Counterimages of TV Fiction: Towards an Apophatic Aesthetic of Contemporary Seriality in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The conclusion of *Twin Peaks*' third season (also known as *Twin Peaks: The Return*) marks a pivotal moment for investigating contemporary television narratives through a negative or apophatic aesthetic lens, inspired by theological concepts of denial and mysticism. This study explores how modern digital serial storytelling embodies themes of negativity, drawing on a hermeneutic methodology informed by iconographic analysis and post-Heideggerian philosophy, particularly referencing Giorgio Agamben. By integrating insights from diverse artistic disciplines such as plastic arts, dance, and religious mysticism, the analysis deepens our understanding of narrative constructions in series like *Twin Peaks: The Return*, and *True Detective*. This interdisciplinary approach illuminates television's engagement with apophatic aesthetics and invites critical reflection on the intersection of digital seriality, theological discourse, and artistic expression within contemporary media culture.

Keyword: TV Fiction, Negativity; Apophatic; Digital; David Lynch.

Introduction

Among all the images engendered by contemporary seriality, the ending of the third season of *Twin Peaks* (2017) constitutes a critical juncture. This conclusion serves as a critical locus for interrogating serial narrative forms, grounded in a negative or apophatic aesthetic – a theological concept denoting a mystical approach to the divine characterized by negation or denial (from the Greek ἀποφάναι, meaning "to say no" or "to deny"). Lynch forges a unique pact with the viewer that eschews reliance on conventional closed scripting or familiar elements from Elizabethan drama or Arthurian narrative prevalent in contemporary television fiction. Instead, Lynch's approach revolves around an unprecedented paradigm within seriality: conceptualizing each episode as a visit to the artist's studio. The treatment of recurring motifs frames the sequences as canvases, sketches, or choreographies that evoke a sensation akin to recent aesthetic forms grounded in gesture, trace, investigation, and montage of alternate, fractured temporalities – such as Israel Galván's choreography *La fiesta* (2017).

Parallel to *La fiesta*'s expansion, deviation, and rhythmic, gestural, and thematic variation in *Twin Peaks* (2017) serve as mechanisms accompanying a strategy of inhabiting bodies and voids through explorations and "counter-molds" (Didi-Huberman, 2006). This constitutes a study in subtraction, elimination, and continual metamorphosis. The concept of cleaving or breaking ground, inherent in canonical flamenco dance that Galván seeks to reinvent – *jondura* alluding to the primordial gesture of delving – is also the impetus

guiding Lynch in his pursuit of the shock of tearing, the will to create rupture. Over the span of twenty-seven years between the first and last seasons of *Twin Peaks*, akin to Galván's pursuit, there emerges a temporal dance fraught with peril. The renowned quote from bullfighter Luis Miguel Dominguín, "Death is a square meter spinning around the bullring" aptly characterizes the works of Galván, Lynch, the final canvases of Rothko, or the dialogues of Anglo-Indian artist Anish Kapoor with the concept of wound and dynamic void.

A recent work by Kapoor comprises a dual sculpture situated at the entrance of the Monte Sant'Angelo metro station in Naples, within the precincts of the Federico II University near San Paolo Park in Fuorigrotta. One structure resembles a gargantuan mouth, suggestive of a uterus, with an inverted funnel shape and a reddish metal surface overlaid with rust. The second sculpture, resembling an externalized organic form with a reflective appearance, acts as a counterpole capable of intensifying the depth of the descending mouth, the station of Line 7 linking the Cumana and Circumflegrea lines. Even in their nomenclature, reverberations echo the presence of a living volcanic subterrane – the Campi Flegrei, encompassing Vesuvius – and the legacy of a tradition that accesses the underworld centred around Lake Avernus, immortalized by Virgil as the mouth of hell. Descending, delving, and puncturing are verbs that accompany the objective of reinscribing narrative, rhythmic, and visual forms within an expansive milieu, addressing both the negative, apophatic trajectory guiding Lynch and a broader comprehension of the manifestations of negativity demanded by contemporary television seriality in portraying domesticity and community: anger, horror, and the cyclical nature of evil.

1. An apophatic aesthetic of television fiction

The closing spectre in film history has perennially been the taboo of resurrection and the potential reversal of death since the inception of cinema. Conversely, the dominant spectre throughout the evolution of serial storytelling persists, even deep into the 21st century, in the disappearance that accompanies death, its starkness amidst the perpetual expansion of the narrative. In the concluding chapter of *Twin Peaks*' third season, *The Return*, Cooper (Kyle McLachlan), reminiscent of navigating the infinite curve of the figure-eight – symbolized by the Möbius strip revealed to him by the absent agent Phillip Jeffries (David Bowie) – endeavours to rewrite history by resurrecting Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), whose death catalysed the series in 1990. Cooper ventures into the liminal space of the red room within the Black Lodge and revisits the night of Laura's demise, previously depicted in the feature film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (David Lynch, 1992). Comparable to a character from Kafka, Cooper materializes before Laura just before her fatal encounter with Leo (Eric DaRe), Jack Renault (Walter Olkewicz), and Ronnette Pulasky (Phoebe Augustine), moments before succumbing to her father Leland's (Ray Wise) murderous hands. The recurring query posed by the one-armed man, "Is it future or is it past?" persists as Cooper grasps Laura's hand and guides her through the woods toward an alternate destiny.

"We're going home," asserts Cooper, and with this declaration, the transition from monochrome to colour ensues, accompanied by Angelo Badalamenti's musical

composition from the inaugural season, bursting forth into a fervent refrain. Through parallel editing, the past commences its reconfiguration. Resembling the pilot episode and twenty-seven years later, the scene with Jocelyn Packard (Joan Chen) before the mirror recurs, yet Pete Martell (Jack Nance) no longer discovers Laura's shrouded body by the lakeshore. Nonetheless, this proves illusory, for in Lynch's cinematic realm, each awakening from a nightmare entails a re-encounter with the horror of reality. The miracle remains elusive, and the envisioned return home – perhaps the quintessential motif in contemporary serial narratives, spanning from *Lost* (2004-2010) to *Westworld* (2016-2022) – derails along a forsaken highway. As Laura vanishes into the nocturnal abyss, her mother Sara (Grace Zabriskie) strikes the portrait of her daughter. Between the scream emanating from the shadows and the concluding one of the series, a new pursuit emerges, defined by the interplay between the episodic and the serial.

The roadside ditch along a secondary road, marked by milestone 430, signifies the threshold to a new historical loop within a landscape reminiscent of Alamogordo, New Mexico. In *Part 8 – Gotta Light?* (Ep. 03x08) this setting explores the convergence between the negativity of evil and the inaugural atomic explosion test in 1945. Cooper embarks on a solitary odyssey, making a pivotal stop at Judy's diner – an abbreviation referring to the malevolent entity pursued by the FBI – where he encounters a waitress named Carrie Page, portrayed by Sheryl Lee, the same actress who embodies Laura Palmer. Convinced that Carrie is Laura in a world shaped by his own interventions, Cooper escorts her to Twin Peaks. However, upon arriving at the Palmer house, they discover that it no longer belongs to the Palmers; the residents there do not recognize the name, and Carrie herself has no recollection.

Cooper stoops and moves with the slowness of Dougie, his burlesque and slapstick alter ego, who has served as the conduit for Cooper's return from the timeless purgatory of the Black Lodge over several episodes. "What year is it?" he queries. Carrie responds with a gut-wrenching scream, echoing the one heard in the dark woods. The lights briefly blaze brightly within the house before plunging into darkness. As darkness descends, *Twin Peaks* – its entire universe – folds inward upon itself, returning to its origins in a monumental loop.

Since its inception in 1990, the debut season of *Twin Peaks* has served as a cornerstone, influencing the forms and mechanisms of serial television fiction produced to date and setting a melancholic tone that foreshadows the broader narratives of subsequent serials. Likewise, the final image of the third season of Twin Peaks offers a vantage point from which to scrutinize contemporary television seriality: it evokes an unattainable return home, resonating with series like *Mad Men* (2007-2015), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), or *The Leftovers* (2014-2017); it delves into the existential horror of death within serial space; and it challenges a central theme in contemporary television fiction – the language of negativity.

A fundamental aspect of Lynch's cinematic approach involves scrutinizing a detail that disrupts the apparent tranquillity of the whole, exploring the disparity between the panoramic shot and the minute fragment, between the immaculate lawn and the decomposing ear. Conversely, the episode *Part 1 – My Log Has a Message for You* (Ep. 03x01) of *Twin Peaks* unfolds within an absent exterior, flattened after a twenty-seven-year hiatus. Instead of the whispering firs, the buzz of the Packard sawmill, and Badalamenti's music that characterized the initial seasons, there is now the silence of an expansive world.

As Lynch suggests in his meditative work, *Catching the Big Fish* (2006), he understands that to reveal something, one must first create a void. Therefore, the season commences by introducing – in this world of *The Open* (*Das Offene*), as described by Rilke in his eighth *Duineser Elegien* (*Duino Elegy*, 1923) – the ultimate embodiment of potential: a vast, empty acrylic cube.

Similar to a Faraday cage, the acrylic cube occupies a Manhattan penthouse, serving as a focal point alongside Philadelphia, Las Vegas, and Buenos Aires, which collectively constitute the expanded geography of the series. In a meticulously orchestrated ritual, multiple surveillance cameras continuously capture the empty cube while a young man stands guard, anticipating the emergence first of an evil presence and then of Agent Cooper from the timeless abyss of the Black Lodge. The spatial emptiness achieved through successive denials, as elucidated by sculptor Jorge Oteiza (2003) in his artistic endeavours, represents a process of liberation and asceticism – or, in terms of the negative theology espoused by the German mystic Meister Eckhart, a means to give birth to the "fruit of nothingness" within the vacant recesses of the soul. Here, the concept of abandonment (*Abgeschiedenheit*), fostering annihilation and the incarnation of God in man (*kenosis*), is as vital as the breakthrough (*Durchbruch*) that reveals the ground (*Grûnt*) where the transcendental encounter may transpire.

David Lynch's entire body of work is defined by the notion of the breach and the opening of thresholds between worlds (Pintor Iranzo, 2017), often epitomized by specific gestures enacted by the characters. In the earlier seasons of *Twin Peaks*, Sheryl Lee's deliberate hand movements conveyed profound meaning, and Lynch himself, in the role of Gordon Cole, interpreted an FBI agent's gestures in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* as a means of accessing an alternate reality. In the third season, both Laura and her mother perform symbolic acts of self-exposure, removing their own faces at symmetrical moments to reveal an abyss (*Abgrûnt*) of light and darkness. Moreover, numerous vortexes materialize, leading towards the heterotopic "other place" of the Black Lodge, evoking the Silencio cabaret from *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) and the radiator from *Eraserhead* (David Lynch, 1977).

In contrast to Lynch's last feature film before the third season of the series, *Inland Empire* (2006), *Twin Peaks: The Return* evokes a return to the sacred. For instance, Dougie (Kyle McLachlan) embodies not only a childlike and aphasic version of Cooper, characterized by slapstick reminiscent of Jacques Tati, but also personifies a prodigious figure of the holy fool. Similar to Lynch's recent paintings, the canvas tends to unveil a translucent realm beyond, a departure from the abject experiences depicted in his earlier black canvases – a technique previously explored by comic book artists like Frank Miller and Bill Sienkewicz in *Elektra: Assassin* (1986-87), Grant Morrison and Dave McKean in *Arkham Asylum* (1989), and Manu Larcenet in *Blast* (2009-2014). In this context, there exists a parallel between the aesthetic of breach evident in the works of McKean, Larcenet, and Lynch, and that of Kapoor's pieces such as *Place* (1985) and *The Healing of St. Thomas* (1989-1990), or the deliberate incisions seen in Lucio Fontana's *Concetti spaziali* from the 1960s.

In the exploration of apophatic aesthetics within Anish Kapoor's work, theorist Amador Vega (2004) emphasizes the significance of emptiness within the wound, portraying tearing as a new language that emerges from sacrifice and contemplation, proposing itself as a form of preaching or an "opening towards others". However, the

sacrificial motif, central in J.J. Abrams' series and in the superhero narratives of Marvel series like *Daredevil* (2015-2018), *Jessica Jones* (2015-2019), and *Luke Cage* (2016-2018), is distilled in Lynch's approach to a mere distance from a death depicted in the pilot episode, taking on a more plastic rather than strictly narrative quest.

Referring to Kapoor, Vega draws attention to a fragment from Meister Eckhart's sermon on the Conversion of St. Paul on the Road to Damascus: "when he got up from the ground, with his eyes open, he saw nothing" (Vega, 2004, p. 155). Eckhart's discourse alludes to inner vision while simultaneously evoking its antithesis – the impossibility of finding a counterpart, an answer to the outward gaze, akin to the premise of Kafka's *The Castle* (*Das Schloß*, 1926), where the denial of the image itself assumes a gaze and contemplates the character, the reader. Instead of the anticipated fortress, only a dense, dark mist is unveiled. This void, preceding all words, represents the ultimate endeavour of artists like Rothko, who, akin to Fontana, delved into series, variation, and an open creative process.

From *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997) to *Inland Empire*, Lynch persistently juxtaposes dual narratives around a central void, catalysing the collapse of the symbolic order surrounding split characters. Similar to the dark void that emerged on Rothko's canvases in his final years despite efforts to contain it within the symbolic realm of colour, Lynch situates sex and murder at the core of trauma, ensnaring his characters in a loop between reality and escape into increasingly terrifying fantasies. The overflow of this abyss assumes a historical dimension in Lynch's portrayal, reminiscent of Godard's cinematic philosophy of history, embodying the genesis of contemporary evil in the 1945 atomic test explosion in New Mexico. The eighth episode operates with an autonomous, episodic quality – akin to an instalment of *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964) or *Black Mirror* (2011 – ongoing) – yet also establishes a precise historical and serial context. The acquisition of certain abstract images set to the rhythm of Krzysztof Penderecki's music not only represents a reinterpretation of experimental cinema by figures like Stan Brakhage, Jordan Belson, or Bruce Conner, but also serves as the foundation of a negativity that transcends representation, colliding with a mode of nihilistic negativity prone to incarnating in forms and figures of horror.

The imagery of the atomic mushroom cloud, the transient figures of hobos or vagabonds, Cooper's malevolent *Doppelgänger*, Kafka's portrait overseeing Gordon Cole's office, the manifestations of Cooper within the acrylic cube and through the electrical outlet, the sight of a decapitated corpse, and notably, the peculiar mutant animal emerging from the explosion – all serve as examples of a nuanced figuration of negativity. The peculiar hybrid creature, a blend of insect and amphibian, born in the aftermath of the atomic blast, contaminates the Edenic innocence of 1950s America upon entering the mouth of a young woman. The significance lies not in deciphering whether the girl is Killer Bob's mother or Laura Palmer's grandmother, but rather in contemplating the presentation of evil as a deviation or corruption of established rituals. The hobos assume the role of archetypal agents of evil, associated with Judy, and intone a mantra that supplants The Platters' music: "This is the water, and this is the well. Drink full and descend. The horse is the white of the eyes, and the dark is within". Lynch delves into a nihilistic portrayal of evil as an abrupt irruption or the absence of goodness and *eudaimonia* - εὐδαιμονία, signifying a state of complete well-being and fulfilment.

2. The Mystery of Evil

The historic fracture precipitated by Al Qaeda's attack on the United States and the bombing of the World Trade Center twin towers on September 11, 2001, not only reshaped the geopolitics of the 21st century but also signalled a deeper phenomenon echoed by subsequent events such as the Sars-Cov2 pandemic and conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. This phenomenon suggests a profound shift in the perception of time – a clandestine intuition that something disintegrates without progressing towards resolution. American television fiction encountered a tragic turning point in the September 11 terrorist attacks, unleashing narratives steeped in melancholy and redemption mechanisms (Pintor Iranzo, 2009). According to philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2010, p. 17), Christ's sacrifice liberates humans from tragedy, paving the way for Comedy in the vein of Dante. However, the untimely realm of *Twin Peaks: The Return* reflects contemporary serial television fiction emerging from tragedy without redemption, tasked with representing a negativity that post-capitalist socio-cultural narratives have neither expiated nor resolved.

Negativity, conceived by Heidegger as *Nichtheit* – a tragic vector of time and an essential condition of being – is further explored by philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2012, p. 17) in the context of a time impoverished of negativity, transitioning from a Foucauldian disciplinary society of negation and prohibition to a neoliberal performance-based society of positivity, echoing what Baudrillard (2006) terms "the violence of consensus". Beyond a subtractive and theological understanding of negative aesthetics, a secondary aspect nurturing negativity in contemporary seriality is the concept of evil. Drawing from Baudelaire's notion that "the devil's most beautiful trick is to persuade us that he does not exist", Denis de Rougemont (1942) highlights the Judeo-Christian legacy of a dualistic universe conception. Although evil can be construed as the absence of good or a rupture of Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* (Nussbaum, 2001), a representational, figurative, and cultural tradition of evil counterbalances positivity. Removed from conventional social paradigms, it resurfaces in new or indirect forms within fiction. The question posed by genocide and catastrophic events specialist Ervin Staub (1997) – "Is the concept of evil relevant to a psychologist?" – underscores the pivotal role that evil can, and indeed should, assume in fiction, across diverse manifestations – from *American Crime Story* (2016-2017) to *Stranger Things* (Netflix, 2016 - ongoing) and *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016).

In the climactic sequence of the first season's finale (*Grand Guignol*, Ep. 01x08) of *Penny Dreadful*, a priest cryptically whispers to the protagonist Vanessa Ives (Eva Green): "If you have been touched by the devil, it is like being touched again by the hand of God. It makes you sacred in a certain way. Do you truly wish to be normal?". Throughout subsequent episodes, Vanessa grapples with and succumbs to influences from the supernatural realm – be it the demon or the desires of the Egyptian deity Amunet, whose destructive allure Eva Green embodies through gestures and contortions reminiscent of Charcot's photographic studies of hysteria patients at La Salpetrière. In standout episodes, particularly from the fifth onward, Vanessa becomes a vessel for an external voice and eventually melds, akin to Thomas De Quincey's and filmmaker Dario Argento's embodiments of darkness, into the sanctuary offered by Sir Malcolm's mansion. Far from being an impregnable arcadia shielding against the dangers of London's alleys, the

mansion harbours a past that fuels the series' narrative engine: Sir Malcolm's relentless pursuit of his daughter, a Mina Harker consigned to limbo as depicted in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

Notably, the enduring depiction of evil as impurity, transmission, and contagion from ancient traditions coexists with a rich tapestry drawn from 19th-century literature. Alongside Vanessa and her mission, characters such as Dr. Van Helsing, Victor Frankenstein and his creature, Dorian Gray, and the werewolf traverse through *Penny Dreadful*, resembling the ensemble playwright Alan Moore assembles in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999-2019). Even Sir Malcolm (Timothy Dalton) embodies an avatar of adventurer Allan Quatermain, overseen in this tale by African servant Sembene, who gravely asserts, "Where I come from, we know that some people cannot be saved. Your daughter is one of them". This tension between possession and salvation reflects a Hebrew-rooted Manichaean dualistic mindset alongside the Greek tradition of viewing individuals as concurrently innocent and culpable. The tragic, as an exploration of the terrifying – termed *tó deinón*, denoting both terrible malevolence and profound marvel – is a concept Heidegger delves into when discussing encounters between individuals and unsettling powers beyond them, as articulated in his *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1959) and his approach to Hölderlin's *The Ister* (*Der Ister*) (Heidegger, 1984 [1942]).

The inexplicable eruption of disaster has acclimatized contemporary television fiction to a disconcerting, sinister malaise – an *Unheimlich* scenario in Freudian terms (1919). In the concluding episode of the first season (*The Prodigal Son Returns*, Ep. 01x10) of *The Leftovers*, mannequins mimicking the vanished family members of Nora Durst (Carrie Coon), who disappeared alongside two percent of the world's population in the enigmatic "Departure", delves into an unsettling manifestation of evil devoid of identifiable causation, resonating with other series such as *Flashforward* (2009) or *Lost*, and in alignment with classic television series like *The Twilight Zone*. However, Tom Perrotta and Damon Lindelof's narrative for *The Leftovers* ultimately delves into the fixation on the quest for messianic redemption channelled through Kevin Garvey (Justin Theroux) and the imperative to shoulder guilt, embodied by the Guilty Remnant sect. The convenience of attributing guilt as a means to confront the *Big Other* (Žižek, 1991) of the inexplicable, explored previously by filmmakers like Rossellini in *Europa 51* (Roberto Rossellini, 1952), underscores the notion of evil as retribution for transgressing prohibitions – a motif mirrored in *Fringe* (2008-2013) and narratives revolving around the loss of a child. Nevertheless, the epitome of negativity transcends this, culminating in the absolute obliteration of guilt epitomized by the complete rupture of any ethical framework.

In confronting the pervasive melancholy of series such as *Hannibal* (2013-2015) and the abject themes in *Sharp Objects* (2018), alongside explorations of the dark underbelly of superhero narratives as seen in *Dexter* (2006-2013), as well as the atmospheric dread in *The Fall of the House of Usher* (2023), *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018) and *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020), and the social corrosion depicted in *Bron* (*The Bridge*, 2011-2018) and *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-2014), a symbolic and ethical framework persists – a potential escape through guilt. Even within the context of allusive evil interwoven with literary references in *True Detective* (2014-2023), characters often serve as ethical anchors, as exemplified by their confrontation with racist mobs in episodes like *Get the Rope* (Ep. 01x07) of *The Knick* (2014-2015).

However, documentary series like *The Jinx* (2015-2024), directed by Andrew Jarecki, mark a radical departure. The series, initiated at the behest of Robert Durst, a suspected serial killer, led to a re-evaluation following its final episode. Durst's prominent presence in the series presents a portrait not only of mental illness, but also a reflection of the neoliberal condition of evil. Just as fictional characters like *Mad Men*'s Don Draper carry out actions simply because "they can", Durst, a wealthy heir of a real estate empire, commits murder "because he can", at least within the crimes recounted and acknowledged. This reveals a rupture where many tropes of the psychopathic universe, well-defined in cinema around the unfathomable horrors of reality, converge.

The positioning of Durst alongside figures like Gilles de Rais in Elizabeth Roudinesco's studies (2007) on evil is apparent, much like how contemporary series have explored the representational mystery of evil, evident in the stark and direct rhetoric of Jarecki's series. With the appearance of a dismembered body inside a cow's entrails in *Li'l Quinquin* (*P'tit Quinquin*, 2014), a series by Bruno Dumont set in the French Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, the secrets of a small coastal town unfold. Dumont's focus diverges from probing the darkness beneath a rural idyll, akin to Lynch's approach in *Twin Peaks*, instead emphasizing the construction of emotional responses to imagery. Faced with Mrs. Campin's corpse on the beach, Commissioner Van der Weyden (Bernard Pruvost) remarks, "She was a beautiful woman, there, naked like a Flemish painting", hinting at the expiatory intent of a killer targeting adulterers and interfaith couples. The commissioner's portrayal by a non-professional actor with Tourette's syndrome enhances a plural gesturality, emphasizing an emotional suspension.

This stylistic mechanic, reiterated humorously during Mrs. Lebleu's funeral, disrupts social norms in the face of personal and communal anguish, aligning with a pursuit of subtraction and elimination that Dumont attributes to Eckhart's negative mystical topology. Echoing Hegel (1971) and Kojève (1979), Dumont's series acknowledges evil as an unresolved aspect of the human condition: humans cannot retreat to nothingness due to their natural existence without a definitive home. The primary function thus lies in inhabiting and constructing Arcadias, with evil as an inescapable shadow. As Giorgio Agamben highlights in *The Mystery of Evil* (2017, p. 7), "the Church is, until the Last Judgment, both Church of Christ and Church of the Antichrist". Referencing an article by Joseph Ratzinger (1956, p. 181), Agamben continues, "From this it follows that the Antichrist belongs to the Church, grows in it and with it up to the great *discessio* [separation], which will be introduced by the definitive *revelatio*". This coexistence of good and evil, explored through the words of clergy in *Penny Dreadful* and further investigated by Ratzinger and Agamben referencing the texts of Donatist bishop Tyconius, embodies the mystery of iniquity, a concept derived from the apostle Paul's expression "the man of lawlessness" – *ho anthropos tes anomias* – in the Letter to the Thessalonians, subsequently transliterated as the Antichrist in Latin:

> According to Illich the *mysterium iniquitatis* of which the Apostle speaks is none other than the *corruptio optimi pessima* (the worst corruption of the best), namely the perversion of the Church that, by institutionalizing itself more and more as an alleged *societas* perfecta, has furnished the modern State with the model for completely taking charge of humanity. But, even earlier, the doctrine of the Roman Church as *katechon* had found its most extreme expression in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor, which Ivan Karamazov recounts in Dostoevsky's novel. Here the Church is not only the

> power that delays Christ's second coming, but that which seeks to definitively exclude it ("Go and do not come again," the Grand Inquisitor says to Christ [Dostoevskji, 1992, p. 262]) (Agamben, 2017, p. 12).

Within the context of this "go and not come again" of redemption, the inaugural season of *True Detective* harnesses a potent narrative engine to diverge from a universe inspired by *Twin Peaks*, evolving instead towards logics imbued with mystery constructed through literary allusion and notions of lineage contamination. Set against the backdrop of the real-life series of murders known as "The Jeff Davis 8", occurring in Jennings, Southwest Louisiana, between 2005 and 2009, writer Nick Pizzolatto structures the narrative around two focal points across different stages of the investigation, employing interviews with the two detectives, Martin Hart (Woody Harrelson) and Rustin "Rust" Cohle (Matthew McConaughey).

True Detective Season 1 (2014) traverses' diverse genres – from western to fantasy – in order to depict a "world in which the world is not", as articulated by Jacques Derrida (2010) in his 2002 seminar on insularity, drawing inspiration from Heidegger and Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719)(Regazzoni, 2009). What distinguishes the first season of *True Detective* from series such as *Top of The Lake* (2013-2017) in its exploration of the figurative roots of evil is its eagerness to disseminate a mystery grounded in echoes. The investigation serves as a conduit for weaving together literary echoes of Lovecraft and Weird Fiction, Thomas Ligotti and his pervasive concept of forbidden knowledge, the Southern Gothic of Flannery O'Connor, Tennessee Williams, and above all, the perversion of Faulknerian lineages – themes revisited in the fourth season of *True Detective* (2023), encapsulated in an image resonant with Cronenbergian themes: a cluster of frozen interconnected bodies in the midst of Alaska.

Much like Roberto Enrico adapted one of Ambrose Bierce's tales, *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* (1890), for an homonymous *Twilight Zone* episode (Ep. 05x22, 1964), another of Bierce's stories, *An Inhabitant of Carcosa* (1886), forms the foundation of *True Detective* Season 1 (2014), addressing the horror of returning home to find no one there, only one's own grave. Similarly, Pizzolato borrows the name Carcosa from Bierce and also draws upon *The King in Yellow*, a collection of stories by American writer Robert W. Chambers (1895). Most significantly, however, is the gradual construction of an unsolvable enigma, an inaccessible secret that modulates the viewer's relationship with a territory steeped in the past, at least until the final episode, where revelations dismantle much of the narrative framework established. In the death scene of Reggie Ledoux (*True Detective*, Ep. 01x05), an accomplice of the malevolent Childress, Ledoux – sporting a rope tattoo around his neck – is filmed by Cary Fukunaga in a manner reminiscent of Donato Bramante's *Cristo a la Colonna* (1480-1490).

The pictorial allusion here serves to draw attention to a motif or complex of gestures, diverging from the deliberate influences of Flemish primitives evident in sequences from *Li'l Quinquin*. Rather than deliberate citation, Lynch intervenes to twist and pervert everyday gestural codes in his work. What significance lies in the choreographies of the dwarf in the early seasons of *Twin Peaks*? And in Laura's gestures within the Black Lodge? What is conveyed by the elderly waiter's cordial thumb raise at the Northern? What thoughts occupy Audrey's mind as she sways, attempting to discern the subtle echoes behind the jukebox notes? How might *Twin Peaks* be interpreted through the

choreographic spectre that permeates it – a theme further explored by Lynch in the cabaret-performance *Industrial Symphony* (1990) (Pintor Iranzo, 2017)?

Conclusions

The sense of unease and disquiet (*tó deinón*) arises from the disruption of causal chains that typically govern everyday functioning, but the representation of evil signifies a deeper exploration by introducing the concept of reversibility. The tearing and descent mentioned initially lack significance without their counterparts – the ascent, the Anabasis. Similarly, Christ and Antichrist, the word and the anomia, are intertwined and inextricably linked forms of self-narration. The sculptures for the entrance of the Monte Sant'Angelo metro line in Naples by Anish Kapoor consist of two parts – one prominently externalized and the other abyssal inward – wherein, akin to Fontana's works, the tearing would be meaningless without revealing the abyss (*Abgrûnt*). Negativity encompasses both reversibility and the dissimilarity inherent in the image itself, manifesting what medieval theologians termed the *vestigium*, across three reconfigured areas: the apophatic, the choleric, and the representation of evil, forming a triangle that also encompasses guilt and sacrifice.

In light of *True Detective*, *Twin Peaks*, and other series under discussion, defining the space of evil not merely as the result of liberated passions, but precisely as a consequence of its opposite – apathy, the absence of *pathos* and passion – seems appropriate. Kierkegaard notes, "When humans are not moved by the passion that propels them into action, they withdraw into themselves, giving rise to sickly feelings" (Marina, 2011, p. 57). The Seven Deadly Sins, in Christianity, represent a desperate effort to salvage passions, highlighting the excess of social positivity mirrored in the negativity of contemporary serial fiction. For instance, consider one of the most iconic images of 20th-century television fiction: the final sequence of Don Draper practicing yoga in *Mad Men* (*Waterloo*, Ep. 07x07), segueing into the Coca-Cola *Hilltop* (1971) advertisement – a perfect illustration of societal positivity in the era of performance. "It's the Real Thing", young people of various races sing together on a hill, distinct yet united in a way that, somewhat ominously, smooths out differences. Confronted with the power-to-do stemming from the denial of difference and the singular *pathos* that Draper has suppressed, the path of negativity, akin to the mystical dimension in apophatic aesthetics, signifies a desperate reclamation of passion.

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Lost (ABC, 2004-2010, 6 seasons).
Lost Highways (1997, David Lynch).
Luke Cage (Netflix, 2014-2017, 2 seasons).
Mad Men (AMC-HBO, 2007-2015, 7 seasons).
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Sharp Objects (HBO, 2018, 1 season).
Stranger Things (Netflix, 2016 – ongoing, 4 seasons).
Top of The Lake (BBC UKTV-BBC Two, 2013-2017, 2 seasons).
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