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30 ANNI DI TWIN PEAKS

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The Good, the Bad and the Odd: A Cross-Semiotic and Systemic-Functional Insight into *Twin Peaks*

Adjectivation thrives in *Twin Peaks* criticism. Things that "are not what they seem" may in fact call for qualitative modifiers to linguistically convey their riddles and intricacies. Much has been written over the last thirty years celebrating Lynch/Frost's sumptuous and hypnotic poetics of narrativity, as well as about the show's bizarre mix of realistic, unrealistic, surreal, absurd and supernatural modes, and its offbeat hybrid genre positioning (see Sanna 2019: 12-14; Weinstock 2016a: 9-14). A paradigmatic series, immediately met with devout fandom and nowadays acclaimed as the major TV drama product of its time and the prototype of today's storytelling, *Twin Peaks*' first two seasons were aired on the ABC network between April 1990 and June 1991. The show's formula is prodigious: a structural, generic and transmedia blend of contrasting ingredients. A key factor is the convoluted plot structure, made up of extended, intertwining lines, drawing from mystery, forensic procedural, noir, science fiction, sitcom, sentimental, pantomime, gothic, supernatural, horror, fantasy and doppelgänger fiction. As genres all too easily shift into one another, without explanation, viewers' narrative literacy is both titillated and challenged (see Dolan 1995). Also essential is the uncanny, grotesque narrative pitch, one that brings together a highbrow, Mephistophelean, Fuseli-meets-Jung visual atmosphere with a mockingly gory and melodramatic tone, disjunctively appearing as both a tribute to and a parody of the golden age of US soap operas, mainly *Peyton Place* (1964-69) and *Dallas* (1978-91), from which *Twin Peaks* borrows, as it were, several cast members.

As iconic as it is still today, *Twin Peaks*' trademark formula is proba-

bly the result of its idiosyncratic production, this being the first and overarching artistic accident the series was graced with.[1] Lynch's concurrent commitment with the shooting of *Wild at Heart* (1990) made it necessary to outsource both writing and directing, albeit within the original authorial framework (see Creeber 2012). Lynch directed six out of thirty episodes; Frost wrote ten. Thirteen more directors and six more writers were brought into the project. Different approaches eventually combined in a syncretic, intermittent style, whereby subplots, characters (as many as 39 regulars), as well as narrative and visual motifs oscillate between multiple aesthetic modes and tones which fluster expectations and "undermine linear, cause-effect narrative" (Abbott 2016: 186). "Soap noir" is how Frost sums up homicides, femmes fatales, voice over, high-contrast lighting, subjective angle shots, jazzy music and sober mood (Holt 2008: 250) as they meet with quirky humour, saturation, eccentricity and paranormality, against the backdrop of a small town up Washington State, near the Canadian border.

But going back to adjectives: is *Twin Peaks* more disquieting or hilarious? It's hard to tell. Odd it certainly is, showing as it does – think of demons named BOB and MIKE, scorched engine oil and Leland Palmer's singing repertoire – how flaunted banality may "tragicomically mask strange forces" (Nochimson 1995: 148). Moreover, so strikingly odd is radiant, stylish and exotic FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper, the series' lead character, that as the plot unfolds through season 1 viewers may be willing to trade their knowledge of who-

1 Other aleatory circumstances serendipitously contributing to the show's iconicity include set dresser Frank Silva being cast as BOB after Lynch was horrified to see him accidentally reflected in a mirror while shooting a scene in the Palmers' sitting room; the ominous flickering light at the morgue in the Pilot episode actually being a malfunctioning prop; *Twin Peaks*' nomination as Best Drama Series for the 1990 Soap Opera Awards; Sheryl Lee (Laura Palmer/Maddy Ferguson) and Mädchen Amick's (Shelly Johnson) last-minute recruitment, due to Lynch becoming mesmerized by their doll-like physicality; Annie Blackburne (played by Heather Graham), Agent Cooper's soul mate, being introduced to downsize the flirt between Cooper (played by Kyle MacLachlan) and Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn), due to rivalry between Fenn and Lara Flynn Boyle (playing Donna Hayward), who at the time was MacLachlan's companion.

ever killed Laura Palmer in exchange for the sheer oddity of just everything else. In a place where they have stacks of doughnuts on police station desks, and a gas man is married to an amnesiac, Herculean one-eyed woman while in love with the owner of the local café, whose gangster husband gets beaten up by the gas man's wife, there are more sensational things to unveil than the torments of a teenager. Ubiquitous and articulated as it is, encompassing such conceptual shades as weirdness, incongruity, eeriness, grotesqueness, dysfunctionality, quirkiness, absurdity, improbability and plain logical impossibility, oddity appears as the equator of the *Twin Peaks* coordinates. Be they main or minor, good or bad, Existents (i.e., the story's characters, things and settings; see Chatman 1978: 26) are in fact plain odd. Think of a few random examples: Audrey Horne, the Log Lady, Major Briggs, the Great Northern Hotel, One-Eyed Jack's, the Black Lodge, Waldo the Mynah Bird, or Dr Jacobi's coconut. Irrespective of their relevance, and of their comic or tragic status, Events (i.e., doings and happenings; see Chatman 1978: 26) are also odd. Consider Ben Horne's re-enactment of the Civil War, Donna Hayward's encounters at the Meals on Wheels programme, the finding of a fish in Pete Martell's percolator, Josie Packard turning into a wooden drawer knob, etc. In an odd place, filled with odd things, odd facts come about at either the hand or the expense of odd people.

Despite the undeniable lure of adjectival flair, this paper aims at disassembling – rather than going along with – the structural mechanics of oddity in *Twin Peaks*. Incorporating linguistics, semiotics and narratology, this study presents a cross-semiotic and systemic-functional analysis, for which Figure 1 provides a blueprint [Fig. 1].

On the one hand, oddity manifests itself in the visual mode as the common denominator of all *Twin Peaks* Existents, namely, every animate or inanimate, human or non-human entity that is materially present within the spatiality of the text. On the other hand, oddity appears in the narrative mode as the unit of measure for all *Twin Peaks* Events, viz., every process that, either accomplished by the characters or happening to them, occurs within the temporality of the text. For this reason, we may further speculate that while

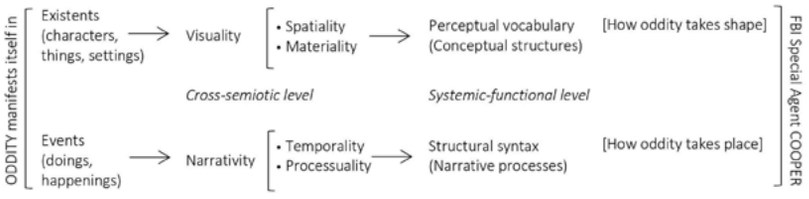

Fig. 1
Blueprint for a cross-semiotic and systemic-functional analysis of *Twin Peaks*

Existents provide the perceptual vocabulary conveying how oddity takes shape, thus embodying the spatial/material dimension of the show, Events operate as the structural syntax enacting how oddity takes place, thus disclosing the temporal/processual dimension of the show.
More specifically, in section 1 I will look into the oddity of *Twin Peaks* from a cross-semiotic standpoint, as a product of the visuality *vs.* narrativity dichotomy (Lessing 1766; Jakobson 1959; Iedema 2001; 2003; O'Halloran, Tan, Wignell 2016), the cultural and generic ancestry of which will be sketched out, also with respect to Lynch/Frost's imaginary inventory. In section 2, oddity will be considered from a systemic-functional angle (Halliday 2002; 2004; Kress, Van Leeuwen 1996; 2001) as the result of a cross-codification process between the show's perceptual vocabulary (i.e., Existents, or Conceptual structures) and structural syntax (i.e., Events, or Narrative processes). I will finally investigate how FBI Agent Cooper's special mission cuts across this system of sign oppositions.

1. What's the matter with *Twin Peaks*?

Existents are visual items – people, places and props – that give body and shape to the spatiality of a story. The materiality of *Twin Peaks* Existents immediately shows in a threefold manner. First of all, individuals (including their appearances and gestures), animals (living, dead and taxidermied) and objects (belongings, furniture, equipment, etc.) appear as incongruous in regard to their physical whereabouts, logic/logistic relevance and numerical formation.

A partial list of favourite displaced or miscontextualized Existents would include the Lady's Log; the fish in Pete Martell's coffee pot; stuffed fish and ungulates, and repurposed deer antlers; Waldo the Mynah Bird; 24/7 supplies of coffee and doughnuts at the police station, and coffee everywhere else (including the Black Lodge); Ben and Jerry Horne's brie baguettes; Agent Cooper's micturition in the Pilot episode, his little finger ring and cowlicks; Josie Packard's androgynous allure; DEA Agent Bryson's cross-dressing; Gordon Cole's hearing aid; Nadine Hurley lifting 600 lbs., her cotton balls and drape runners; an interstellar cablegram from the White Lodge for Agent Cooper; Albert Rosenfeld's vituperations, and his love declaration in the face of Sheriff Truman; "Diane, I'm holding in my hand a box of chocolate bunnies"; Audrey Horne dancing and Agent Cooper snapping fingers at Angelo Badalamenti's non-diegetic music; a llama in a veterinarian's office; the incredibly iconic swaying traffic light at Sparkwood and 21.
Existents moreover tend to be numerically odd – that is to say, overtly uneven. Quantity is a troublesome principle in *Twin Peaks*. In Lynch/Frost's omissive-excessive aesthetics, items appear as either in excess (i.e., undefinedly added on) or in defect (i.e., subtracted without any apparent motivation). Think, on the one hand, of the first three shots of the Pilot (two ducks swimming in the lake, two porcelain hounds on Josie's beauty counter, two Josies), or of Laura and Maddy, Caroline and Annie, BOB and MIKE and other evil doppelgängers, or the double life of every character in town. Or think of dozens of doughnuts, golf balls, naval cadets, heaping platters. On the other hand, think of missing symmetrical body parts (arms, eyes), physiological deficits (Gordon Cole's hearing impairment, Leo Johnson's vegetative state, Ronette Pulaski's coma, Nadine Hurley's amnesia), or utter no-shows ("Diane?"). Things, it seems, are either too many, or too few.
Secondly, oddity increases as Existents combine. The order of things is not quite right in *Twin Peaks*. In particular, inanimate objects appear as responsible for perplexing configurations of material space, both domestic and outdoor, which they take command of through mock-encyclopaedic arrangements and fetishist detail prolifera-

tion. Think of a perfectly set breakfast table, a blackboard, a map of the Himalayan region and empty bottles on a tree stump in a forest clearing, as Agent Cooper illustrates his Tibetan method of investigation in episode 2; Nadine Hurley's collection of bookshelf figurines, a plethora of miniaturized dolls, shoes and ducks, among which is the bust of a pioneer lady wearing an eye-patch; the display of copper cookware at the Blue Pine Lodge, where only sandwiches are eaten; Windom Earle's stage design of a victim encased as a chess piece, an objectified metaphor of his ongoing grudge with Cooper; the all-timber interior décor at the Great Northern Hotel; the One-Armed Man's sample assortment of boots; Old Bellhop's manoeuvring with a glass of milk and a telephone horn shortly after Agent Cooper has been shot in episode 9; and Ben Horne's manic praise of his piling up of furniture items and office supplies in an impossible way in episode 19: "if only one could find the perfect arrangement of all objects in any particular space, it would create a resonance the benefits from which to the individual dwelling in that space could be extensive, could be far-reaching". Lynch/Frosts's "visual inventiveness", bestowing the show its "distinctive televisual look" (Lavery 1995: 5), organises materiality in overly taxonomical fashion, by means of intradiegetic visual patterns and formations that appear as idiosyncratic catalogues of the perceptible, in such a manner as to exacerbate (and thus contradict) any principle of perspicuity and plausibility. There is something effortlessly clear-headed about this delirious visuality, which – albeit within a powerfully Aristotelean plot structure – gives prominence to the "reification of the material" as it turns commodities into "strange and wonderful things" (Weinstock 2016b: 43).

The generic matrix of such perceptual vocabulary can easily be traced back to the soap opera, a "completely furnished world" about which fans "can make up quizzes and play trivia games" (Eco 1985: 7), which *Twin Peaks* both picks up and parodies. While the former aspect manifests with the use of televisual mid-range and close-up shots, performing a crystallization of visual space (viz., banalizing objects, gazes and the material relationships among them), the latter is signalled by A-list cinematic techniques such as extreme

subjective angles, distorting the relational space between Existents, and high angle shots, which alter the morphology and perceptibility of matter itself. Think of the spinning ceiling fan, seen from the bottom of the staircase leading to Laura's room, or the record player, seen from the dressing room where the golf bag hiding Maddy's body is, at the Palmer residence; or the opening shot of episode 12, a super-close-up vision of the inside of a wooden ceiling tile looking like a spiralling nest of fibres, as seen by Leland Palmer in his examination cell. Lynch/Frost's concern with the visual conventions of serial melodrama is also apparent in the semi-serious use of *Invitation to Love*, a soap opera which many characters follow throughout season 1. The unravelling of passions and betrayals in the Twin Peaks community is parodically mirrored in the nonsensical conspiracies of the Lancaster family (see Charney 1991; Telotte 1995), which are literally taken up in season 2, with such motifs as Catherine Martell's plot against Josie Packard, the identity of Lucy's baby's father, Maddy and Laura's overlapping looks and personalities, the Milfords fighting over a woman at Leland Palmer's funeral, Nadine Hurley's amnesia after attempting suicide, and the major "Who-Shot-J.R.?" cliffhanger between episodes 8 and 9.

Thirdly, and most importantly, there is the puzzling degree of narrative agency shown by pretty much all *Twin Peaks* Existents. The range of physical entities that are involved as proactive Participants (Halliday 2002: 71) within the show's spatiality is uncannily expanded so as to include "the foregrounding of matter as matter" (Weinstock 2016b: 30). That is to say, the prerogative of engaging in material action is conferred without explanation to both human and non-human, animate and inanimate, sentient and non-sentient, organic and inorganic, living and dead subjects – and objects: tools, gear and paraphernalia, as well as plain theatrical backdrops, atmospheric agents, electricity, extra-terrestrial forces, chemical substances, etc. Animals and botanicals are personified (see for instance owls, windswept Douglas firs, Waldo in love with Laura Palmer, the vengeful pine weasel). Inanimate matter becomes vital and sentient ("My Log saw something that night"; a "smiling bag" with a man in it), or uncooperative and vexing (the flickering light at the morgue and a deer's

head falling off the bank wall in the Pilot episode; rebellious hospital stools in episode 10; obnoxious adhesive tape; banana aftertaste in red wine; a catapult floorboard hitting Deputy Brennan's forehead at Leo Johnson's house). Conversely, living creatures turn into still-life artefacts (see the omnipresent stuffed specimen and woodwork; gun racks, chandeliers and table legs made of antlers and animal bones), and people become either thing-like (Josie's damnation scene; Leo Johnson's petrification; Windom Earle's display of his victims) or beastly (see BOB, crawling around on all four and laughing/barking; Albert Rosenfeld's comment on Sheriff Truman: "Look! It's trying to think"). As a result, the whole notion of what human perception ultimately is, along with its cognitive relationship with the external world, becomes dubious. Likewise, the boundaries between the concepts of potentiality and actuality become permeable, for knowledge of the material world outside of the filter of subjectivity is indeed possible, in *Twin Peaks*. The linguistic concepts of subject and object, and the principles of transitivity and transactionality (Halliday 2002: 112) are strained beyond the phenomenological limits set by correlationism (see Ballas 2019), as well as beyond the spatiality of the visual medium. Existents serve as the perceptual vocabulary of such a spellbound poetics of empirical action and anti-phenomenological knowledge. That is to say, the intrusive visuality of *Twin Peaks* comes with a "How-do-we-know-what-we-know?" sticky note attached to it.

One may compile a taxonomy of the "weird and wondrous" objects that come alive in *Twin Peaks*. Food, for instance, is always in focus and out of place. Gastronomy works as a ubiquitous form of interference in the show's visual coordinates. Impertinent plates, snacks and delicatessen tamper with the unravelling of Laura Palmer's murder, both in comic and in dramatic situations, either adding to the series' mock-melodramatic visuality or bringing about even more unsettling overtones. Think, on the one hand, of Agent Cooper's gourmet attitude, his sips and morsels, and the art form he turns ordering breakfast into, on day 2 of his stay at the Great Northern Hotel; Jerry Horne's food perversions and Ben's turning to carrots and celery (after regaining sanity); the Log Lady sticking gum to a

booth at the Double R Diner; the malignant food Pete Martell is served at the hospital in episode 9; and the 25-second personified dolly shot of a bellicose banquet at Leland Palmer's funeral, which opens episode 18. On the other hand, there are Norma Jennings' mashed potatoes and frustrated efforts to win the appreciation of a food critic; the Meals on Wheels programme, where creamed corn (i.e., Garmonbozia) first appears; the chewing gum due to "come back in style" that recalls the horrific childhood days when, unbeknownst to him, BOB first possessed Leland Palmer.

Fashion items also show a puzzling degree of agency. Viewers are flooded with conspicuous, eccentric clothing choices that are always "evocative of a sartorial elsewhere" (Spooner 2016: 105). As mischievous distractors, clothes allegedly either reveal people's identities or conceal them (or overtly disguise them). But most of the time people's dressing code is self-referential, as in "Fashion-for-fashion's-sake" – a point clarified by the Stop Ghostwood catwalk show in episode 25. Admittedly, one may oppose Donna Hayward's chunky plaid jumpers ("the casual indifference of these muted earth tones is a form of fashion suicide")[2] and Audrey Horne's Lolita apparel. But Donna turns out to be as concupiscent as Laura, whose sunglasses she starts wearing; and Audrey is revealed as sexually incompetent. Think, however, of unmotivated 1950s retro (Audrey Horne, Shelly Johnson and Norma Jennings; the pristine, Cary Grantesque suits worn by Agent Cooper; James Hurley's leather jackets; Dick Tremayne's Ralph Laurenness); exoticism (Josie Packard's orientalism; Deputy Hawk's Native American textiles; Dr Jacobi's Hawaiian shirts, worn with a Sherlockian cape); travesty (Denis/Denise Bryson; Windom Earle; Mr. Tojimura; Ben Horne as General Lee). Think of the extensive use of uniforms (cheerleaders' leotards, baseball jackets, military ranks, lab coats, etc.), something costume designer Sara Markowitz appears to be particularly fond of, which is a superb, purposeless red herring throughout the story. And footwear, too – Audrey's red pumps and saddle shoes, Nadine's new ballerinas, so shiny she fears boys might see her underwear mir-

2 So goes Albert Rosenfeld commenting on Cooper's new clothes after he is temporarily removed from office.

rored in them, Leo Johnson's "new shoes", Philip Gerard's stock of duty boots, Ben Horne leading the Confederation in his socks – is allusive of nothing in particular. If things are not what they seem, fashion misbehaves too. It is a token of *Twin Peaks*' impudent visuality. This proactive effectivity of inanimate matter beyond and despite human control may be called "thing-power" (Bennett 2010: 13; Ballas 2019: 121). It is the cunning, baffling capacity that other-than-human objects have to impact on the world of subjects, and to correlate with their affairs in ways that may turn out either comic or disquieting, aleatory or methodical, and which may be the result of karma, happenstance, or the universe's whimsical recalcitrance to obey mankind's petty order of things. Or it may just be the downright ribaldry of matter. Objects have a life of their own, which is at cross purposes with people's ones. Be they hilarious (a llama in a veterinarian's office, a fish in a coffee pot, Laura's necklace in a coconut) or ominous (the spinning ceiling fan, blowing winds, the swaying traffic light, Hank Jennings' domino), *Twin Peaks* Existents turn out to be fully-fledged actants. They can sometimes be ridiculous and ominous at one time. Think of the phenomenal 120-second sequence in episode 9, a gory visualisation of what happened to Laura Palmer and Ronnette Pulaski at Jacques Renault's cabin and afterwards, at the abandoned train coach. Accompanied by Cooper and Albert's alternating voice-off narration, the sequence superimposes a dolly shot of stacked doughnuts and coffee pots at the Sheriff's Office on shots of windswept trees, the swaying traffic light, Ronnette wandering along the railway, traces of blood and dirt from the killing, the letter R being placed under Laura's ring finger. As the dolly reaches the other end of the Sheriff's desk towards the end of the sequence, doughnuts and coffee shift into yet more props: issues of *Flesh World*, sealed evidence bags and Deputy Brennan's own doughnut, a triumph of powdered sugar he left aside in weeping.

The secret life of matter, and its occasional surfacing to the dismay of human beings, is by tradition among the core concerns of both horror and humour. Kafka's uncanny poetics of perceptual knowledge, for instance, posits permeable boundaries between subject and object, what is alive and what is not, what is inert and what sentient,

animate or inanimate. The purposeless "creature" called Odradek, a flat star-shaped wooden thread spool that loiters in someone's house, "in the garret, the stairway, the lobbies, the entrance hall", can answer baby questions and produce the "kind of laughter that has no lungs behind it" (1919: 270). If death is the wearing out of some kind of activity inside of living beings, will it ever die? There is no way of knowing. It will probably forever insist on rolling down the stairs, something the anonymous narrator finds painful. In book 3 of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1761), as the protagonist is about to be born, Dr Slop's obstetrical bag is cross-tied in an impossible way by numerous and villainous "hard knots, each of which" was "twitched and drawn together with all the strength" of Obadiah's body (1760-69: 208). So obstinate are the knots that neither heartily cursing Obadiah nor cutting through them with a penknife is of any help. Dr Slop struggles with the bag, and, as Tristram is hastily delivered, his nose is disfigured by the doctor's forceps. This is, literally, how his misfortune in this world takes shape. In F.T. Vischer's whimsical novel *Auch Einer* (1878), inanimate objects – especially personal and household items – have the mean and lurking habit of casting off their inert functional disguise, becoming animated and vexing people with their conspicuousness, as an untimely reminder that they were not "thrown out there, as the term *ob-ject* suggests", but thrust instead "into the sphere of activity that is most fully the subject's own, the place where the subject feels most fully its sovereignty" (Kreienbrock 2013: 1). Eyeglasses hiding out and buttons unpicking themselves from clothes have a satanic soul, which Vischer calls *die Tücke des Objekts* ('the maliciousness of the object'), this being the reason they deserve capital punishment, by means of violent mechanical dismemberment (see Papapetros 2012: 239).

In *Twin Peaks*, Existents likewise take malicious action and jump out of the visual regime to set off and codify narrativity. Causative, cognitive and temporal repercussions of the utmost importance are attached to ostensibly trivial objects. In episode 17, Agent Cooper's epiphany of who killed Laura Palmer in the Roadhouse dream sequence is triggered by a piece of chewing gum. A little finger ring is taken by the Giant in exchange for the three key clues he offers to

the gunshot Cooper in episode 9, and physically re-materializes in episode 17, in corroboration of Cooper's insight into the crime. The final finding of the gateway to the Black Lodge depends on a jar of foul-smelling oil the Log Lady's late husband collected from within a circle of sycamore trees at Glastonbury Grove. For spellbound materiality is the only compass to the oddity of the *Twin Peaks* geography. This resonates with wider modern philosophical approaches, such as Object-Oriented Ontology (see Bennett 2010; Weinstock 2016b), i.e., the baffling reframing of perception and cognition as not necessarily anthropocentric, one-way transitive processes: objects watch us, know us, much better than we know them. Another source of inspiration, which Lynch overtly acknowledged (superimposing it with intimations from Quantum physics), is Hindu Vedas' conception of materiality as seemingly solid, but in fact "porous and unbound", and forever changing its state, regardless of what human perception might infer or know about it (see Nochimson 2016: 49). Think of the cup of coffee Agent Cooper is handed in the Black Lodge, in the last episode of season 2: the substance turns from liquid to solid to oily. If the ordinary perception of matter and its natural states is a convention, this cup of coffee is simply a manifestation of what the material world might really look like from other than a subjective angle shot. This odd angle of vision is exactly how Agent Cooper sees things – an idea to which I shall come back in Section 2.

Although expected to sit as mere visual accessories of spatial representation, Existents turn out to be the story's narrative fuel. Here lies the cross-semiotic core (Jakobson 1959; Iedema 2001; 2003) of *Twin Peaks*' vexing visuality. Overstepping the semiotic boundaries inherent to its materiality and spatiality, the show's characters, things and settings eventually appropriate distinctly temporal and processual affordances, which by tradition are the prerogative of the narrative principle. Remember G. E. Lessing's dichotomy of artistic signs in *Laokoon* (1766), where the (visual) coexistence of signs in space is opposed to the (narrative) succession of signs in time. In *Twin Peaks*, we see oddity spatialized as a taxonomy of juxtaposed structures, but since the latter maliciously give rise to a succession

of narrative initiatives, we also apprehend oddity as a temporalized process. As schematized in Figure 1 above, in terms of Systemic Functional Grammar, this implies redesigning the boundaries of Existents as Conceptual structures. The ideational metafunction of language – whose mission is to represent the 'real' world, the one standing outside of semiosis, thus construing a model of human experience (Halliday 2004: 29) – is in fact split into two opposite types of representations. Narrative (or Transactional) processes represent Participants as doing something to/for/with/against each other, i.e., they codify ongoing sequences of doings or happenings, with the temporal meaning of a process (material, mental, behavioural or verbal) or change in the state of affairs. For this reason, they may be placed alongside a story's Events. The counterparts of a story's Existents are instead Conceptual (or Relational-Existential) structures, which depict Participants spatially, in terms of their Essence or Attributes (what/where/when/with what or whom they are; what they have), Identity (what/who they are, in terms of their social identity) or Existence (what/who there is) (Halliday 2002: 112; Kress, Van Leeuwen 1996: 79). Conceptual structures are thus supposed to spatialize relations (see O'Halloran, Tagn, Wignell 2016). They encode not processes, but systems. But since Lynch/Frost's disobedient visuality superimposes on narrativity, absorbing part of the temporal and processual load that is the systemic-functional privilege of Transactional processes, *Twin Peaks*' visual vocabulary ends up being narrativized – ad libitum.

Foreseeably enough, the reverse also happens. Narrative processes, or Events, which form the structural syntax of *Twin Peaks*, are cross-codified as Conceptual structures, whereby temporality becomes spatialized, and narrativity visualized. The cross-semiotic and systemic-functional short circuit that is created between the linguistic notions of subject and object, and between visuality and narrativity, actually works in both directions. This most notably happens by the grace of Agent Cooper's presence in the story. For he is the "primary seer" (Nochimson 2016: 49) of this odd resonance between opposed systems of signification.

2. "Man, I would love to see the world through your eyes"

Events are the propelling kernels of narrativity, i.e., doings or happenings that, connecting in some form of temporal motion, syntactically weave Existents in a sequence of relevant "incidents, news, various happy and unhappy" circumstances (Lotman 1979: 163), thus setting the structural pace of the story. In *Twin Peaks*' overarching plot line, processuality takes place through the perplexing "semiotic wonderland of clues, symbols and red herrings" (Lim 2015: 98) that is represented by the mystery of Laura Palmer's murder. But the attitudinal and epistemological oddity of FBI Special Agent Cooper, the chosen unraveller of such intricacy, hijacks the problem/solution functional grammar of classical detective fiction.

To start with, Agent Cooper recalibrates the parameter of semiotic relevancy, making it at odds with evidentiality. His investigation starts off with the collection and deciphering of disparate clues that come forth in grotesque quantity and with petty sensationalism. Think of bird pecks on Laura's shoulders; ligature marks on both her wrists and biceps; the fragment of a poker chip in her stomach; leftover cocaine; two secret diaries, a secret home movie, a secret box of audio tapes; traces of an overcrowded social life (as a student and homecoming queen, Johnny Horne's tutor, food delivery volunteer, English teacher, salesgirl at Horne's perfume counter and prostitute at One Eyed Jack's); and vestiges of her (other than professional) sexual relationships with eight(ish) local men. Admittedly, these clues are connected by Agent Cooper in a chronological chain of causes and consequences ("Gordon, there's some curious linkages here"), and designed into a narrative reconstruction of the facts leading to the crime. But the cogency of the evidential paradigm – i.e., the anthropological core of detection as the archetype of infinite semiosis, whereby "apparently negligible details could reveal profound phenomena of great importance" (Ginzburg 1979: 124), which was allegedly developed by hunter societies at the very onset of the Anthropocene – is blatantly flaunted. In Sherlockian fashion, one has to admit, Cooper's attention towards minutiae is as deep and ardent as that of a connoisseur; and his understanding of the killer's modus operandi, something that cannot be the object of direct experience, is attained through the art of conjectural speculation, in a manner reminiscent of E. A. Poe's Auguste Dupin. In *Twin Peaks*' poetics of narrativity, though, the range of Events' relevancy is oddly magnified into a disproportionate spectrum of viable options, which includes sheer banality. Evidentiality and triviality are not the terms of a dichotomy, but collaborate as the apexes of a continuum that is entirely available for semiosis. The relevancy of empirical phenomena may be placed at any point of the continuum, and signification may occur along the whole spectrum. Think, for instance, of how mundane the Giant's three clues are: a man in a smiling bag (i.e., Jacques Renault in a body bag with an open zipper), owls not being what they seem (i.e., their being animal vessels to spirits from the Black Lodge), and a man pointing "without chemicals" (i.e., off-haloperidol Philip Gerard sensing BOB's presence inside the Great Northern Hotel). Or, as mentioned above, think of the piece of chewing gum that, in the Roadhouse confrontation scene in episode 17, allows Agent Cooper to automatically re-access his Black Lodge dream and finally hear what Laura had whispered in his ear in episode 3: "My father killed me".

This is not to exclude *Twin Peaks*' narrativity from the domain of the evidential paradigm. But evidentiality is not quite what it seems, here. Cooper's mission is not one of epistemological police. The cauterization of futility and inconsequentiality as dead ends in rational thinking is not among his tasks: his vision is rather one of epistemological ecology.[3] He is indeed a worshipper of (and an accomplice to) materiality's proactive encroachment on human affairs. He is the captivated disciple of trifling details, i.e., the weird, accidental, not quite necessarily symbolic circumstances that are the offspring of cosmic energies both microscopic and immeasurable. He, too, makes the transitivity and transactionality of perception

3 The resonance of Cooper's ecological vision with the indisputably farfetched Stop-Ghostwood motif later in season 2, as well as his falling in love with Annie Blackburne's "beautiful and peaceful" forest, might in fact go beyond these plot twists being the result of multi-authorial inconsistencies in the making of *Twin Peaks*.

and knowledge quite liable to jam. His attitude towards clues whose keyness depends from other than their facticity, as well as towards his immediate surroundings, is one of intrigued candidness, in which "sidetrips into sensuality" (Nochimson 1995: 149) are not a rare occurrence. Think of faint hints of Douglas firs in the air; "damn good" cups of "deep black joe" and cherry pies "that'll kill you"; a chickadee on a Dodge Dart; his exquisite morning zest, and his love of a town where a yellow traffic light still means you have to slow down, not speed up. Trademarks of the-man-of-sensibility aside, Cooper's attitude is one of compliance with the paradigm not of detection, but of revelation. His reply to Annie Blackburne in episode 26, as she confesses the outer world is like a foreign language to her, so that her poor vocabulary barely suffices to grasp how much she still ignores about it, speaks volumes about his proneness to overturn deduction in favour of epiphany. "Man, I would love to see the world through your eyes", he says. Indeed, Agent Cooper is a seer of things. He is not a hunter of the truth. He is no master of darkness. His mind is no searchlight scanning obscurity. The reverse rather happens: he lets himself be irradiated by the brightness – despite it not being the clarity – of anti-phenomenological cognitive contents. This is what literally happens in the Giant sequences, when a glowing cone of theatrical light introduces Cooper's mentor after his shooting at the Great Northern Hotel in episode 9, and at the Roadhouse in episodes 15 ("It is happening again") and 17, as the Giant returns Cooper's ring. His enchantment at these supernatural apparitions parallels his wonderment at how delicious the local patisserie is, or at how "beautiful and peaceful" Annie's resilient inner forest appears to him. Kyle MacLachlan's androgynous looks, with the hinted corporeal artificiality of his 1950s aplomb (see his monochromatic uniform and graphic slicked back hair), in fact help in typifying Cooper as the slightly disembodied human recipient of an impossible universal wisdom that physically infiltrates, inundates him (as electricity, water and wind also do in the show – albeit for different reasons).

Agent Cooper, mystic detective, is a *seer* of what goes on beyond the visibility of things. In a story of multiple possessions, he is the curious vessel of a hybrid epistemological style. As it were, his understanding of the Palmer case is actually based on three sets of clues, quite heterogeneous in nature. Empirical traces are firstly extracted from Laura's body by mock-Sherlockian pathologist Albert Rosenfeld, whose hard facts are not quite what is needed to see inside the murder. Indeed, although helped by Bureau guidelines and graced by a fair amount of serendipity and rational thinking (see his reading of Sheriff Truman's body language upon meeting Josie Packard), Agent Cooper's method is all about the heuristic power of visualization. In episode 2, he demonstrates a Tibetan investigation technique he derived from a dream of his about the exile and return of the Dalai Lama, based on a subconsciously acquired "mind-body coordination operating hand in hand with the deepest level of intuition". This vedic method consists in throwing rocks at empty bottles on a tree stump, while suspects' names are read aloud – and then seeing what happens, the assumption being that the detective's mind may subconsciously resonate with the secret life of objects, and function as a white page for messages drawn by the universe in the form of glass and rocks. (To detect dispatches from outer space, or the Lodges, is also the ultimate purpose of Project Bluebook.) In harmony with the all-embracing tolerance Cooper nurtures in regard to triviality, and with the method's aleatory ideation, one of the rocks hits Deputy Brennan's forehead. The last rock, associated with Leo Johnson, however breaks the glass. At this moment, Leo – one of the three men attending Laura and Ronnette's sex party before the murder – is the only suspect whose relationship with Laura Palmer is still unknown. His involvement in the case, undetectable by forensic analysis, is a clue revealed by Cooper's divinatory theatrics.

Secondly, Agent Cooper resorts to the synchronistic insight of his own precognitive dreams and visions. Despite their being involuntary and introspective, their meaning is not psychological but epistemological: they are the result of telepathic connections with Sarah Palmer, Laura, MIKE and BOB, and clairvoyance (namely, Cooper foresees his future: being trapped inside the Black Lodge for twenty-five years). These dreams and visions are non-individual, non-experiential sources of trans-temporal and trans-spatial knowledge

which the subject is physical host to – a gnostic intimation coming to Lynch from Hindu Vedas and Native American folklore, rather than Jungian theory (Nochimson 2016). These dreams and visions Cooper calls in episode 17, for lack of a better word, "magic". In his Black Lodge dream (episode 3), an actual re-dreaming of Laura Palmer's former dream ("I'll see you again in twenty-five years"), Laura and the Man from Another Place produce a second set of *a priori* clues, i.e., Laura's arms bending back, a gum that will come back in style, birds singing and music playing in a cabin in the woods. These clues actually help Cooper disclose the sequence of Events leading up to the end of the sex party at Jacques Renault's red-curtained cabin, insights into which first came from the Tibetan method. Finding out what happened after that, when an unknown third man took the girls to the abandoned train carriage (as elucidated in episode 9, with the abovementioned 120-second doughnuts-and-coffee dolly sequence), needs a further, more powerful set of epiphanic clues. These are the three riddles provided by the Giant in episode 9, which enshrine what has happened in the darkness of the past and what will happen in the obscurity of the future. They will bestow upon Agent Cooper the cross-semiotic gift of visual temporalization. From this point in the investigation on, and until the anagnorisis in episode 17, Cooper will be illuminated by his mystic adjutant. The light emanating from the Black Lodge is in fact only for the damned and the gifted to see.

For the intuitive and fragmentary knowledge that Agent Cooper gathers from dreams and visions is presented to him in the visual semiotic. He contemplates past, present and future by means of blindsight, i.e., the capacity to perceive things visually, despite lacking the actual phenomenological experience (Holt 2003: 1). This gift is shared by other characters, who show curious degrees of insight into the secret life of things, thus facilitating Cooper's mission, especially as regards the Giant's second, most enigmatic clue. Think of Major Briggs, who is in touch with woods, owls and UFOs (although his knowledge is classified); the Lady's Log (who "saw something that night" and "has a message for you") and Deputy Hawk, whose Native American heritage senses something uncanny in the woods.

In a place where things are either too many, or too few; displaced, lost or miscontextualized; or arranged in perplexing patterns and prone to take on anomalous degrees of empirical agency, it takes a different type of semiotic literacy to understand what is going on than the Sherlockian narrative skills typical of the evidential paradigm. The legibility, if any, of *Twin Peaks*' Events does not imply a secret alphabet to decipher and back-translate into the discreteness of verbal codification. It takes a cross-semiotic cognitive style to interpret this oddity, one that incorporates the affordances of visual language: coexistence, contiguousness, synchronicity. Agent Cooper *sees* what other detectives *read* from clues. He configures the linkages among Events by way of grasping them together as juxtaposed, coexistent, in space. Only afterwards does he verbally expose their chronological and causative development, and only to the benefit of unaware characters like Sheriff Truman, Dr Hayward or Sarah Palmer. In systemic-functional terms, he cross-codifies Narrative (or Transactional) processes by means of Relational-Existential structures (Halliday 2002: 118; Kress, Van Leeuwen 1996: 76), thus turning a series of processes (i.e., Events) into the juxtaposition of (attributive, identifying and existential) visual systems.

Admittedly, Agent Cooper's early reaction to the Black Lodge dream in episode 3 is one of straight rational pursuit. "Break the code, solve the crime", he says over breakfast to the Sheriff and Lucy Moran, as if the clues from the dream were some encryption to be extracted from the visual framework it had paranormally been encoded in, and resemiotized in a linear sequence of verbal signs. In fact, as more poignant clues come forth, more and more reliance is conferred to intuitive spatialization. Two episodes later, Cooper debunks the idea of verbal language being the optimal tool for understanding the clues yielded by his dream. As he tells Sheriff Truman, "in the heat of the investigative pursuit the shortest distance between two points is not necessarily a straight line". Visual language, that is, does not obey the straightness of spatial sequentiality or temporal linearity, but contiguousness and synchronicity. Later on, in episode 27, as he puts together the three thirds of a love poem sent by Windom Earle to Donna Hayward, Shelly Johnson and Audrey Horne, Agent Cooper

has an intimation that seemingly unrelated Events, such as Leo Johnson's disappearance, Windom Earle's crimes and the discovery of a petroglyph at Owl Cave, are not in fact disparate circumstances, but parts of a configurative pattern that he is required to grasp and observe in spatial, rather than temporal, terms. Despite logic dictating "that these investigations be considered separate entities", he explains to Sheriff Truman, "I believe otherwise. I believe that these mysteries are complementary verses of the same song. Now I cannot hear it yet, but I can feel it, and that is enough for me to proceed". The concepts of spatial configuration and visual patterning are key to Cooper's auditory metaphor, for we *listen* to a song in its temporal sequentiality, "as it moves from beginning to end", but as soon as the whole of it "is in our minds", the coexistence of its juxtaposed parts becomes apparent, and "we *see* what it means" (Mitchell 1980: 554, emphasis added). Voicing Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle as she coyly woos Agent Cooper, well-read Annie Blackburne spells out the heuristic underpinnings of spatialization and visualization – albeit via the acknowledgement of its limitations: "What we observe in nature is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning". The puzzling epistemological salience of Cooper's investigative style lies, in other words, in its power to conceptualise and systematise the functioning of as yet unknown, and perhaps forever unknowable, complex phenomena, which dialectically offer themselves as epiphanic gifts to the beholder's eye and mind. That is to say, of whatever nature it may be, experimental, paranormal or supernatural, cognition is revealed as an eminently spatialized meaning-making process.

The structural syntax of *Twin Peaks*' narrativity thus appears to be the offspring of cross-semiotization between the temporality of Narrative processes and the spatiality of Conceptual structures. For not only is the processuality of Events apprehended by Agent Cooper in terms of visual language, but the disentangling of the mystery's temporal intricacies takes place in the synchronicity of spatial configuration. It is indeed only in the Black Lodge sequence in season 2 finale, as the paradox of "the darkness of future past" where "one chants out between two worlds" becomes literal, that the case is

truly solved. Agent Cooper enters the Black Lodge, and with it Laura Palmer's dream about it, as well as his own dream about Laura's dream. In a space that does not even materially exist, he physically enters multiple simultaneous temporal dimensions. In the realm of pure spatiality, where boundaries are dissolved between temporal planes, individual consciences, states of materiality – living and dead, human and non-human, sentient and inert, potential and actual, animate and inanimate, liquid, solid and oily – he understands, he *sees* not just the circumstances of the Palmer case, but the nature of time itself. No matter how painful it is for *Twin Peaks* devotees to think of Agent Cooper locked inside the Black Lodge for twenty-five years, while his doppelgänger takes his place in the real world; or how agonizing it will be to follow Good Cooper as he shifts into Dougie Jones in the first seventeen episodes of *The Return* (2017). At the end of season 2, Agent Cooper is where he should be. He is in the spatialization of time. Beyond life and death, good and bad; beyond the space-time dichotomy. He is where everything is in being, forever existing and happening at the same time – where narrative connections and visual configurations no longer *matter*.

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