

Spectres of the Black Lodge: An Engagement with Hauntology and Spectres Through *Twin Peaks*

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The 1990s David Lynch and Mark Frost's crime drama *Twin Peak* and its reboot *Twin Peaks: The Revival* display a form of storytelling unique even in the age of serialized television. The story progresses in a way that does not allow the viewer the necessary knowledge to comprehend what is occurring on screen. Location, time, dimension, reality and other fundamental indicators of setting are abandoned. *Twin Peaks: The Revival* continues the series after the events of the original series saw FBI Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) becoming trapped in "The Black Lodge."¹ The Black Lodge exists as both a spiritual and interdimensional location. Cooper was tasked with investigating the murder of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), a popular high schooler who came under the influence of "Bob" (Frank Silva), a Black Lodge entity. Cooper enters the lodge and pursues his Doppelgänger (Evil Cooper), but Evil Cooper escapes the lodge trapping Cooper in the spiritual realm. *The Revival* revolves around Cooper's attempt to return to the "real" world as Evil Cooper wreaks havoc with no clear goal or endpoint.

What makes *Twin Peaks* such a compelling program is that it continuously forces the viewer to question what is occurring on-screen while simultaneously refusing to answer these same questions. As with any great mystery story, the viewer must attempt to discover and solve the puzzle. In *The Revival*, the viewer is prompted to consider the following questions: what are Evil Cooper's intentions? What is the Black Lodge? What are the boundaries between dimensions? The *Revival* concludes with Cooper and Laura being transported to another dimension without their knowledge as different versions of themselves, named Richard and Linda respectively. Thinking that they have reversed the effects of Laura's murder, they return to Laura's family

¹Lynch, *Twin Peaks*, Season 2, "Beyond Life and Death."

home where, to their shock, a new family resides. The series ends with Laura's piercing scream cutting off electricity to the home upon realizing that they are now trapped outside of their reality.

What can be said of the fixation on objective answers that surround the entire run of *Twin Peaks*? Are there narrative norms that predicate what is and what is not expected to be revealed to an audience? This article will apply Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology to the story of *Twin Peaks*. Hauntology for Derrida is a way of viewing events and ideas where temporality itself disappears. Derrida describes time as repetition; "repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time, since the singularity of any first time, makes of it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a hauntology."² I will argue that *Twin Peaks* is an example of Derrida's hauntology and the ways that spectral images are used in the show allows the viewer to see impact of how television and other forms of media are consumed. To apply hauntology to the format of television, I will examine the work of Mark Fisher who pioneered the practice of reading tele-media through this lens.³ Fisher saw hauntology on film as being represented through shots of empty landscapes that make the viewer feel a sense of unease. In looking at how media is structured in the procedural format it becomes clear that shows such as *Twin Peaks* challenge the comfortable feelings of resolution and structure, instead creating an engagement with media that is unsatisfying and inherently strange.

To understand how Derrida comes to use the concept of hauntology, one must go back to the inspiration for his book, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. In the opening of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, he writes "A spectre⁴ is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism. All the Powers of Old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre."⁵ Communism, for Marx at the time of writing, was an ever-present entity. It was not housed in a physical institution, but

²Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.

³Mark Fisher, "What Is Hauntology?," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 66, No. 1 (2012): 21.

⁴The usage of specter with an "re" as opposed to "er" denotes the intended usage in the respective citation.

⁵Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, Second Edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 245.

rather it was becoming a way of feeling that seemingly rose out of the ground and from the sky; communism for Marx was thus spectral. It is this spectral element of Communism that leads to what Marx terms a “holy alliance,” where those with a vested interest in maintaining the current order put aside differences in order to achieve a common goal. While Communism in Marx’s life was recognizably constituted this way, after his death there were many instances of the specter of Communism emerging in states around the world. The most prominent of these Communist states was the Soviet Union.

It was the collapse of the Soviet Union that’s peaked Derrida’s interest in the notion of specters. In his book *Specters of Marx*, Derrida articulates a fascination with the fall of the Soviet Union and the supposed death of Communism, where an ideology that is purported to have been beaten by capitalism appears to still drive much of the global political discourse. There is an inherent “theatricalization” that emerges in much of Marx’s later work which arises out of a respect for the work of William Shakespeare.⁶ Marx’s admiration for Shakespeare pushes Derrida to look at the playwright’s famous work *Hamlet*, where the ghost of the titular character’s father returns from the dead to warn his son that his uncle is his murderer. It is the specter of the king returning, influencing the play by being simultaneously alive and dead that makes it hauntological. Derrida contends that hauntological specters are inherently theatrical, arguing that Marx’s portrayal of communism in *The Communist Manifesto* is that of a backstage presence which is emergent and “begins by coming back.”⁷ With this theatricalization Marx is setting the stage for a battle that the enemies of Communism cannot win, as they are unable to stop something that comes of its own volition and cannot be materially located. It is Marx’s understanding of Communism as ever emergent that pushes Derrida to apply this reading to the fall of the Soviet Union.

Looking at the specter or ghost, Derrida proposes the question “What is a ghost? What is the effectivity or the presence of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up?”⁸ In response to this question, Derrida introduces the concept of “Hauntology,” an idea that plays with the

⁶Fisher, “What Is Hauntology?” 21.

⁷Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11.

⁸Author’s original emphasis. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10.

concept of ontology as a way to connect the physical world with a presence that simultaneously exists and ends. The purpose of ontology is to attempt to understand what it means “to *be*, to be *real*, *actual* or *present*.”⁹ Ontological understandings establish the parameters through which we interact with the physical. When Derrida introduces Hauntology, it is not to suggest that ontology does not exist or is useless. Rather, it is that ontology fails to address the ideas and concepts that do not have a physical permanence, as Derrida explains

To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration.¹⁰

For Derrida, ontology is a magical creation that exists through its “exorcism” of the self; in its critique of hauntology, ontology attempts to critique itself. When analyzing Marx through Derrida’s work, Pierre Macherey argues that it is necessary not to reaffirm work as if it is finished, but rather to look back upon it and affirm the significance of its ideas.¹¹ This understanding is important as it recognizes Marx’s work as being materialist but allows one to expand it into the realm of the spectral, away from the ontological understanding. By separating the historical materialism of Marx from the ideology of Communism, one is able to engage with Communism outside of its physical embodiments, such as the Soviet Union.

To properly engage with hauntology in this context, it is important to look at one of the most famous (or infamous) works to arise out of the collapse of the Soviet Union: Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*. Following World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in an ideological conflict known as the Cold War, with Liberal Democracy and Communism being pitted against each other. In *The End of History*, Fukuyama argues that the fall of the

⁹Dale Jacquette, *Ontology*, Central Problems of Philosophy (Montreal: MQUP, 2002), 2.

¹⁰Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 202.

¹¹Pierre Macherey, “Marx Dematerialized, or the Spirit of Derrida,” in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 19.

Soviet Union, represented the end of history with Communism's collapse allowing Liberal Democracy to reign as the dominant global ideology.¹² Fukuyama conceives of history in the tradition of G.W.F. Hegel, where history unfolds in a dialectical movement of contradictions that eventually achieves synthesis. For Hegel, world history is teleological, meaning that it has an endpoint which "represents the development of the (absolute) spirit's consciousness of its own freedom and of the consequent realisation of this freedom."¹³ While Hegel never makes clear what this endpoint looks like or if it is even possible, Fukuyama saw the fall of the Soviet Union as a realization of the absolute spirit through Liberal Democracy. This understanding of the end of the Cold War comes into direct clash with Derrida's understanding of that same event. While not directly referencing Fukuyama, it is clear that Derrida is dismissive of this viewpoint when he writes:

As for the sleight-of-hand trick between history and nature, between historical empiricity and teleological transcendentality, between the supposed empirical reality of the event and the absolute ideality of the liberal telos, it can only be undone on the basis of a new thinking or a new experience of the event, and of another logic of its relation to the phantomatic.¹⁴

Here Derrida is arguing that hauntology allows for a dismissal of one dominant ideality, "liberal telos," as outside of the material reality, which for Fukuyama is represented by the fall of the Communism. In his compilation book of three interviews entitled *Positions*, Derrida states "I have attempted to systematize a deconstructive critique precisely of the authority of meaning, as the *transcendental signified* or as *telos*."¹⁵ Derrida does not think that spectral beings are themselves problematic, rather he is critical of bodies that claim to be the source of absolute authority and truth. Therefore, Derrida sees ideologies like

¹²Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), xii.

¹³Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 138.

¹⁴Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 86.

¹⁵Author's original emphasis. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/P/bo24847338.html>.

Communism as always having some semblance of appearance, while definitive ends as understood by Fukuyama do not have universal meaning as the ideas themselves both endure and end. In his work on hauntology, Liam Sprod argues that the teleological approach to history is inherently problematic. Sprod suggests that the end of history is not reflective of an empirical end but rather: “The specific end of history is only a manifestation of the deeper problems of ends themselves, temporality and the future, and it is through addressing this essential ontological problem that the path out of the end of history can be found.”¹⁶ Fukuyama understands ideology in binaries, as either being true or false, meaning that the possibility of spectral ideology is impossible thus limiting the transcendence of events and ideas. Fukuyama seeks in *The End of History* to isolate an event, where Derrida locates the event as never ending or beginning.

The theorist that has brought Derrida’s concept of hauntology into the present consciousness was Mark Fisher. In his book, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Fisher applies hauntology to his view of culture in the post-1970s neoliberal era. Fisher understands hauntology through “the spectre understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing.”¹⁷ Any attempt to locate the hauntological specter in a physical entity fails in that it does not account for “reverberant events.” in the psyche.¹⁸ Returning to Communism, hauntology finds Communism not as a singular event or ideology, but as a series of events that we simultaneously engage with but have no connection to. However, Fisher argues that out of the fall of Communism Fukuyama’s vision of capitalism emerged, which Fisher terms “capitalist realism.”¹⁹ Fisher sees the haunting not within a continuation of Communism’s presence, but rather in that out of the disappearance of the specter of Communism, capitalism has changed. It is not that one sees the dominance of Liberal Democracy confirmed, but rather capitalism was able to grow into something alien to that which existed in the Cold

¹⁶Liam Sprod, “Against All Ends: Hauntology, Aesthetics, Ontology,” *3:AM Magazine*, May 11, 2012, <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/against-all-ends-hauntology-aesthetics-ontology/>.

¹⁷Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, E-Book (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014).

¹⁸Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*.

¹⁹ Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*.

War. This reading of Fisher allows for two examinations of hauntology; first, the influence that specter can have, and second, what the disappearance of that specter creates.

Following Derrida, I contend that ideas and concepts do not end, rather, they are consistently haunting in that they are never fully tangible or visible. It is this haunting that one is driven to study and engage with these concepts. For Derrida, hauntology is directly tied to media. He identifies a “frontier” between public and private life, the media, in which he suggests the limit of politics can be found.²⁰ He defines media as “news, the press, telecommunications, techno-tele-discursivity, techno-tele- iconicity.”²¹ In this way, *Twin Peaks* can be conceived as a medium through which politics is directly engaged through a new imagining of the frontier between public and private life. Consequently, it is important to view *Twin Peaks* through a hauntological lens. *Twin Peaks* as a whole is haunted by the specter of Laura Palmer, her translucent visage is even presented to the audience during the opening titles of *The Revival*. The plot of *Twin Peaks* continues to have less and less to do with Laura Palmer as the workings of the two lodges become clearer. The characters of the show, along with the audience, are initially driven by a desire to find out what happened to her, but what anchors them to the show are the peculiarities and mysticism that surrounds the events of the series.

Employing a hauntological perspective to *Twin Peaks*, it is evident that Laura Palmer is not the only specter that can be examined. In fact, the specter of *Twin Peaks* is not one particular entity. Rather, drawing on Fisher, it is an absence that creates a presence that one is enamoured by because the specter is no longer visible but rather points to futures that never occurred.²² *Twin Peaks*' use of specters demonstrates how haunting characters can become a catalyst for the emergence of a new reality, without the character being physically present. Take for example the specter of Laura Palmer who appears on numerous occasions to Cooper during his visits to the Black Lodge. The apparition that Cooper sees is not the real Laura Palmer, but the cousin of the Man From Another Place. This quasi-Laura Palmer represents her specter. Additionally, Laura Palmer represents a kind of haunting in that she is

²⁰Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 62–63.

²¹Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 63.

²²Mark Fisher, “The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology,” *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* 5, no. 2 (October 24, 2013): 45.

still responsible for the instigation of the story, but also largely absent from *Twin Peaks*. This is demonstrated through several instances where she whispers into Cooper's ear evidence that the viewer is not privy to, nor which Cooper can remember. The absence occurs where the image of Laura as an innocent teenager the people of Twin Peaks knew, was replaced by that of a troubled girl, who unbeknownst to them, was being influenced by the entities of the Black Lodge. Laura Palmer can be seen as the hauntological specter in that she influences the narrative of the show both through the appearance and absence of her presence.

What draws audiences to *Twin Peaks* is that it disrupts the notion of clarity and comfort that exists in conventional television. Lynch has constructed a narrative and employs a way of filming that prevents the viewer from being comfortable; even the simplest of scenes creates for the audience a sense of uneasiness that is not rooted in horror or suspense. This feeling is epitomized through the re-emergence in the return of original series character Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn) and her new husband Charlie (Clark Middleton). Prior to her re-emergence, Audrey's last appearance was in the season two finale where she was in a building that exploded, leaving her fate unknown.²³ Audrey's return is structured around a story that was already in progress, and none of the context that Audrey and Charlie discuss is rooted in the viewers knowledge. Similarly, other characters make reference to a character, Billy, who the audience never sees or understands beyond rumours off handed comments.

Audrey Horne's appearance seemingly has little to do with the main plot, yet by giving her exposure the audience becomes feverish to understand her relevance. At the end of her story arc, Audrey becomes trapped in an empty void and is never seen or referenced again. The possibility of Audrey's arc being that of polite fan service is rejected in favour of speculation. The speculation as to Audrey's involvement in the storyline disregards her position as a specter in the plot. Audrey is a specter, though, in that she is haunting the plot of the new series by reminding the audience of her impact on the original series. In this way, the audience has no way of knowing what events depicted are real, as the narrative structure of the show is unreliable. The events of Audrey's timeline work to provide familiarity and nostalgia while simultaneously provoking feelings of discomfort as a familiar character is in a place

²³David Lynch, *Twin Peaks: The Revival* (Showtime, 2017), "Part 12."

unrecognizable both to the audience and to herself. It is this attempt to revisit a specter of the past that shapes the viewers engagement with *Twin Peaks*.

Perhaps the scene that best represents hauntology in the show is when FBI Director Gordon Cole (David Lynch) recalls a mysterious dream. In Part 14 of *The Revival* Cole recounts “another Monica Belluccidream.”²⁴ His character recalls:

I was in Paris on a case. Monica called and asked me to meet her at a certain café, she said she needed to talk to me. When we met at the café Cooper was there (positioned to Cole’s right and behind in a standing position), but I couldn’t see his face. Monica was very pleasant, she had brought friends, we all had a coffee. And then she said the ancient phrase ‘we are like the dreamer, who dreams and then lives inside the dream.’ I told her I understood, and then she said ‘But who is the dreamer?’ A very powerful uneasy feeling came over me. Monica looked past me, and indicated to me to look back at something that was happening there. I turned and looked (back to where Cooper was standing). I saw myself, I saw myself from long ago in the old Philadelphia offices. Listening to Cooper telling me he was worried about a dream he had... and that was the day Phillip Jeffries (David Bowie) appeared, and didn’t appear. And while Jeffries was apparently there, he raised his arm and pointed at Cooper and asked me ‘Who do you think that is there?’²⁵

This monologue from Cole elucidates a specter that had been with him for years. The scene Cole describes is from a 1992 prequel film entitled *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*.²⁶ When “the long lost” Phillip Jeffries returns, both in the event itself and through the dream, Cole is reminded of his past as part of the FBI’s paranormal investigation unit and the mysterious events that led up to the murder of Laura Palmer.²⁷

²⁴ Monica Bellucci is an actress and is friends with David Lynch.

²⁵ Lynch, *Twin Peaks: The Revival*, “Part 14.”

²⁶ David Lynch, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992; New Line Cinema), Television.

²⁷ Lynch, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*.

As well, the spectral image of Cooper looms in the background as Cole enjoys coffee with Monica Bellucci. At this point in the series Cole has yet to reconnect with the normal Cooper as he is still trapped in between the Black Lodge and 'reality.' Cole is remembering that Cooper's shadow has loomed over the series events since he went missing, and even though he has not been involved in the story, he still believes in and welcomes the influence of Cooper into his dream revelation. It is through Cole's conversation with the ghostly image of Monica Bellucci that he is able to discern that there has been a spectral element driving the case that he had been simultaneously unaware of.

Beyond just being an example of hauntology, how *Twin Peaks* is understood can be tied directly to what is viewed as comfortable in contemporary popular culture. Audiences have been trained to view programming and engage with this type of story through procedural narratives. For media studies scholar Chandler Harriss, "procedurals filter the ratioinative action through characters who actively investigate the mystery for the viewer, following procedures that are prescribed by their professions."²⁸ Procedurals are not limited to police investigations, they are best identified as following the day to day routine of professionals from doctors to cowboys. Harriss applies the work of folklorist Vladimir Propp to four successful cop shows: *Law and Order*, *Homicide: Life on the Street*, *The X-Files* and *CSI*. Harriss' altered method unfolds in stages with subsequent sub-moves, where there is some freedom as to what steps are taken but in the end it will still progress in the same fashion until the ultimate resolution of the "Perpetrator being removed from society."²⁹ As well, each archetype of character in a procedural must stay within its own sphere, where victims are victims, investigators investigate, and so forth.³⁰ For Harriss, the structure of the procedural must stay consistent throughout; the entirety of each episode and the show as a whole must follow a set formula.³¹ As a story, *Twin Peaks* begins as a standard procedural, but as the show progresses it becomes clear that it is not restricted to the norms of procedurals. *Twin Peaks* only adheres to the first aspect of a procedural,

²⁸Chandler Harriss, "Policing Propp: Toward a Textualist Definition of the Procedural Drama," *Journal of Film and Video* 60, no. 1 (2008): 43.

²⁹Harriss, "Policing Propp," 56.

³⁰Harriss, "Policing Propp," 46.

that there is a victim and the crime will be investigated. There are aspects of the procedural throughout its run, but they are out of order and are satiated by explorations outside of the procedural. There is nothing normal about what occurs after the investigation begins, as the investigators never appear to be in control. The hauntological specter of the Black Lodge determines what unfolds. *The Revival* ends with no clear resolution as it appears that Cooper has once again become trapped in a reality he does not understand and no definitive proof is found that the series villain, Bob, has been defeated.

What can be gleaned from this knowledge of hauntological experience? How one interprets the world around them is largely determined by what they see and the feedback loop that is formed out of this interaction. *Twin Peaks* acts as a means for one to envision how concepts can become hauntological through the use of specters in its narrative. It is both representative of the concept of hauntology, and how hauntology can create affect on a viewer's experience. What Derrida's hauntology provides is a sense of legitimacy of concepts even if they have lost their physical form. The Soviet Union has collapsed, but its specter can be seen in two ways: as a consistent presence in the world that is necessarily shaped by actions taken by the former entity, or the gap through which the disappearance of its embodied form was filled by a globally dominant form of capitalism. Chasing that which is obscure and unknowable is unsatisfactory; rather there needs to be an engagement with the things that make one believe that the unknown is a puzzle that can be solved. The hauntological specter of procedural forms of television makes the audience believe that there has to be a definable set of conclusions. Popular culture has conditioned audiences to search for clues and when there is an outright absence of clarity, audiences tend to express panic and discomfort. The potentials for this hauntological understanding of modern popular culture can be expanded to other domains, where the desire to return to sunny pasts or to go toward completely new futures blind one from the realities that always existent specters create. The strange and sublime experience that is *Twin Peaks* is not an anomaly of popular culture, but a raised alert to the ever-present specters of television's pasts, presents and futures.

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