' broadcast, given how digital technology, particularly the internet, has created a kind of 'archive culture' that allows access to a wealth of media from the past. However, it also works as another indicator of difference: Twin Peaks, the series and the town, is not quite a pocket universe, but it does seem to exist in some kind of temporal bubble.<sup>1</sup> The various acts featured at the Bang Bang Bar/Roadhouse contribute both to the sense of nostalgia that surrounds *The Return* epitextually and to the themes of memory and loss prominent in the series. Chromatics (parts 2, 12 and 17, with Julee Cruise) and Au Revoir Simone (parts 4 and 9) both draw on 80s influences such as New Order, Depeche Mode, and the Cocteau Twins (whose vocalist Elizabeth Fraser performed "Song to the Siren" on the soundtrack of Lynch's 1997 film *Lost Highway*); Cactus Blossoms (part 3), Trouble (part 5), Rebekah Del Rio (part 10), and The Veils (part 15) all reference the 50s; Sharon Van Etten (part 6), Lissie (part 14), and Eddie Vedder (part 16) each perform songs firmly rooted in the established traditions of mid-late twentieth century Western song craft. The songs performed in *The Return* by the latter three artists, as well as those by the Cactus Blossoms and Del Rio, are all examples of what Mark Fisher termed the 'classic style' of 21<sup>st</sup>-century pop music. Fisher coined the term in his analysis of artists such as Amy Winehouse, Adele, and the Arctic Monkeys, whose music, he argues, "belong[s] neither to the present or the past, but to some timeless era, an eternal 1960s or an eternal 80s" (loc. 241). For Fisher, such music is an indication of cultural stasis and a lack of innovation (one preoccupation of his book is, as its subtitle indicates, "lost futures").

However, in the context of *Twin Peaks*, "classic style" music from the Cactus Blossoms and Rebekah Del Rio, which is such a perfect pastiche of its sources as to seem to belong authentically to the past, also functions as an element of estrangement: *Twin Peaks* is set in a world recognizably like our own, but noticeably, strangely, different in the endurance of a 50s aesthetic, far more

prominent than in the real world, of which the music of the Cactus Blossoms and Del Rio is but one aspect. The presence of these performers in *The Return*, particularly that of Del Rio (whose dress in her episode has the same pattern as the floor of the Red Room), points back to the original series, where the 50s aesthetic was more dominant than in *The Return*, wherein, as we have seen, stylistic elements of other decades are present. The pattern on Del Rio's dress and the Lynch-authored lyrics to her song "No Stars," which are concerned with revisiting both the time where and the place when "it all began," indicate her significance as a kind of liminal presence bridging the series-world with the real world. Viewers can achieve the aim stated in Del Rio's lyrics by (re)watching the original series and/or the prequel film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992)—and Lynch has asserted on several occasions that watching the prequel is key to understanding *The Return*, which may itself be an act of nostalgia. The lyrics of "No Stars" foreshadow the events of part 17, in which Cooper travels back in time to prevent Laura's murder, rewriting history in the process and creating another rupture in the fabric of space and time when Laura is pulled out of the new continuity established by Cooper's actions by "Judy," the malevolent entity that gave "birth" to BOB in part 8. "No Stars" pre-dates *The Return*, appearing on Del Rio's 2011 album *Love Hurts Love Heals*, but its lyrics bear a similar relationship to *The Return* as those written by Lynch for Julee Cruise's 1989 debut album *Floating into the Night* bore to the original series. Cruise's record functions as companion piece to the series, alluding to events and characters and supplying the series' theme music in an instrumental version of the album track "Falling." Cruise also appeared in three episodes of the series (the pilot and sixth episodes of the first season and the seventh episode of season 2) performing songs from the album. Like "No Stars," Cruise's songs pre-date the series, but when she performed "Rockin' Back inside My Heart" on a 1989 episode of BBC2's culture magazine program *The Late Show*, the introduction by host Sarah Dunant made specific mention of her forthcoming appearance on Lynch's

“much-anticipated TV pilot *Twin Peaks*” (“Julee Cruise”).

Cruise’s performance on *The Late Show* also presented her as a liminal figure. Dressed in black, pale and fragile beneath a platinum blonde bouffant, her voice yearning and pure if slightly out of tune, Cruise appeared both waif and wraithlike: an envoy from the world of the series more than simply a singer promoting her debut album. “From the eighties on,” music critic Simon Reynolds—an early supporter of Cruise—writes, “rock ‘n’ roll recurred only as a ghostly signifier detached from any real world referents” (307). Cruise’s spectral appearance and the 50s pastiche of “Rockin’ Back inside My Heart” bear up this assessment, although the song itself is more rock ‘n’ roll-influenced pop than actual rock ‘n’ roll. However, the endurance of 50s style in the series-world and Cruise’s presence there as a popular performer<sup>2</sup> give rock ‘n’ roll the ‘referents’ it lacks in the real world, again marking out the series-world as an alternative Earth.

Fisher wrote about the “classic style” of Adele, et al, in response to Reynolds’ concept of “retromania”: pop culture’s fascination with, and constant referencing of, its past.<sup>3</sup> Although the ‘retro’ aspect of the musicians who perform at the Bang Bang Bar does make perfect extra-diegetic sense in the context of “retromania”—after all, they are all recording artists in the actual world, with the exception of James Hurley (as played by James Marshall) who, in part 13 sings “Just You,” co-written by Lynch and Badalamenti and first heard in season 2 of the original series—it also contributes to the Otherness of *The Return* as part of a repertoire of estranging tactics. This also includes the pervasive 50s aesthetic mentioned above: like *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks*, *The Return* often resembles 50s American suburbia but is significantly and assertively not set in that era. However, there is nothing anachronistic for the people who inhabit that world about the 50s aesthetic that pervades *Twin Peaks*; Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) is charmed by the town when he arrives there, but we do not get the sense that he considers it to be “weird” (the eccentricities of characters like the Log Lady notwithstanding) so

much as *perfect*, and Cooper himself has something of a 50s aesthetic in his clean cut appearance and courteous manner.

To use a concept from Mikhail Bakhtin, Cooper occupies the same ‘chronotope’ as the residents of Twin Peaks; that is, he shares space and time with them, both in the town specifically and, more broadly, in the world of which it is a part, and so, what might appear anomalous to the viewer is not necessarily so for him. In her review of the first episode of *The Return for Variety*, Sonia Saraiya criticizes the “inexplicably stupid” closing scene in which “the indie-electronic band Chromatics performs to a room of middle-aged townies taking tequila shots.” Leaving aside the class contempt, ageism, and regional snobbery evident here, Saraiya also demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of the aesthetic of the series: Chromatics’ music is strongly influenced by 1980s synthpop—most notably New Order and Giorgio Moroder—and, as such, its inclusion in the show is consistent with the use of similarly ‘retro’ music in the original series and throughout Lynch’s *oeuvre*. Saraiya’s error is to read for mimetic realism, an odd approach for anyone to take to Lynch’s surrealist-influenced work. It may be the case that, in the actual world, Chromatics would not receive as warm a reception in a non-urban venue as they do in the series (although who is to say, given the pervasiveness of retromania, which is not a purely urban phenomenon, and the pervasiveness of archive culture due to the internet), but *Twin Peaks* is set in a world that Lynch and series co-creator Mark Frost have *imagined* into being. Bearing this in mind, Saraiya’s sarcastic comment, “nothing says rural, small-town, faded glory like an impossibly cool synthpop band,” is actually true in the (e)strange(d) world of *Twin Peaks*.

The narratologist Lubomir Dolezel argues that “actual-world (historical) individuals are able to enter a fictional world only if they become possible counterparts, shaped in any way the fiction maker chooses” (21). When celebrities play themselves in entertainment industry-based TV series such as *The Larry Sanders Show* (1992-1998), *Extras* (2005-2007) or *Entourage* (2004-2011), they are

fictionalized, often transformed into characters with certain aspects of their personalities exaggerated or inverted. We do not get any insight into the personalities of the acts from the Bang Bang Bar except James, but a comparison of their performances there and in the actual-world, via footage on *YouTube*, shows, for the most part, no significant differences, with the exception of “The” Nine Inch Nails, as I discuss in more detail below. The credits tell us that Sharon Van Etten plays a character called Sharon Van Etten who shares time and space with James Hurley (just as the actual world Van Etten shares time and space with James Marshall); Del Rio is credited as playing “Herself” but it is a fictionalized version of this self; the highly successful DJ and recording artist Moby plays a “Musician,” backing Del Rio, who looks very like the Moby with whom we are familiar and could very well be the series-world’s version of him, a Moby who has perhaps failed to achieve the success of the actual-world Moby, making his living instead as a jobbing musician. This inconsistency in the credits seems, like the definite article and its quotation marks appended to Nine Inch Nails, another act of estrangement, a puzzling irritant which disrupts the smooth consumption of *The Return* both as a linear narrative and as a comforting piece of 90s nostalgia.

In the actual world, Nine Inch Nails is known for its fusion of rock and electronic music. “The” Nine Inch Nails from part 8 sound and look like 60s-70s rock band The Velvet Underground, to the extent of having images projected onto them as was the case when The Velvet Underground performed at Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable multi-media ‘happenings.’ Sonically, “The” Nine Inch Nails have less in common with the other synthesizer-based acts in the series (Chromatics, Au Revoir Simone, Hudson Mohawke [part 9]) than they do with Trouble and The Veils, although these bands reference the 50s rather than the 60s. Although the song “The” Nine Inch Nails performs, “She’s Gone Away,” pre-dates *The Return*, its retro style is unrepresentative of their *oeuvre* overall. Its inclusion, along with the modification of their name, functions as both an element of estrangement and an

indication of divergence: Nine Inch Nails play the role of “The Nine Inch Nails,” a mid-level rock band who play regional venues rather than the arenas filled by their actual world counterparts.

According to Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails, Lynch rejected the song he originally submitted for *The Return* for being too “*Twin Peaks*-y sounding,” requesting instead something “more aggressive and ugly” (Morgan Britton). The placement of “She’s Gone Away” and the modification of the band’s name in episode 8 contribute to its pivotal, and disruptive, presence both as an installment of the series and as a part of televisual history. Their performance at the Bang Bang Bar occurs immediately before a very brief scene in which the BOB-possessed doppelgänger of Agent Cooper regains consciousness after being shot earlier in the episode by his henchman Ray; the episode then shifts into black and white, moving back in time to 1946 and the Trinity nuclear test that brought BOB into the earthly plane. The “aggressive and ugly” song by “The” Nine Inch Nails presages this temporal and visual transition: Reznor intones the lyrics “She’s gone away” over and over against a dissonant, repetitive musical backing, invoking the fate of Laura Palmer who functions as a significant absence in *Twin Peaks*, the town and series. The same dimensional ‘tear’ that brings BOB to Earth also alerts The Fireman and Señorita Dido, who send Laura’s soul to follow him. Part 8 is, then, of paramount importance to the *mythos* of *Twin Peaks*, as well as being one of the most challenging pieces of Anglophone serial television drama ever broadcast. As such, the modification of Nine Inch Nails’ name is as significant as Lynch’s rejection of their original submission: just as that song would have fit too smoothly into the established aesthetic of the series, so merely presenting a straight-forward counterpart of Nine Inch Nails would have been insufficiently disruptive, too familiar, for this pivotal episode.

It is useful here to continue the comparison with *The Invisibles*. In issue 4 of the series’ second volume, we learn that not only did the Trinity test create a dimensional “rupture” through which “something impossible entered our universe,” but that this was a

*deliberate* act instigated by Robert Oppenheimer, whose fictional counterpart Morrison, the ‘fiction maker’ in Dolezel’s terms, has imagined as a “secret priest of Azathoth, the Idiot God of Nuclear Chaos.” The result of the test is the subsequent incursion of this ‘impossible’ entity into Roswell, New Mexico, on July 2, 1947, the same date and location of an alleged UFO crash in the actual world. The entity is “a god fallen into the world it had created,” and this theophany generated “shockwaves which reverberated backwards, forwards and sideways, through spacetime,” both creating and changing history (vol. 2, no. 4). Beyond the obvious similarity to the results of the dimensional ‘tear’ we see in part 8, *The Return* recalls *The Invisibles* in its depiction of an altered history most prominently in the season finale but also in ‘hints’ found in earlier episodes. These hints take the form of ‘glitches,’ including Big Ed’s out-of-sync reflection in part 13, the ‘shudder’ in part 15’s assassination scene, and the major continuity ‘error’ in the Double R diner scene in part 7, which suggests the existence of another, parallel Earth and/or an altered history. In the scene, the camera cuts away from the counter when a character named ‘Bing’ bursts through the door, disrupting the diner’s peaceful mood; when the camera cuts back to the counter, a split second later, a different assortment of customers is arranged there. The episode’s credits begin to roll over the remainder of the scene, in which nothing else disruptive is seen; however, the theme for Windom Earle, Cooper’s former partner turned serial killer who entered the Black Lodge in season 2 where BOB took his soul, can be heard beneath the song ‘Sleep Walk’ by Santo and Johnny (1959) playing in the diner. As a piece of non-diegetic music, the presence of Earl’s theme can be taken as an indication to the audience that all is not as it seems and that the Black Lodge’s influence is at work on the reality of the series-world, suggesting either that a kind of time dilation has occurred and time has leapt forward in the split second the camera left the counter or that reality has been ‘rewritten’ to produce an alternative world. Some of the staff in the Double R seem aware that a change has occurred: Shelly (Mädchen Amick) looks

disconcerted, as does Heidi (Andrea Hays) whom Shelly touches seemingly both to comfort her and to convince herself that Heidi is real.

That this change occurs after the introduction of a disruptive element, Bing's entrance to the diner, recalls the 'shockwaves' generated by the entity's incursion in *The Invisibles*. Bing is looking for someone called 'Billy,' who may be the same character Audrey Horne repeatedly mentions in *The Return*. Audrey's scenes are revealed to take place in some kind of alternate reality that could be a dreamworld, perhaps generated by the coma she entered in season 2 and from which she seems to awaken in part 16. Audrey's waking comes after, and seems to be stimulated by, her dancing at the Bang Bang Bar. The MC announces the title of the song she will perform to as "Audrey's Dance," which points away from the world of the series to the actual world, where "Audrey's Dance" is the title of a track on the 1990 album *Soundtrack from Twin Peaks* composed by Angelo Badalamenti. While the track is used diegetically in the series when Audrey dances to it in season 1, episode 2, it is unlikely (although admittedly not impossible) that she knows it by the title used on the soundtrack album. Like the presence of an issue of *The Invisibles* in *The Invisibles* or *The Return's* use of the name 'Billy,' which can be seen as a reference to actor Billy Zane, who played Audrey's love interest John Justice Wheeler in season 2, the MC's announcement of the song is a meta-fictional gesture that draws attention to *The Return's* thematic preoccupation with layers of reality.

Although the Trinity tests did also occur in the actual world, the demonic incursion they allowed in *The Return* can be taken as the point of divergence from actual world history, and the 50s aesthetic of the world of *Twin Peaks* can be interpreted as a sign that the prosperity resulting from America's nuclear program is inextricably linked to the presence of evil resulting from the Trinity test. That a 50s aesthetic is pervasive in both the original series and in *The Return* shows how this evil is a fundamental part of American culture. The use of the 50s aesthetic in a modern-day

setting is an example of what the Russian literary critic Viktor Shklovsky termed *ostranenie*, which translates as ‘defamiliarization’ or ‘estrangement’. In the essay “Art as Device” (1925), Shklovsky writes,

The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By ‘estranging’ objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and ‘laborious.’ The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. (6)

As a defamiliarizing act, attaching the definite article to Nine Inch Nails’ name is also an act of estrangement which, like the pervasive 50s aesthetic, is a way of reminding the audience that this is not the world with which they are familiar, however similar it may appear. The use of quotation marks seems too to be an ironic gesture, acknowledging that this is not the ‘real’ Nine Inch Nails while also suggesting that it is only the version for this particular timeline, one of many in a multiverse of alternative Earths (which includes our own; Lynch explores similar themes in *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive*, and, particularly, *Inland Empire* [2006]). As such, the renaming of the band anticipates, as does the Double R diner scene, the rewriting of the series’ timeline that occurs in part 17 when Cooper travels in time to prevent Laura Palmer’s murder, which is also foreshadowed by the various glitches and meta-fictional gestures discussed above.

What might seem like over-analysis of simple jokes or mistakes is validated by the use of a parallel or alternative Earth trope when Cooper and Diane cross over (in a 50s-style car) to another world in the final episode of *The Return*. This earth is more like our own, with no obvious 50s elements present. Compare for example Judy’s Diner in Odessa, Texas, with the Double R in *Twin Peaks*: where the latter is warm, inviting and lively, Judy’s appears drab, impersonal and on the point of closure (it is all but empty with chairs already on several tables, even though it is open and the scene takes place during the day), which we can take as a reference

to the decline in the American economy since 2008. What little clientele there is includes three thuggish cowboys who molest their server, unthinkable behavior at the Double R. Furthermore, these cowboys are revealed to be armed, perhaps as a comment on the increase in gun ownership, and crime, in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

The rather severe version of Cooper whom we see in this world is also more appropriate to the times than the 50s-style clean-cut lawman we are used to, as is shown when Cooper overcomes the three cowboys, without breaking a sweat or even leaving his seat, after they threaten him at gunpoint. After doing so, he places their weapons in the diner's deep fat fryer, even though, as he tells the staff, he is unsure whether or not this will ignite their ammunition—irresponsible behavior uncharacteristic of the 'original' Cooper. This version of Cooper, referred to by some fans online as 'Grey Coop' and named as Richard in the episode, is a synthesis of Dale and Mr. C, his BOB-possessed doppelgänger. The Cooper of this Earth is nevertheless still preoccupied with the murder of Laura Palmer, so we can see that the act of estrangement here is actually to make both this alternative Earth and its version of Cooper *more* realistic than the quirky milieu and clean cut hero that we are used to. This is a Cooper (and world) relevant for 2017, and his presence undermines any comforting nostalgia that *The Return* might have provided.

"What year is this?" Grey Cooper asks in the final episode of *The Return*, echoing Fisher's confusion on first viewing the video for Arctic Monkeys' "I Bet You Look Good on the Dance Floor" (2006). Fisher "genuinely believed that it was some lost artifact from circa 1980":

Everything in the video—the lighting, the haircuts, the clothes—had been assembled to give the impression that this was a performance on BBC2's serious rock show, *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. Furthermore, there was no discordance between the look and the sound. At least to a casual listen this could have quite easily have been a

postpunk group from the early 1980s . . . it's easy to imagine "I Bet You Look Good on the Dance Floor" being broadcast on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* in 1980 and producing no sense of disorientation in the audience. Like me, they might have imagined that the references to '1984' in the lyrics referred to the future. (loc. 214)

"There ought to be something astonishing about this," Fisher writes before coming to the conclusion that the reason there is not is that "by 2005 there was no 'now' with which to contrast [The Arctic Monkeys'] retrospection" (loc. 224). Compare Fisher's reaction to Cooper's disorientation: *why* does he ask what the year is? It has been explained to him by the resident of the house that he knows as Laura's home that not only do the Palmer family not live there now, they never have; Cooper has arrived in an alternative Earth with an alternative history, and under these circumstances, *where* he is should matter more than when. Just as the video seemed to Fisher to exist out of time—although, as he notes, "anachronism is now taken for granted" (loc. 280)—Grey Coop realizes that he doesn't know when or where he is after the revelation about the Palmers.

But still, the question remains puzzling, and theories about it abound on *Twin Peaks* online fora, including the suggestions that the events in the alternative reality of the finale do not take place 25 years after Laura promised she would next see Cooper but earlier (which is why he meets Carrie Page instead), and that Grey Coop is preoccupied with the date because he has forgotten he has 'crossed' (as Cooper) into another dimension. When Cooper and Diane cross dimensions they do so, as noted above, in a vintage car and arrive at a retro-style motel where they make love, vigorously but joylessly, to "My Prayer" by The Platters, from 1955. This recording is significant: it also appears in the 1956 flashback scene in part 8, playing on the radio station that the Woodsman takes over to broadcast his incantatory/activatory message.<sup>4</sup> When Cooper awakes the next morning, the room has become a bland, modern, generic interior—what anthropologist Marc Augé calls a

‘non-place’—his vintage car replaced with a modern-day model, and Cooper transformed into Richard, aka Grey Coop. So the crossing seems to have involved two stages: the first, to a world similar, stylistically, to the 50s-influenced aesthetic with which Cooper, Diane, and the audience are familiar; the second, to a world which more closely resembles contemporary reality. The motel room in the first stage is, then, an interstitial or liminal space and the lovemaking there—which includes its own ‘glitch’ when “My Prayer” abruptly stops, then resumes a few seconds later—seems to be a form of sex magick ritual to complete the crossing, creating Richard/Grey Coop in the process. Grey Coop is the Cooper for both 2017 and for this realistic dimension, just as Carrie Page is the appropriate iteration of Laura Palmer.

In *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier*, the second of Mark Frost’s two companion novels to *The Return*, FBI agent Tammy Preston (Chrysta Bell in *The Return*) reports her disorientation over discovering, in newspaper articles about Laura Palmer, that her body had never been discovered “wrapped in plastic” and floating in the river, as was the case in the original series, and that Agent Cooper had arrived in Twin Peaks to investigate her disappearance, not her death. Preston is further baffled by the reaction of local law enforcement personnel to her enquiries about Laura’s fate: “they all got a dazed and confused expression when I brought it up.” History has been rewritten in Preston’s world, although she still remembers earlier events, leading her to question her own sanity. Preston is, then, another liminal character, in terms of her memory: like the viewer she knows that things have changed, although, unlike the viewer, she does not know why. Toward the end of the novel, her memories of the events have been erased as Preston’s consciousness is fully assimilated into the new reality.

Whether or not this reality is the same one to which Cooper and Diane cross over and in which Cooper finds Carrie Page, whom he believes to be Laura Palmer, is left open to interpretation. With its reports on the fates of several characters from the original series not addressed in *The Return* or Frost’s first companion novel

*The Secret History of Twin Peaks* (2016), *The Final Dossier* resembles film critic David Thomson's 1985 novel *Suspects*, which consists of biographical sketches of characters from American cinema, including events taking place before and after their appearances on screen. One such example is Amy Jolly, as played by Marlene Dietrich in the film, *Morocco* (von Sternberg, 1930), who, it is explained, fled to Mexico after assuming the identity of a Bedouin woman, Tanya, the name of Dietrich's character in *Touch of Evil* (1958). Thomson's fiction takes its cue from the ending of *Morocco*, which shows Amy falling in with a group of Bedouin women following a Foreign Legion regiment, leaving Amy's eventual fate open for the viewer. Similarly, we can speculate that Laura fled Twin Peaks, eventually changing her name to Carrie Page in the altered timeline/alternative earth inhabited by Grey Coop—except we learn that the Palmers never lived at the house with which we are familiar as their home. Furthermore, we are told by the current resident, Alice Tremond, that the previous owner was a Mrs. Chalfont, a surname used by an associate of BOB's who appeared in the original series and *Fire Walk with Me*, suggesting supernatural interference in the reality of this dimension. That Laura then hears her mother call her name, followed by an electrical discharge and the apparent implosion of the dimension and that the finale ends with Cooper and Laura returned to the Red Room reinforces the possibility of a supernatural manipulation of reality.

The episode ends with Laura whispering in Cooper's ear, horrifying him. We do not hear what she says and no further explanation of their fate is provided, leaving the ending open to speculation. Several commenters online have suggested that Cooper learns that *all* of the events of *The Return* have been a dream, that he never left the Black Lodge and never will. The Argentinian fantasy writer Jorge Luis Borges made a connection between dreams and fiction throughout his *oeuvre*, including the short story "Everything and Nothing" (which appeared in the 1960 collection *El Hacedor*, the English title of which was *Dreamtigers* [1964]) in which Shakespeare is visited on his deathbed by God,

who tells him that both have dreamed worlds into existence: Shakespeare the worlds of his plays; God the world that Shakespeare inhabited. If we accept that Cooper has similarly dreamt the events of *The Return* into being, then we can see him as, in Dolezel's terms, a "fiction maker" (it is worth noting here that *El Hacedor* translates from Spanish as "The Maker"). For Dolezel, all fictional acts create worlds; story is the microstructure of a narrative and world its macrostructure. In his dreaming, Cooper creates the world(s) of *The Return*, is their *author*. But as a prisoner of the Black Lodge, his authorship is subject to the malevolent influence of Jowday.

Of course, this is simply more speculation on the meaning of the events of the finale and of *The Return* as a whole. What is undeniable, however, is the preoccupation with alternative Earths and parallel dimensions in *The Return*, which includes the blog "Search for the Zone," maintained in the series by the character William Hastings (Matthew Lillard) but also existing in the real world. The blog, designed to resemble a '90s era website typical of now-defunct platforms such as Geocities or Angelfire, contains Hastings' musings on the existence of a multiverse and links to another site, [grantchronicles.com](http://grantchronicles.com), concerned with parallel dimensions. Like the references to "Audrey's Dance" in episode 17 and *Invitation to Love*, the website is a meta-fictional act that ruptures the ontological barrier between the real world and the fictional world(s). Like Morrison's placement of a previous issue in *The Invisibles*, these tactics by Lynch and Frost draw attention to the artificiality, the *fictionality*, of the series, stimulating us to question how reality is constructed. In our current 'post-truth' age of alternative facts and fake news, the tactics of estrangement used in *The Return* take on a political charge, making it a vital text for a world in which reality itself seems to have been placed in quotation marks.

## Notes

1. This is generally true of Lynch's work and his fondness for anachronisms: when exactly, for example, is *Blue Velvet* or *Mulholland Drive* [2001] set?
2. "Rockin' Back inside My Heart" seems to be something of a hit among the youth of Twin Peaks, as shown in season 2, episode 7, when several female characters lip-sync to the song.
3. One example of retromania provided by Reynolds is Chris Isaak's song "Wicked Game," included on the soundtrack to Lynch's *Wild at Heart* (1990). Reynolds describes it as "a highly stylised retro-chic affair, like a fifties ballad sluiced through the deluxe atmospherics of Roxy Music circa [their 1982 album] *Avalon*" (179). Similarly, Fisher describes the 'classic style' of Winehouse, Adele, and others as being "buffed up" by modern production techniques to make it sound good on radio (loc. 243). On the radio in 1990, "Wicked Game" was easy to misidentify as a re-issue of a 50s recording, which was not uncommon in the 80s and early 90s: TV advertisements for Levi jeans, for example, spawned the re-release of several 'classic' soul and rock songs, including Marvin Gaye's "Heard It Through the Grapevine" (1968; 1985) and "Should I Stay or Should I Go" by The Clash (1981; 1991).
4. Furthermore, one of The Platters featured on the recording was named David Lynch; this is perhaps another meta-fictional gesture.

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