PROPHETIC VISIONS, QUALITY SERIALS: *TWIN PEAKS'* NEW MODE OF STORYTELLING

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ABSTRACT

Following the April 1990 debut of *Twin Peaks* on ABC, the vision - a sequence of images that relates information of the narrative future or past – has become a staple of numerous network, basic cable and premium cable serials, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB), *Battlestar Galactica* (SyFy) and *Game of Thrones* (HBO). This paper argues that *Peaks* in effect had introduced a mode of storytelling called "visio-narrative," which draws on ancient epic poetry by focusing on main characters that receive knowledge from enigmatic, god-like figures that control his world. Their visions disrupt linear storytelling, allowing a series to embrace the formal aspects of the medium and create the impression that its disparate episodes constitute a singular whole. This helps them qualify as 'quality TV', while disguising instances of authorial manipulation evident within the texts as products of divine internal causality. As a result, all narrative events, no matter how coincidental or inconsequential, become part of a grand design. Close examination of *Twin Peaks* and *Carnivàle* will demonstrate how the mode operates, why it is popular among modern storytellers and how it can elevate a show's cultural status.

KEYWORDS

Quality television; Carnivale; *Twin Peaks*; vision; coincidence, destiny.

By the standards of traditional detective fiction, which necessitates rational explanations and does not permit fantastic elements (Todorov 49), *Twin Peaks* constitutes a failure. Though FBI Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle McLachlan), the serial's main protagonist, uses some logical methods in the course of crime solving, such as analyzing forensic evidence, he also openly applies intuition and dreaming. Surprisingly, his non-rational methods not only help resolve the Laura Palmer murder investigation, the series' initial central story arc, but also foretell his foray into an otherworldly realm called *The Black Lodge* in the show's final episode. This combination of dreams and investigative elements arguably characterizes the show as specifically an oeuvre of art film director David Lynch. Many of his films, such as *Blue Velvet*, *Lost Highway* and *Inland Empire*, deliberately blur distinctions between real life and dreams by focusing on characters that are both dreamers and investigators.

Simon Riches aptly defines these protagonists as 'knowledge *seekers*' that 'uncover concealed information.' (27) He asserts that Cooper, however, is distinct from Lynch's other knowledge seekers, because their dreaming is separate from acquisition of investigative knowledge, while Cooper's dreams 'provide him with knowledge of the world outside of his mind' and so inform his real life investigation. (29) It is true that Cooper receives external knowledge. For instance, the first major dream sequence on the show, which occurs at the end of Episode 2, introduces Cooper to multiple characters that he had never previously seen in real life, such as the mysterious one-armed man MIKE (Al Strobel) and the long-haired BOB (Frank Silva), who is ultimately revealed to be Laura's killer.

Rather than a product of his subconscious then, Cooper's dream constitutes a 'vision', an experience '...in which a personage, thing, or event appears vividly or credibly to the mind, although not actually present, often under the influence of a divine or other agency.' (Random House) By this rationale, Cooper's uniqueness lies in his qualification as a visionary – someone with the ability to receive visions – or, more specifically, as a 'shaman detective' that 'receives guidance in his investigations from intuitive, extra-rational sources of information.' (Bulkeley 2013 69) However, Riches' claim overlooks the existence of *Dune*'s Paul Atreides, an earlier Lynch protagonist whose dreams predict future events. More importantly, Cooper is not the sole visionary in *Twin Peaks*. Laura's mother Sarah (Grace Zabriskie) is actually the first to demonstrate the ability to see visions.

Later on, one learns that other characters, including Laura herself and possibly The Log Lady, are visionaries as well.[1] But while Cooper's ability is not unique for Lynch protagonists, its application within the serial television format was unprecedented at the time. Appearing as audio-visual messages with crucial information about the past and future, the visions of the multiple protagonists constantly disrupted the story's chronological progression. This allowed Lynch to develop what Kelly Bulkeley describes as 'an extended network of dream influences and interactions unfolding back and forth through time and across different domains of reality.' (2013 67) Unlike the largely sequential narratives of episodic sitcoms and long-running soap operas, *Peaks* would then possess an unconventional narrative structure that endowed the show's narrative in its entirety with a sense of unity and predetermination.

In effect, the show introduced an innovative mode of television storytelling that I term *visio-narrative*. Today, it is one of the most popular modes of storytelling within prime time serials. Using case studies of *Peaks* and *Carnivàle*, this paper intends to illustrate how the model initially functioned, how it has evolved through appropriation by other programs and why it is appealing to numerous storytellers today. Examining it will lead to a better understanding of how modern television programs are constructed and culturally evaluated.

A POETICS OF VISIO-NARRATIVE

At its core, visio-narrative has three interconnected components: the vision, the visionary and the source. The vision is the message, while the visionary is its receiver and the source – its possibly omniscient sender. Their interaction suggests that all events proceed according to a plan, that characters must fulfill their destiny, so nothing is incidental. Figure 1 illustrates a wide spectrum of network, basic cable and premium cable programs that come to feature these elements from the 1990s through the 2010s. Like *Peaks*, many of them, such as *Lost* and *Battlestar Galactica*, tend to fall under the label of *quality TV* within scholarly discourses. Note that I refer to the associations the term *quality* had gained primarily in the 1980s-90s, where it came to specify programs that distinguished themselves from traditional episodic and serial shows by defying or reworking their genre and narrative

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1 Unlike Cooper, none of them are actual professional investigators. So, the term 'shaman detective' will designate a subset of the 'visionary' that specifically works in or with law enforcement and uses visions to solve cases.

conventions, resulting in innovative new forms. (Dunleavy 32-33) In this sense, the notion of what quality is relies on comparative distinction.

As Robert Thompson puts it, 'quality TV back then was best defined by what it was not: *Knight Rider*, *MacGyver* and the rest of 'regular' TV.' (xvi) If *Peaks* qualifies as quality on the basis of its distinction from traditional television, then this status is at least partially attributable to its innovative visio-narrative storytelling. Arguably, the most crucial element to the mode is the visionary. Typically a main, if not *the* main, protagonist within a series, he is fundamental to a program's central narrative premise. To make a show around a visionary would then be equivalent to making unconventional quality television. As one can see from the chart, after *Twin Peaks* it becomes fairly popular to build shows around lead characters capable of seeing visions.

SERIES	RUNTIME	NETWORK	VISIONARIES
Twin Peaks	1990-91	ABC	Dale Cooper, Sarah Palmer, Madeline Ferguson
The X-Files	1993-02	FOX	Fox Mulder, Dana Scully
Babylon 5	1994-98	PTEN/TNT	Virtually all main characters
Millennium	1996-99	FOX	Frank Black
Buffy:The Vampire Slayer	1997-03	WB/UPN	Buffy Summers
Charmed	1998-06	WB	Phoebe Halliwell
Angel	1999-04	WB	Allen Doyle, Cordelia Chase
The Dead Zone	2002-07	USA	Johnny Smith
Carnivàle	2003-05	HBO	Ben Hawkins, Justin Crowe
Lost	2004-10	ABC	John Locke, Desmond Hume
Battlestar Galactica	2004-09	SCY-FY	Laura Roslin, Gaius Baltar
Medium	2005-11	NBC/CBS	Allison Dubois
Heroes	2006-10	NBC	Peter Petrelli, Isaac Mendez
Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles	2007-09	FOX	Sarah Connor
Kings	2009	NBC	David Sepherd, Silas Benjamin
Flashforward	2009-10	ABC	Virtually all main characters
Game of Thrones	2011---	HBO	Bran Stark, Rickon Stark
The Legend of Korra	2012-14	NICK	Avatar Korra
Hannibal	2013---	NBC	Will Graham
iZombie	2015---	CW	Liv Moore

△ FIGURE 1

Perceived as a form of extrasensory perception, intuition, precognition or clairvoyance, the visionary's ability is typically innate and inexplicable. Cooper, for instance, appears to have the ability by the time the series begins, and makes no attempt to define when or how he gained it. Similarly, Londo Mollari of the sci-fi series *Babylon 5* establishes in the first episode that his entire race, the Centauri, have a natural aptitude for prophetic dreams that inform them when and how they will die. Londo thus knows that he will die strangling an enemy twenty years in the future, an event that is depicted literally in the 17th episode of the third season. By validating the external information visions provide, shows entice viewers to accept the premise that a character can simply receive visions without any further clarification. This also serves to distinguish visions from similar though explicable elements, such as vivid hallucinations.

Despite how fundamentally irrational visions are, some shows ground them in an internal logic. For example, Johnny Smith, the main protagonist and visionary of the *Dead Zone*

series, unlocks his ability only after he sustains brain damage from a car accident in the premiere episode, providing him with access to the brain's normally inaccessible 'dead zone.' This ostensibly makes his mind so active, that he is able to perceive the future and the past. Similarly, Will Graham, the lead of *Hannibal*, possesses a psychological disorder that provides him with the capacity for 'pure empathy.' By empathizing with other people and imagining their actions, he is able to visually recreate in his mind past narrative events with pinpoint accuracy. Neither explanation truly holds up to logical scrutiny, but it does help the programs avoid explicitly supernatural associations with the fantasy genre.

Shows also tend to impose certain conditions in regard to how and when visionaries receive their messages. Arguably, the most common condition is sleep, allowing for a presentation of surreal dream sequences. In addition to Cooper and Mollari, the visionaries of *Buffy, Terminator, Heroes, Lost, Battlestar Galactica* and *Carnivàle* among many others regularly receive prophetic dream visions. An alternative approach requires an awake visionary to actively induce the vision by coming in physical contact or close proximity with a particular person, object or space, on which the vision will then focus. The aforementioned Johnny Smith provides an excellent illustration of this, as touching anyone or anything with his bare hands can induce a vision, a point that leads him to wear gloves, so as to control access to his ability.

Visionaries aren't necessarily limited to only one type of reception. Cooper repeatedly receives visions when not sleeping, such as when the character of the Giant appears to him in the second season. And though he mostly gains visions through active physical contact, Smith occasionally has prophetic dreams. Whatever their methods, visionaries can receive two types of messages: 'connotative' and 'denotative.' The 'connotative' vision appears as a series of symbolic and cryptic images representing literal events that have occurred in the series' past or will have occurred in the future. The transmitter deliberately obfuscates its true meaning, providing the visionary and the audience with the motivation to decipher it. As more narrative events transpire over time, the vision's literal meaning grows clearer, though it is often possible to realize this only through the benefit of hindsight.

Contrariwise, the 'denotative' visions literally depict narrative events that have, will or could take place, leaving only the context surrounding them ambiguous. In this case, there tends to be a clear delineation into past and future sub-types. Past-oriented visions either raise questions and mysteries about the past that compel the visionaries to unravel them

in the present or, conversely, resolve questions about past events that are relevant to the present. Future-oriented ones, meanwhile, usually prompt the visionary to change the future by averting a disastrous or undesirable outcome that is yet to take place. Much of the intrigue in the first season of *Heroes*, for instance, revolves around the question of whether or not the main characters will be able to prevent a nuclear explosion that will claim millions of lives sometime in the future, as prophetic painter Isaac Mendez foresees in his vision.

In addition to these intratextual narrative effects, the different vision types can produce extra-textual cognitive effects. Sternberg defined them as the three 'universals of narrative.' Two of them, 'curiosity' and 'suspense', refer to a state of mental restlessness that occurs in a reader due to a lack of narrative information relative to a specific tense – the past in the case of the former and the future in the case of latter (Sternberg 1978 65). While suspense makes the reader wonder about the outcome of a future conflict, curiosity requires him to hypothesize about previous 'gaps' and ambiguities in the narrative and make sense of them through retrospection. 'Surprise', the third universal, occurs in conjunction with curiosity when the narrative reveals to the reader his misreading of past events and '...enforces a corrective rereading in late recognition.' (Sternberg 2001a: 117 quoted in Sternberg 2003 327) A given vision can easily produce multiple effects.

The connotative vision, whether about the past or the future, evokes viewer curiosity by inviting active speculation in the present about its literal meaning, while the past-oriented denotative vision accomplishes this by specifically raising questions about the past. Both deliberately withhold answers, compelling viewers to keep watching the series in hopes of obtaining them. Subsequently, they surprise audiences, the former by revealing the literal meaning behind the previously veiled symbolism and the latter by resolving questions and properly contextualizing the vision events. All this prompts retrospection and re-cognition of the vision images. Future-oriented denotative visions, on the other hand, raise suspense by appealing to a viewer's prospection. In this case, the viewer needs to keep watching to alleviate the sense of restlessness he feels from knowing a narrative's potential future outcome and wondering, if the visionary can alter it.

Providing anachronous glimpses into the future or the past that disrupt the linear progression of the narrative, visions evidently function in a manner comparable to prolepsis and analepsis. I refer to Gerard Genette's definition of 'prolepsis' or flash-forward as 'any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place

later.' Meanwhile, 'analepsis' or flashback refers to 'any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment.' (40). Defined this way, flashbacks and flash-forwards divide a text into past, present and future segments. Once the anachronous segment play out, the text resumes narrating the present.

A key difference then is that visions collapse the temporal divisions, for the anachronous segments are presented within the frame of a character's learning of them within the present. As such, unlike flashbacks, which traditionally possess a connection to a character's memory and so represent information he already knows in the present (Currie 204), visions always provide the visionary, if not the audience, with new narrative information. And unlike flash-forwards, which render the audience cognizant of what will take place in the future, while leaving the characters in the present ignorant, visions allow a present character to see events that should or could happen ahead of the time they happen. The formal execution of visions is also fairly different. Like the present-day sections of the narrative, flashback and flash-forward segments in serial television primarily ascribe to the 'classic realist' mode of storytelling.

Predominant in the Classical Hollywood cinema and mainstream television drama, this mode aims to 'use film conventions (of narrative, genre and style) to create a plausible, coherent narrative world (or diegesis), and to use film techniques to generate and maintain audience belief in this.' (Dunleavy 79) This allows an unobtrusive style of storytelling that convinces the viewer that what he is seeing is real by making imperceptible formal aspects that call audience attention to the constructedness of the screen text. (Allen 64) In particular, editing becomes crucial to sustaining audience belief in the illusion of reality. To this end, screen texts utilize the form of invisible editing, which involves creating eyeline matches, following the 180-degree rule and cutting on action, so as not to detract the viewer from the narrative. (Allen 66; Dunleavy 80) This allows for a linear progression of the narrative from scene-to-scene.

Naturally, the transitions between a present-day sequence and a flashback or flash-forward segment can violate the classic realist mode. The flashback in particular is associated with dissolves and fades, which visibly indicate the passage of time on-screen and draw attention to editing as a storytelling technique (Hayward 133-134) However, following the transition, the text resumes the classical mode until the anachronous segment concludes. So, with the exception of the transitions, the classic mode remains dominant. Foregrounding of formal elements, on the other hand, is frequent in visions. Common techniques include shifts in editing style and sound design. In addition, connotative visions regularly include narrative elements that blatantly contradict the classic realist segments that precede and follow them. This codes them as unreal or non-literal in relation to the narrative diegesis. The case studies will show further how such elements operate within a serial.

CASE STUDIES: TWIN PEAKS TO CARNIVÀLE

As I said in the beginning, *Twin Peaks* introduced the visio-narrative model, so it makes sense to examine how the series uses visions to construct a serial narrative. For this, I will look at two from the first season – Sarah Palmer's waking vision of BOB in Episode 1 and Cooper's dream vision in Episode 2. The first takes place when Sarah and Laura's friend Donna bond in their grief over Laura's death. While hugging Donna, Sarah sees something that shocks her. There is a cut to a first person shot and for three brief seconds we see what Sarah sees: BOB crouching behind Laura's bed. This cryptic image marks BOB's first official appearance on the series. The camera quickly zooms in closer and a jarring sound effect resembling a pipe organ transmits Sarah's shock to the audience before the scene cuts back to Sarah screaming in terror. Rather than editing, the scene uses camerawork and aural cues to formally distinguish this sequence from the aesthetic norms of the classic realist mode it adhered to previously.

The sequence makes one curious to know, who the man behind Laura's bed was and if he was really there, while also raising the question of whether or not Sarah had a hallucination. This entices the audience to keep watching the series, so as to learn the truth. Cooper's dream vision in the next episode sheds some light on the mystery of BOB. It establishes that the man Sarah saw is real, that BOB is his name, and that he was once a friend of a one-armed man named MIKE. Cooper's dream retroactively establishes that Sarah had a connotative waking vision and while builds on it narratively. Formally, however, it differentiates itself from Sarah's waking vision via fades, dissolves and other techniques that call attention to the process of editing itself, while distorting or heightening character voices to call attention to the artificiality of on-screen sound. This also frames the sequence as distinct from the invisible editing and audible dialogue that pervades every previous scene. So, if Sarah's vision remains

within the bounds of reality, Cooper's takes place within the dream world.

Roughly, one can break down the dream into three parts. The first part features multiple fade-in and fade-out dissolves between images of Cooper in bed, an image of Cooper in the Red Room and a scene from the Pilot, with Sarah running down the stairs yelling Laura. Here, we see it in slow-motion, Sarah's voice is distorted. Then there's a series of quick cuts with flashes or flickers of light that intercut Sarah descending with a shot of BOB at Laura's Bed from Sarah's vision, as well as shots of dead Laura and a bloody towel from the Pilot. Part 2 commences as the sequence settles on MIKE, who recites the poem *Fire Walk with Me*. Multiple dissolves intercut this with Cooper lying in bed before transitioning to BOB, who seems to communicate with MIKE and Cooper from another time and place.

Part 2 ends with a shot of candles in a circle going out as the show dissolves to the Red Room for an extended sequence that composes Part 3. The Red Room segment, where Cooper, now an older man, meets the odd-looking Little Man (Michael J. Anderson), a dwarf in a red suit, and a girl who resembles Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), both of whom speak in riddles, largely stands alone. If the preceding segments stylistically deviated from classic realism via editing, the final Lodge segment accomplishes this through sound design, while resuming the invisible editing style. Unlike Cooper, the Little Man and the Girl speak with voices so highly distorted and deliberately unrealistic that the episode provides subtitles to help viewers understand them. Their largely nonsensical dialogue accentuates the unreality of the scene. Towards the end, the Girl comes up to Cooper and whispers something in his ear.

We cut to Cooper awakening in his bedroom. He calls Sheriff Truman (Michael Ontkean) and claims that he knows who killed Laura Palmer. But instead of immediately sharing the answer, Cooper instead demands that Truman wait until morning. The lack of immediate clarity to what Cooper sees and experiences elicits audience curiosity, imploring the viewer to watch the next episode. However, after recapping his dream in the beginning of Episode 3, Cooper claims to have forgotten, who killed Laura, denying Truman and the viewers immediate satisfaction of curiosity. Nonetheless, Cooper has resolved to understand his dream's meaning, stating that the key to solving the murder lies in decoding his dream: '...my dream is a code waiting to be broken. Break the code, solve the crime.'

The series maintains audience curiosity and links the resolution of the central question of 'Who killed Laura Palmer?' to the resolution of the numerous questions that arise from Cooper's dream, such as: 'Who are BOB and MIKE? Where did they come from? What is the Red Room? Why does the Dwarf say all the things he does?' This invites the viewer to follow Cooper's advice and decode the dream's message by watching subsequent episodes of the series, then placing them in context with the vision through retrospection and re-cognition. As I mentioned previously, multiple shots in Part 1, all of which reference Laura's murder and BOB, are from the previous two episodes. By showing them alongside new material of MIKE, BOB and the Red Room, the dream vision establishes a connection between the events they reference and indicates that it has a direct connection to Sarah's waking vision of BOB.

One can infer from all this that BOB knew Laura, has been to her bedroom and ultimately murdered her. Additionally, every passing episode reveals that Cooper's dream symbolically foretold multiple future narrative developments. For example, the Dwarf has a cryptic line of dialogue concerning the girl who resembles Laura: 'She is my cousin, but doesn't she look just like Laura Palmer?' In hindsight, one can see that the Little Man was obviously referring to the first appearance of Laura's identical-looking cousin Madeline Ferguson (also Sheryl Lee) in Episode 3, underlining her status as both Laura's relative and doppelganger. Later on, Cooper tracks down Gerard, the One-Armed Man first seen in his dream. He initially denies any knowledge of Cooper's dream or the name MIKE. Subsequent episodes, however, establish that MIKE is a spirit that takes over Gerard's body, confirming that Cooper's dream was a vision.

MIKE corroborates his suspicion that BOB, whom MIKE defines as a spirit similar to himself, is Laura's killer. Similarly, BOB swears that he will kill again in the dream. In Episode 14, he fulfills this claim by murdering Madeline. Finally, Cooper's appearance in the Black Lodge as an older man strongly implies that he will travel there in the future, foretelling his real-life journey in the series finale. As both visions' information is repeatedly validated by real-life developments, the series gives the impression that everything in the narrative is known or planned in advance by the vision sources. This makes evident that visions result in an unconventional temporality that compounds the present time, in which a visionary learns of an event's occurrence, with the time a past event had occurred and/or the time a future event will occur within the story.

Multiple shows of the 1990s-early 2000s clearly build on the *Peaks* model. However, only a few, such as *Babylon 5* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, use visio-narrative for serial narration. Instead of creating non-chronological linkages across disparate episodes, visions in procedurals like *Millennium*,

Angel and *The Dead Zone* paradigmatically serve a key role in the set-up and resolution of an enclosed hour-long plotline anchored by a shaman detective.[2] The need for episodic closure resulted in these shows' visions largely lacking in narrative ambiguity and, in turn, the ability to elicit audience curiosity or foster speculation and decoding.[3] As viewers can rest comfortably knowing that an episode will have fully explained a vision's literal meaning by the end, they have no reason to actively engage with the text. This 'vision-of-the-week' format dominated until the debut of HBO's 1930s period fantasy drama *Carnivàle.*

Focusing on the conflict between Oklahoma carnie Ben Hawkins (Nick Stahl) and Californian evangelical minister Justin Crowe (Clancy Brown), who represent the opposing forces of good and evil, the show marks the return of visions to seriality and ambiguity. Of all the shows that utilize the model, it possesses arguably the highest number of serial visions to date, with a frequency of at least one per episode. While *Twin Peaks* had only three visions in the entire first season, *Carnivàle* features four in the pilot episode alone. Most prominent is the 'cornfield dream', which recurs in numerous variations throughout the entire series. Each depicts two characters, one of which stalks the other on a dark, stormy night through a cornfield. As a rule, the pursuer is Justin, while the man he chases is either Ben or his father Henry Scudder (John Savage). This allows for a division by character into Ben variations and Scudder variations.

For this study, I will focus on the very first vision – a 33-second long Scudder variation from the premiere episode *Milfay.* Following a cryptic prologue, the series immediately throws the audience into the dream without any character or plot set-up. Featuring extremely rapid editing, it intercuts 12 shots depicting the cornfield narrative event with about 21 shots depicting different events from subsequent episodes in the series. Each cornfield image lasts two-four seconds, allowing one to make out that a Tattooed Man is chasing a man clad in a white shirt in a cornfield. The cornfield images appear to progress sequentially. However, the series hasn't yet established the identities of either character, the specificity of the time and place of the event depicted or the reason for its occurrence, deliberately confusing the viewer. Moreover, the intercutting heightens the confusion, as the non-cornfield images appear non-sequentially.

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2   *Angel* largely dropped this structure by the end of its second season.

3   While *The Dead Zone* has a long-running arc focused on a nuclear apocalypse Smith sees in visions, it is predominantly an episodic series.

Each lasts anywhere from a few frames to a second, making it difficult to make sense of what exactly they depict. By going over them frame by frame, I've identified ten of them and pinpointed the episodes they appear in. Figure 3 positions them in order of their appearance in the vision, comparing it to the order of the episodes they originate from and the order of the events they depict in the chronology of the story as a whole. The lack of correspondence between all three orders illustrates that the vision previews literal events up to the ninth episode of the series, but arranges them in a seemingly random fashion, constantly jumping back and forth through time. Like in the case of *Twin Peaks*, this compounds multiple tenses, blurring the distinction between past, present and future. But it also intentionally challenges the audience to carefully watch the future episodes and use them to construct a proper chronological sequence of the events the vision represents.

SHOT	DESCRIPTION	EPISODE	CHRONOLOGY
1	Scudder stumbling in a WWI trench	6	A
2	Scudder and Russian Soldier in the café	2	E
3	Sofie turning over the cards	1	D
4	People gathering over a coffin	3	F
5	Scudder on Babylon miners' photo	6	G
6	Tattooed Man rapes Appolonia	9	C
7	A girl with crab claw-like hands	8	J
8	Ben in the trenches	7	H
9	Russian Soldier fires	7	B
10	Ben wakes up without legs	8	I

△   FIGURE 2

The episode then cuts to Ben waking up in a brightly lit, dusty house, indicating the sequence beforehand was a dream. This creates a visible contrast between the vision and the non-vision sequences. Whereas the montage jumped across multiple timeframes, locations and events, the scenes that follow depict interconnected events in a specific time and space. When it cuts to an exterior shot, captions that specify that the story takes place in Oklahoma, 1934. [the present] Whereas the vision featured visible, rapid cutting, this scene utilizes continuity editing with longer shots and a slow pace. And whereas the vision had no context, this one establishes some clear plot details – we learn Ben Hawkins is an escaped

convict, who joins a travelling carnival after his mother dies and his farm is repossessed.

After establishing a dominant classic realist style and spatio-temporal specificity, the series proceeds in this mode for about 16 minutes until Ben has another variation of the cornfield dream. The third variation, meanwhile, cuts to Justin waking up, establishing that he too experiences visions and can have a version of the same dream, as Ben. Notably, Justin's version features more shots of the Tattooed Man, which reveal that he and Justin are one and the same. It also creates a paradigm, according to which Ben and Justin encounter each other only in visions until the final episode, suggesting an inevitable intertwining of the disparate plot threads. The show demonstrates that it gradually doles out information and fills in the gaps regarding the various events we view in the visions. This encourages active viewing of subsequent episodes.

The cornfield event's significance would only become fully clear by the end of the second season. In the episode *Cheyenne, WY*, Justin captures and then murders Scudder after he tries to flee. Notably, Scudder never runs into a cornfield, so Justin's pursuit in the vision does not directly correspond to literal events. This signifies that the Scudder variation symbolically foretold Justin's pursuit of Scudder and his attempt to kill him. However, the series finale *New Canaan*, where Justin pursues Ben into a cornfield, intent on killing him, literally fulfills the Ben variation. So the vision corresponds to both versions, to the first instance connotatively and to the second denotatively. This hybridity allows it to foretell multiple possible outcomes, rather than one particular future event, as well as produce multiple effects on its viewers.

As a connotative vision, it can make viewers curious about its actual significance and later surprise them with its reveals. As a denotative vision, it can continuously generate suspense over two seasons by presenting 'rival scenarios about the future' (Sternberg 2001a: 117 quoted in 327), specifically the outcome of the cornfield chase. This illustrates how by mixing denotative and connotative visions, a serial generates all three narrative universals simultaneously, while giving a strong sense of the overarching plot's simultaneous predetermination. By using shots from future episodes, the series gives the impression that its vision source is omniscient and knows all possible outcomes of events long before the characters experience them. At the same time, the variability of the cornfield dream suggests that the source doesn't know, which outcomes will actually come to pass. This illustrates the ability to visio-narrative to mask instances of evident authorial manipulation ('EAM').

AGENTS OF CONTROL AND AUTHORIAL MANIPULATION

Authorial manipulation is a fundamental aspect of plot construction. The majority of classic stories operate utilizing causation. They center on goal-oriented characters, which, in pursuing a certain goal or desire, perform actions that will have narrative consequences, leading from one set of plot points to the next in a cause-and-effect chain. In doing so, the realist text attempts to convince audiences that what they are watching or reading is real and manages to '…camouflage the ultimate extradiegetic causal level of the author (who actually writes the text and thus causally manipulates all events within it) by constructing a narrative world with its own intradiegetic connective systems.' (Dannenberg 25) This renders authorial manipulation invisible. EAM manifests when this camouflage proves unsuccessful, allowing the audience to notice the text's fictional nature and consequently regard its narrative events implausible. This can occur when certain events contradict others, resulting in 'holes' that disrupt the plot's unity, or when a series abandons or drops various plot threads without resolving them.

And then there are obtrusive 'coincidences', constellations of '…apparently random events in time and space with an uncanny or striking connection.' (Dannenberg 93) A common assumption is that the best examples of classic storytelling avoid such issues, with many critics and professional writers viewing signs of EAM negatively. Marie-Laure Ryan, for instance, decries the presence of plot holes as a consequence of an author's ineptitude at creating logical connections between events and situates coincidence as an example of the many 'cheap plot tricks' that 'blatantly serves the interests of the story and the goals of the author at the expense of verisimilitude.' (59) In a similar vein, Lewis Herman insists that to avoid poor plotting writers must ensure that 'every hole is plugged' and 'every coincidence is sufficiently motivated to make it credible…' (88) Despite such attitudes, EAM tends to appear within the story arcs of numerous prestigious serialized dramas.

One reason for this is that television screenplays are usually products of collaboration between a show-runner and a group of full-time and staff writers. Multiple voices can result in conflicting ideas and directions for a long-form story that nonetheless have to work towards a common goal. Many writers also attest that the development process is organic and unpredictable, with rigorous pre-planning often giving way to improvisation and evolution. The normal solution to this is to

revise earlier scripts, ensuring episode-to-episode consistency. However, this is contingent on specific production schedules. Network TV writers especially have very tight deadlines. As a full season is typically 22-26 episodes per year, the development and production phases soon begin to overlap. (Douglas 56) As episodes air, writers script later installments of the ongoing work-in-progress story, unable to revise what has already appeared onscreen.

J. Michael Straczynski, who was responsible for writing much of the *Babylon 5* five-year story arc, once summarized such issues in response to a fan on a CompuServe posting by comparing the production of serialized television to the chapter-by-chapter publication of a novel:

> Let's say I'm writing a novel. I start with a fairly clear notion of where I'm going. Six chapters in, I get a better way of doing something, so I go back and revise chapters 1-5, so it now all fits; you never see what went before. Now, compare that to a situation where you're publishing each chapter as you go, and you can't go back and change anything (personal communication, May 10, 1996).

Additionally, the ongoing narrative must accommodate external factors. As Macdonald points out in discussing television production of a serial, 'Scheduling of actors, availability of studio sets and location sets... may restrict options.' (96) Under these circumstances, the construction of a coherent singular narrative with little to no sign of EAM is virtually impossible. Admittedly, the degree to which such authorial manipulation is actually visible is a subjective one. Casual viewers may overlook or forgive signs of EAM within a given episode. However, as a serial's episodes also function as a greater whole, the more holes, coincidences, etc. a serial accumulates per episode, the more it risks shattering the transparency of the overarching whole.

The visio-narrative model, however, offers a built-in countermeasure against such issues – the vision source. An internal agent of causal manipulation, it fits the description of a 'control level' presence, whose integration is a common way of maintaining suspension of disbelief in classical plots. The visibility and motives of such agents can fluctuate from highly explicit to utterly incomprehensible. While more recent examples are contemporary rational forces, epic gods remain the earliest and most visible control agents. (Lowe 56-57) Through visions, especially dream visions, the gods offer guidance to the hero, such as by directly foretelling fu-

ture actions he must undertake to fulfill his ultimate destiny. (Russel 26) Depending on the program, the source or sources can be explicitly divine, extraterrestrial or ambiguous.

The sources in *Peaks*, such as the Little Man, BOB and MIKE, parallel the gods of classical epics, who function 'not as abstractions but as conscious, intervening characters' (Gregory 1) within the plot. Supporting this is Carroll's comparison between Cooper, who ventures into The Black Lodge, and ancient epic heroes that journey to the realm of the dead, such as Odysseus and Aeneas. (288) If Cooper is a contemporary equivalent to an ancient Greek hero, the Lodge beings are the equivalents of the Olympians. In *Carnivàle* the controlling power doesn't directly participate as a tangible character, remaining invisible and unknowable. This portrayal is in line with the Renaissance epics, such as *Paradise Lost*, which assumed the existence of only One True God, whose actions and motives were often inscrutable. (Gregory 4-9) Given that the series' central premise rests on a Manichean conflict between good and evil and that the show directly explores Christianity, one can infer that the Christian God is the source.

Whatever the case, it camouflages the author's causal level, naturalizing coincidences, unresolved plotlines, etc. by disguising them as signs of intradiegetic divine manipulation. Numerous plot points in both case studies hinge on random confluences of events without a strong causal precedent. For instance, while searching for a girl with crab claws to join the carnival in episode 9, Ben encounters Phineas Boffo (John Doe), a rival carnival manager, who is searching for her as well. During a handshake, Ben touches Boffo's ring, triggering a vision that reveals a connection Boffo possesses to Ben's father. Ben was not deliberately searching for his father, so his chance encounter with Boffo seems like an improbable coincidence. However, the series had previewed his meeting with the crab girl in its first vision, indicating that his meeting with Boffo was fated to happen.

Similarly, Cooper initially assumes that his former mentor Windom Earle (Kenneth Welsh) arrives in Twin Peaks to pursue a personal vendetta, only to uncover that Earle seeks the Black Lodge that Cooper is searching for at the same time. Moreover, Earle turns out to have a previous connection to the character of Major Briggs, whom Cooper only met in the course of investigating Laura Palmer's murder. These revelations prompt Cooper to reflexively remark: 'Coincidence and fate play a large role in our lives.' On the extradiegetic level, the improbable series of events Cooper finds himself in is a result of the episode's writers contriving the situation. By explaining it as coincidence and/or fate on the intradiegetic

level, Cooper disguises the EAM on display and prevents viewers from realizing the text's artificiality. Coincidences then evince that the god-figures are the architects of fate within each show's fictional universe.

Nothing is actually coincidental – everything that happens is part of their master plan. *Carnivàle* marks the point when visio-narrative becomes predominantly the province of prime time serials.

In *Lost*, *Heroes*, *Kings*, and *Battlestar Galactica*, all of which revolve around visionaries, who wonder about the concept of fate and the roles of higher powers within their lives, visions link together events separated by anywhere from a few on-screen minutes to several seasons, as well as naturalize numerous improbable coincidences, abandoned developments and illogical plot twists among other signs of EAM. *Flashforward* perhaps takes the reliance on visions to its logical extreme, as the central enigma rests on unraveling the inexplicable occurrence that has caused every person on Earth to briefly experience a vision of his or her future.

CONCLUSION

By using visio-narrative, by regularly violating the classic realist mode, shows strengthen the illusion that their episodes altogether provide 'a completely unified, satisfying tale of events' (Herman 87) intrinsic to classic plotting. They demonstrate a sense of divine control, intrinsically suggesting the existence of a long-term plan and a definitive conclusion. At the same time, they break away from linear storytelling and craft a temporality that compounds multiple tenses. A prime time serial that ascribes to the mode fits the description of an epic as a long narrative that features deities intervening in the lives of mortals (Gregory 1- 9). In that sense, visio-narrative distinguishes a show from conventional television by adopting the conventions of epic poetry. On the other hand, it's possible that *Peaks* and the shows that follow it actually draw on the popular cultural associations between visions, dreams and deities.

The majority of the world's religious traditions differentiate between mundane dreams and revelatory dreams that connect to 'God, the Divine, or to some other transpersonal power or spiritual realm.' (Bulkeley 1999: 23-24) Whether the point of inspiration is the epic poem or the religious contexts, *Peaks* has clearly influenced the ways that stories are told on television, popularizing visions, visionaries and vision sources. By drawing on these elements, television writers receive multiple benefits,

including distinction in terms of structure and temporality, opportunity for formal experimentation and a mask that disguises evident authorial manipulation. This has evidently resulted in an overall narrativization of dreams and their disassociation from the realm of the subconscious. In a way, visio-narrative promotes the notion that dreams must be products of a higher power and convey external, rather than internal, knowledge in order to be relevant within a television narrative.

One could connect this to the notion of legitimation postulated by Newman and Levine. Their argument is that cultural discourse routinely elevates certain television programs, while denigrating others. In particular, what we consider *quality* or sophisticated programming among achieves this status 'in part through its ability to mark itself off from the soap opera.' (99) We can see this in the mode's emphasis on formal experimentation. Ian Macdonald's account of the production of the soap opera *Emmerdale* suggests that any deviation in a soap opera from the dominant aesthetic results in 'bad soap.' As he puts it, 'A freer, more creative production environment allows writers space to tell the story backwards, use subtitles and other technical devices... but draws attention to the production and to that writer.' (96) So, the visio-narrative mode's emphasis on editing, sound and other formal aspects frequently elevates a series above the formally invisible soap opera.

Soap operas also tend to lack closure, while quality shows are perceived to be those serials that have a specific and definitive conclusion. (Newman and Levine 92) As visio-narrative suggests a definitive ending and an ultimate destiny for its characters as per the epic, the mode's usage arguably convinces audiences that a show rejects the soap's perpetual deferral of closure. In actuality, however, a show cannot always meet these expectations. Both *Peaks* and *Carnivàle* were cancelled during their second seasons, leaving numerous plot points without resolution. Signifying that neither series' overarching narrative would reach full completion, the cancellations worked against the visio-narrative mode's illusion of narrative unity and predetermination.

With this in mind, the mode's capacity to elevate a show's cultural status may very well be dependent on the series' ability to deliver the definitive closure its use of visions promises to the audience. The premature non-ending of *Peaks*, for instance, has damaged its reputation, contributing to its consideration as a "failure" within many critical and industrial discourses. (Newman and Levine 92) One has to wonder then, if reactions would be different, had the series not employed visio-narrative. That is, if the show had not suggested that ev-

erything was predetermined, then perhaps reactions towards its abbreviation would not be so negative.

While many have examined the role of dreams in *Twin Peaks* in connection with Lynch's aesthetic, one of the show's most notable contributions to television storytelling has largely gone without recognition and analysis. I have shown how the visio-narrative mode functions, how it has changed through appropriation and offered certain reasons for its popularity. This study, however, cannot manage to touch upon the sheer variety of specific ways in which visio-narrative has been utilized. It would help to have examined some of the more procedural series that have adopted the model, such as *Hannibal*, which uses visions for both serial and episodic plotlines. Hopefully, this will help shed enough light on the subject of visions and bring them more into popular discourse to inspire more in-depth examinations in the future. What I hope have to illustrated is that, thanks to *Twin Peaks*, visions are a highly prominent aspect of modern television storytelling and that ancient mythological heroes along with epic gods now regularly find their equivalents in modern TV visionaries and vision sources.

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