

TOYING WITH TWIN PEAKS: FANS, ARTISTS AND RE-PLAYING OF A CULT-SERIES

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the playful dimensions of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) fandom by analyzing adult created toy tributes to the cult series. Through a study of fans and artists “toying” with the characters and story worlds of *Twin Peaks*, I will demonstrate how the re-playing of the series happens again

and again through mimetic practices such as re-creation of characters and through photoplay. Earlier studies indicate that adults are showing increased interest in character toys such as dolls, soft toys (or plush) and action figures and various play patterns around them (Heljakka 2013). In this essay, the focus is, on the one hand on industry-created *Twin Peaks* merchandise, and on the other hand, fans’ creative cultivation and play with the series scenes and its characters. The aim is to shed light on the object practices of fans and artists and how their creativity manifests in current *Twin Peaks* fandom. The essay shows how fans of *Twin Peaks* have a desire not only to influence how toyified versions of e.g. Dale Cooper and the Log Lady come to existence, but further, to re-play the series by mimicking its narrative with toys.



FIGURE 1. "IN THE WAITING ROOM", PINKKISFUN JANUARY 15TH, 2014.

1. INTRODUCTION: INVITATION TO PLAY WITH *TWIN PEAKS*

This article is an invitation to play with the idea of exploring the *Twin Peaks* television series as a source for fan play. The essay explores the playful dimensions of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) fandom by analyzing adult created tributes to the cult series. The focus is on the material practices of contemporary fans and artists who report to have a relationship to the TV series because of either fannish or artistic reasons.

"Engaging with any form of entertainment, particularly of a fictional nature, is a form of play, and thus texts are essentially spaces for play and the reception it inspires", writes Gray (2010: 205). The scope of my article lies in the understanding of the essential role of material artifacts, props and object play for *Twin Peaks* fans of different ages who are active ei-

ther on social media or as artists toying with the narrative and characters of *Twin Peaks*. Central to these activities is the desire to 'become one with the fiction':

Twin Peaks hits a nerve that drove people to impersonate, act and become one with the fiction that is *Twin Peaks*. David Lynch's series has spawned many fan-made media projects. (Hallberg & Kring Hanse, 2013: 32)

As Burns notes, *Twin Peaks* proved that TV could be much more than it had been (2015: 101). With its status as a 'cult' series with dedicated followers, it provoked fans to partake in various activities, including the creation and consumption of fan texts and merchandise (or *paratexts*, see Geraghty, 2014:123). Lavery, for example, remarks that "two years af-

ter the series' demise, several Peaks fanzines were still being published in the United States and abroad" (1995: 7). The re-playing of the original series continues to inspire fans up to this day.

Play with transmedia phenomena has become perceivably more approachable for both the creative and productive fan as well as the wider fan community more interested in following the 'cultist' activities of these 'superfans' thanks to the development of online, social media. The re-imagining and re-playing of *Twin Peaks* still takes many forms¹: "Fans gather annually, websites are devoted to its characters and settings, video games have been inspired by it" (Burns, 2015: 5).

Play is generally seen as an activity carried out mostly in childhood. The spirit of play develops as enabled by imagination either by playing alone or with others. As *playfulness* is a state of mind that may occur at all ages and *play* is a form of behavior that does not limit itself exclusively to either biological or socially constructed childhood, it would seem unproblematic for adults of the Western world to admit to be players. This does not, however, seem to be the case. Moreover, in adult fandom, play(ful) objects such as toys have been considered something other than things dedicated for ludic manipulation and meaning-making. Traditionally, these activities have been categorized under the two major headings "collecting" and "hobbying" (Heljakka, 2016a). Toys, then, from the perspective of adult appropriation, have for a long time been labelled either as *collectibles* or more lately, as designer toys which often come in limited editions only. In fan cultures, toys have been perceived as a sub-category of merchandise and sometimes novelties or gift items, which leave little space for the consideration of play as a way of using the objects. These constrained and perhaps dated labels also seem to suggest that adult interest in toys would rather serve more the needs of material investment and ownership than the motivations to creatively interact with the toys in the name of play. However, a toy, according to traditional thinking, does not have operational rules such as conditions that imply that goals are met guiding the use of the plaything².

A toy, when compared to a game, represents an open-ended plaything that signals potentialities – a promise of play. Due to its openness, a toy may also lead to unexpected play scenarios. If a toy is well-designed, it will leave room for the

imagination to such a degree that may even guide the use to directions that are perhaps not consciously articulated by the toy designer. Toys with a face – so called *character toys* – have found their way to the hearts, toy closets and experiences of players of all ages. For example dolls that may be posed, dressed-up, 'hairplayed' – even cosplayed with in terms of avatarial play, are of interest to both young and mature players. Sometimes a character toy functions as a 'blank canvas' that may be used in re-playing of narratives that are in no way related to the toys original backstory. One example of such play is the re-playing of *Twin Peaks*.

As only a few mass-produced character toys directly connected with *Twin Peaks* have been made available (e.g. through Bearbrick), it is rather in the DIY or maker cultures that toyified versions of the central characters appear. Apart from these unique, artistic and designerly creations, it is more common that mass-produced doll-types such as Barbies, Blythes and Pullip dolls are employed in the re-playing of *Twin Peaks*. The dolls are often styled (if not customized) to some degree in order to be able to capture the atmosphere conveyed by the series. Furthermore, contemporary, creative play practices with their point of origin in a media product include activities in which the employment of physical materials, technological devices, digital and social play cultures converge (Heljakka, 2016b). One example of these practices is the most topical play pattern addressed in this article: *photoplay*, or simply, photographing of toys. Game scholar Montola considers play as momentary and vanishing – after playing ends it may be difficult to get hold of it without the reports, photographs or artefacts created or used in play (2012: 74). What Godwin (2015) refers to as "photostories" and categorises as "fannish fiction", I have from the beginning of my explorations in adult toy play called photoplay (e.g. Heljakka, 2012).

On Flickr, one may find millions of toy related images. The ones that are simply documentations of toys or toy packaging – in other words photographs that function as an illustration or are purely informative in nature – do not represent photoplay. Instead, in photoplay, there is a clear narrative element involved, whether the photograph represents a singular image or a series of images. To clarify further, the outcomes of photoplay represent toys in staged scenarios inside displays, dioramas or dollhouses, or outside in urban or natural environments. Furthermore, photoplay may mimic popular narratives such as the scenes from *Star Wars* (for example, many of the scenes of this narrative have been reproduced with toys such as LEGO) or as illustrated in this article, from scenes familiar of a TV series like *Twin Peaks*. Moreover, photoplay may

1 Henry Jenkins refers to this practice with the term "re-performing of favorite stories" (see Jenkins, 2010).

2 Salen and Zimmerman refer to operational rules in their *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press, 2004.

result from completely new characters and stories created by the players themselves. Sometimes photoplaying with toys involves known elements of the human world. When 'travelling toys' are photoplayed in the name of *toy tourism*, they are depicted in front of for example famous monuments or scenic views. This parallels the fan practice of pilgrimages, for example, to famous filming locations³. Furthermore, although toy play excluding the use of technologies still exists, it is notable how players appropriate technologies and social media in order to present their play activities to possible *audiences* who enjoy the play of others as *spectators*, *participants* and *social players*. The nature of contemporary object-based and screen-oriented play then, is thus not only remarkably *hybrid*, but also *social* (Heljakka, 2016b).

Social media has made adult appropriation of toys more visible than ever before. Platforms or playgrounds for digitally mediated and visual play such as Flickr, Instagram and YouTube have had a significant role in showcasing what adults have in their toy closets and collections, and in which ways they are using (or rather, *playing with*) their toys. Thanks to social media, practices of fandom such as the creation and sharing of fan fictions and fan art have also become more normalized as compared with in the past, when communication between fans mostly took place through fanzines and at conventions. Although these channels of communication still exist, it is through groups on for example Flickr that fans of different toys (e.g. Blythe dolls or My Little Pony) connect, and together develop new meanings and activities with the toys.

Fan culture is also about being an individual among fellow fans - the ways in which fans differentiate themselves within the fan community. Then a re-playing of *Twin Peaks* with the Blythe doll as in the example of interviewee "Pinkkisfun" (b. 1975) brought forward in this study, may have a dual meaning: First, in terms of how Blythe (which is a popular doll among adult players) is creatively played as Laura Palmer, and second how *Twin Peaks* is re-played with a doll.

Twin Peaks aired first in 1990, before the age of the Internet. The cultures around TV series fandom have since developed mainly thanks to new media services, which allow viewers to access their objects of fandom more easily than ever. In other words, while a series such as *Twin Peaks* has been available in direct TV services such as Netflix, audiences

– new as well as old have been able to immerse themselves in the viewing experience whenever and wherever. Perhaps even more importantly, social media platforms have enabled fans to share experiences and keep contact with other fans in more efficient ways than before. Consequently, digital media may, besides a communication channel, be seen as a tool for creative functions – one that includes characteristics supporting social play. Flickr, as one of the adult playgrounds online, enables the formation of playful communities familiar to many fandoms. On Flickr (www.flickr.com) one may find millions of toy-related photographs, where character toys extending from the hyper-real to the fantastic are depicted as collected objects, personalized artworks or as a part of visual and spatial photoplay in single or multiple images. Photoplay, once shared on these communicative platforms, functions as evidence and documentation of the otherwise ephemeral (e.g. Montola, 2012) toy play activity of adults. In this way, it is possible to expand the discussion on play and the performance of re-playing *Twin Peaks* in various ways to include the notion of spectacle. Today, increasingly, play is also about documentation, sharing and experiencing other people's play through spectatorship. Photoplay, then, functions as well as a spectacle, offering other fans a possibility to participate in the experience not through personal and individual creation, but the consumption of other's toying with *Twin Peaks*.

My attention now turns to how central characters of the cult series, such as Dale Cooper, Laura Palmer and the Log Lady, are constantly 'happening again' when re-played in fan – visual, material, play(ful) and toy-related - practices. In the article, the re-playing in relation to *Twin Peaks* is discussed under the concepts of object play, media play and creative play practices. Toy play as a type of *object play* functions as an umbrella term for many forms of playful behavior interested in the material and three-dimensional aspects of play, ranging from manipulative exploration to mimicry and from storytelling to creative interaction. In object play the value of manipulable, physical playthings is recognized in many ways: toys function both as *evocative objects* with personal meanings, "engaging as well the heart and the mind" (Turkle, 2007: 309) and as vehicles for interpersonal ludic activities. In the case of *Twin Peaks* fandom the affective relationship towards toys extends beyond nostalgia and solitary play practices towards socially-oriented *media play* inspired by transmedia storytelling.

In toy cultures, what is of interest to the fans are the backstories of the toy characters, whether they have their point of origin in the toy itself, or for example a film or TV series. Transmedia phenomena such as cinematic films, for

3 Sometimes fans engage in transcendental journeys involving the use of individual imagination in order to revisit 'places' known from narratives. Roger Aden calls this fan symbolic pilgrimage (Aden 1999). In his book *Cult Collectors*, Geraghty (2013) describes pilgrimages taken by fans to actual filming locations.

example *Star Wars*, the *Toy Story* trilogy and the more recent *The LEGO Movie* all have their connections with the world of toys. *Star Wars* as the most popular (toy and entertainment) brand of all times (Geraghty, 2014) lives on in the play worlds of fans in various play patterns related to its action figures. Again, the *Toy Story* films and *The LEGO Movie* are, essentially, built around the narratives of the toy brands themselves. Nevertheless, fans appropriation of these story worlds may be considered creative as they range from careful re-creations of scenes to more leisurely re-played scenarios, where the fans creative input is of more importance than the ‘correctness’ of the scenes reproduced.

Booth defines media play as “a characteristic of contemporary media culture to focus on those instances in which individuals create meaning from activities that articulate a connection between their own creativity and mainstream media” (Booth, 2015: 15). In other words, the re-playing of *Twin Peaks* involves play patterns partaken with toys that draw inspiration from the original media product: storylines and iconic characters of the television series to which the fans add their personal touch through the choice of playthings employed and various customization practices used. In this way, the re-playing of *Twin Peaks* resembles the creation of fan art or fan fiction in which the toy play scenarios result from a combination of the ‘backstory’ presented in the series and a creative component provided by the player.

Fan scholar Matt Hills has argued in an interview made in 2009 that “much has been written about fan fiction, and there’s started to be more on costuming and pilgrimage (visiting locations linked to filming), but the fan craft of modding and creating one-offs as well as generating photographs/videos of toys, has not been studied enough” (Interview with Dr. Matt Hills, Part 2, 2009). In this article (as well as in my earlier research, see e.g. Heljakka, 2013) the attempt is to fill this gap by studying adult toy play patterns in relation to contemporary toy cultures and fandoms.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methods I have used to study transmedia-inspired toy play in fandoms include participatory observation at doll meetings and toy conventions, thematic interviews with artists and adult toy players and the analyses of screen-based play practices, i.e. toy photographs on blogs, Flickr, Instagram etc. (i.e. what I refer to as *photoplay*). Having participated in doll meetings and ‘adult play dates’ with my own toys, my

auto-ethnographic explorations of adult toy play have led to interesting discoveries in regarding how toy objects are manipulated, altered, customised and increasingly narrativised, sometimes leaning on or inspired by phenomena familiar from transmedia storytelling. In this article, the focus is on the re-playing of *Twin Peaks*, namely on fans, artists and their object play practices in tributes to a cult series. By drawing on literature exploring the phenomenon of *Twin Peaks* and demonstrating the outcomes of interviews with fans of *Twin Peaks*, my aim is to clarify, how the re-playing of the series happens again and again through mimetic, playful practices.

The altogether eight Finnish and one Columbian interviewees, including both ‘everyday players’ and artists, who represent both former fans and first-time viewers of the series of different ages, were interviewed either face-to-face or per e-mail in 2015-2016. The interview questions touched upon the personal relationships of the interviewees towards *Twin Peaks*, the most memorable characters, iconic scenes, particular physical objects of interest and the overall atmosphere of the series. Moreover, the interviewees were asked about their own object play, i.e. creative activities involving manipulation of physical materials such as toys or artworks in the making. The aim was to clarify the ways in which re-playing of *Twin Peaks* happens in reference to adults ‘toying’ with narratives and various artifacts. By this qualitative, thematic study, the author was able to gain information on how adult fandom of *Twin Peaks* materializes in object practices beyond commercially produced merchandise.

3. “MYSTERIOUS AND FORBIDDEN”: ENCOUNTERING AND REMEMBERING TWIN PEAKS

I was a child when the series was on television the first time. I remember that it was discussed at school. Someone was allowed to watch it and someone else had seen parts of it, in secret. It came with something mysterious and forbidden. (Jasmin, b. 1980)

In my interviews the overall atmosphere of *Twin Peaks* was identified as “Oppressing, decadent, mysterious, mystic, playful, enigmatic, sick, scary, cranky, fabled, surprising, erotic, weird, addictive” (Johanna, b. 1973) and, “exciting, a little scary, slow in tempo and agonizing”. (Jasmin, b. 1980). The two interviewees, who have watched the show for the first time recently, use similar terms in describing the overall atmosphere of the series: “A little gloomy and tense”

(Interviewee: Henna, b. 1985) and “I have had an odd feeling that everything is oversize and people is heavily covered in thick fabrics which gives me a bit of tension. Not sure how to describe it well. Also I have noticed that shadows play an important role” (Jennifer, b. 1986).

Fandom itself changes over long periods of time for a series, such as *Twin Peaks*. The interviewees who participated in this study, and who became familiar with the series when it first aired in the 1990s as teenagers and young adults, still seem to have vivid impressions in their mind about the series. Three elements are considered the key attraction of *Twin Peaks*: the characters, the artefactual world and the overall atmosphere of the series.

Adult toy relations are often discussed through a framing of nostalgia. Although this may be one explanation for toy fandom at an adult age, it is questionable whether it is the only one to exist. There are adults with a keen interest in the toys of their childhood. Equally, there are adults who express an interest in contemporary toys with no connection whatsoever to what they played with as children. When considering the re-playing of *Twin Peaks*, it is important to include the notion of nostalgia in the discussions of fans who have a long-term relationship with the series, not because of what they have in their toy collection, but because of how they remember and describe the overall atmosphere of the series. At the same time, it is of interest to this article to investigate how the experience of the series may have been enriched when fans have toyed with by re-playing the series, long after their first encounter with it.

The role of memory in fandom offers an interesting starting point for a discussion on the re-playing practices of adults. In the case of “Pinkkisfun” (b. 1975), the interviewee claims that she has re-visited the series on several occasions before her photoplaying. This illustrates how for some fans of the series the accurate re-creating of the scenes is of high importance, although the physical media being manipulated for the sake of re-playing comes from toydom, and not human actors.

Today, fandom for TV series has changed from the times when *Twin Peaks* first was launched. Fans have become more active in terms of creative practices as the tools to manipulate the original content has developed alongside digital media services and platforms. In a way, then, fandom has developed into more active meaning making than simply the discussion and negotiation of the original narrative. The way this manifests is in the multifaceted practices of fans one of them relating to both individually cultivated material culture and socially shared creative outcomes of this culture.

4. MIMETIC POTENTIALITIES OF A CULT SERIES

Cult TV series such as *Twin Peaks*, with their iconic characters, scenes and catchy lines offer multiple possibilities for mimetic play. Although interviewee “Johanna” (b. 1973), considers the series as “something of ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ with all its thoughtful elements in both visually and in terms of its soundscape”, the visually (and materially) enigmatic quality of *Twin Peaks* allows fans to re-play with important elements recognized as significant symbols for what *Twin Peaks* stands for. For example, as my interviews revealed, artifacts such as the Log, velvet drapes and the zig-zagged black-and-white floor pattern were often mentioned by the interviewees. Moreover, while an atmosphere of a TV series may be impossible to replicate, it is possible to choose memorable scenes and re-create them through a playful approach:

The most iconic scenes always happen on the black-and-white floor in front of the red curtains, in another world. I have depicted red curtains in my paintings a lot. My master’s thesis for the Academy of Fine Arts (2009) is named *Red Curtains – narrative and scenic painting*. The influence of *Twin Peaks* lies deep inside me, even though the first red curtains I saw were the ones in the hall of our primary school. (Katja, b. 1969)

Three of the interviewees (Jasmin, b. 1980, Mari, b. 1984 and Johanna, b. 1973) mentioned the log, and two the drapes (Katja, b. 1969 and Johanna, b. 1973). Further, many of the interviewees mentioned the plastic Laura’s body was wrapped in – an element with perhaps the most attracting mimetic potential of all the material artefacts remembered from the series.

5. THE INFINITE PLAY(FULNESS) OF TWIN PEAKS

For Jenkins (1995: 55), one fan explained, “I don’t care who killed Laura Palmer. I just love the puzzle”. The mysteries of *Twin Peaks* seem to offer fans an endless playground, inviting them to ludic engagement ranging from game-like, structured and finite play to open-ended, infinite play with meanings and materials. As noted by one of the interviewees in this study, “Tomas”, b. 1976, the playfulness of *Twin Peaks* also manifests

in its relationship with the history of television:

The series is very playful with its connection to television history and its format – as the wonderful Invitation to Love underlines. It is very aware of itself – sometimes in playful ways. (Tomas, b. 1976)

As toys are objects which derive meaning in play, it is also important to consider how the concepts of playthings, free-form play and the playing of games become intertwined in the series itself and the fandom revolving it. Overall, one may associate the supposed playfulness of the series with various elements, such as the wordplay in interaction between characters: a certain quirkiness of the dialogue. On the level of physical artefacts, playful engagement manifests in an intercourse between chaos and order – between free-form and rule-bound play: The seemingly random placement of a moose head on the table of the sheriff's department as a sign of disorder and the meticulously organized donuts accompanying the department's workforce in many scenes as a lead for the desire to see order in the chaos. Hague (1995) compares *Twin Peaks*' narrative to Carse's concept of infinite play: "The narrative structure of *Twin Peaks* instead resembles what philosopher Robert Carse calls 'infinite play'. [...] Finite games depend upon the existence of unwritten rules, spatial and temporal boundaries, and 'conclusions' in which someone must 'win'; in infinite games, on the other hand, boundaries are constantly being dissolved to prevent the game from ending. The rules of an infinite game change frequently in order to prevent a "win," or ending, and each "play" in an infinite game eliminates a boundary" (Hague, 1995: 133). According to Pulsipher, gamers need to be able to make decisions based on clearly articulated options, otherwise the plaything in question is not a game, but it can be a story, a toy or a riddle (Pulsipher, 2012: 39). Toys, on the other hand, represent open-ended playthings that signal imaginative potentialities – and a promise of play. Thus, the re-playing practices of *Twin Peaks* fans seem to lean more on infinite play and thus, neglect the competitive element.

The presence of actual, physical toys in *Twin Peaks* is not striking, but nevertheless, undeniable: Take for instance the miniature train in the shop window of the hardware store where Norma meets Nadine, or the Little Elvis figurine in the hands of Audrey's father, Benjamin Horne, when deciding to take a shower after an act of infidelity with Catherine Martell. Leo is referred by Agent Albert as "Mr. Potato Head"



FIGURES 2 AND 3. "I CARRY A LOG – YES. IS IT FUNNY TO YOU?" PINKKISFUN, DECEMBER 27TH, 2013 / "I FEEL LIKE I KNOW HER, BUT SOMETIMES MY ARMS BEND BACK", PINKKISFUN, JANUARY 15TH, 2014.

(a reference to a historically known toy brand from toy company Hasbro)⁴. Further, the toy soldiers play a significant role in the ludic aspects of Ben Horne's re-playing [!] of the American Civil War. One of the interviewees, "Jennifer", b. 1986, points to the log as an anthropomorphized plaything, as follows:

Author: How would you describe the relations between toys and/or play in the series?

Interviewee: I have noticed two instances: The log lady character [who] plays with her log and has somehow a strong connection with the object, I thought that was very interesting and such as small detail but that it perfectly describes the attachment someone can have to a toy (in this case her log) and the huge emotional connection toys play in our lives despite their physical appearance. (Jennifer, b. 1986)

The playful aspect of the Log Lady character manifests on many levels. Her 'sidekick', the Log, is a character itself – one which carries magical capabilities. Dukes writes of the birth of the Log Lady as follows:

⁴ See <http://www.glastonberrygrove.net/texts/script10.html>, accessed September 15, 2016.

After a few outrageous cameo appearances as the Log Lady during the first season, Catherine E. Coulson became an unlikely celebrity. The Log Lady was received with widespread amusement and curiosity as the character and her dear log received parodies on *Saturday Night Live* and *Sesame Street*. Part mystic and part messenger, the Log Lady was an idea that lingered in the minds of both David Lynch and Coulson for nearly fifteen years before the character came to life (Dukes, 2014: 147).

6. PUTTING TWIN PEAKS INTO PLAYTHINGS

Twin Peaks has indeed, always presented a *toyetic* potential⁵. Ken Scherer, former chief operating officer at Lynch/Frost productions, recalls in the oral history of *Twin Peaks*, as recorded by Dukes, that several different types of playful products were planned to be launched: “There were talking logs (which were not produced) and so many insane things” (Dukes, 2014: 153). Today, *Twin Peaks* lives on in a multitude of physical products created by fans and other creative individuals drawing inspiration from the series’ recognizable style: According to Howe, the second-hand auction site eBay has at any given time several thousand items for sale from the *Twin Peaks* universe (Howe, 2013: 41). However, to the fan, as interviewee “Tomas” (b. 1976), points out, the merchandizing, mass-marketable (and perhaps *toyetic*) potential of *Twin Peaks* is not as obvious as one might think:

With many series you can package and sell replicas of certain items, but *Twin Peaks* is not like that. A damn fine cup of coffee is hard to brand. It would be a bit silly to start selling log lady logs. The recorder (Diana) Agent Cooper talks to is not special. The cherry knot that Audrey ties with her tongue does not really work as a key chain, nor the bottle that breaks when a stone hits it. (Tomas, b. 1976)

Today it is more and more common to find toy portraits of popular TV characters. *Breaking Bad* action figures (see Langsworthy 2015), are a recent example of the toyification

5 *Toyetic* refers to the suitability of a media property (TV series, film etc.) for merchandising tie-in lines of various playthings e.g. toys and games.

of characters known from a popular TV series. Still, online, one may find joke items such as a *Twin Peaks* action figure based on the Log Lady’s log. When toy versions of a popular narrative are not available in the mass-market, it is up to independent toy designers, artists and everyday players to come up with designerly, artistic and DIY versions of their favourite characters. A search online sheds light on what kind of *Twin Peaks* related items are available as handmade creations. Besides fan memorabilia such as fan-created and in this way, pro-am style artifacts such coffee mugs and T-shirts on Etsy, there is evidence of the toyification of *Twin Peaks*⁶: for instance, a one-off Dale Cooper action figure is marketed by Twin Pie, and actress Catherine E. Coulson, or the Log Lady, can be seen to hold *amigurumi* (or crocheted toys, see Ramirez Saldarriaga, 2016) in her hands. One of the two first-time viewers of the show, “Jennifer”, (b. 1986), points to the need of people to use objects as memory aids and conversational pieces:

It totally makes sense to me that people will collect and play with the characters because for many of us [it] seems to be important to gather memories through objects. Somehow I feel that [the] fans of any series could deposit in the action figures of their favorite characters those magical moments where they could feel part of the story or use them as a trigger for conversation. (Jennifer, b. 1986)

The toyish manifestations of *Twin Peaks* fandom occur today outside of the cult production itself. For instance, when considering contemporary toy culture and especially the designer toy and DIY aspects of it, *Twin Peaks* has inspired both companies and fans of the series to create toyified versions of the key characters. There are some mass-marketed toyified versions of *Twin Peaks* characters as well. For example, Japanese toy company Bearbrick demonstrates how Laura Palmer, from the infamous scene in the pilot of the series, has been turned into a (rare) toy portrait and in this case, a plastic action figure hybrid between a LEGO-type of figure and Bearbrick’s signature form⁷.

Not everything online is what it seems, though. When searching for *Twin Peaks* related toys on the Internet, it is pos-

6 I propose that *toyification* communicates the idea of an entity being reinforced with toyish elements/aesthetic; an object, technology or a technological device, a character or a human being acquiring a toyish appearance, form or function through intentional behavior.

7 See <http://www.bearbrick.com/1200.html>. Accessed February 3, 2016.

sible to find examples that may represent 'the stuff of dreams' more than actual, mass-marketed products. Some toys again, are ready to be auctioned, like a custom-made Dale Cooper Figurine⁸. The toy as an example of a custom-made character toy is a case of pro-am created fan art for commercial purposes and functions as an example of an art toy. Art toys, sometimes also referred to as *designer toys*, may come in limited numbers. According to media scholar Marc Steinberg, "the designer toy generates an expanded field of creative and critical practice that simultaneously invokes and works against the grain of character merchandising" (2010: 227). 'Merchandise' or 'collectable items' is precisely how toys are often positioned in the context of adult fandom. In Steinberg's thinking, then, designer toys created by artists may offer possibilities to negotiate transmedially spread, somewhat uniform meanings of a commercial brand, positioned, through merchandising, as a "collectible".

Although the *Twin Peaks* experience was extended with only a few, licensed, mass-marketed items such as the "Welcome to *Twin Peaks*" town guide and *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* (i.e. merchandise), fans soon saw other possibilities to enter the story worlds in terms of utilization of physical objects. According to one of my interviewees, "Tomas" (b. 1976), the series inspired him to re-create the wrapped-in-plastic theme by the appropriation of a Barbie doll in the 90s – a gift that was not appreciated in a way a fan would assume:

I created a Laura Palmer figurine once. It is a fairly unique fan activity for me, I have rarely done any physical fan works. But I painted a blond haired Barbie doll blue and wrapped it in plastic. I was very happy with the outcome as it was a successful reproduction of a particularly striking image from the series. The doll was created as a present to a friend, a friend who I thought was as big a fan of *Twin Peaks* as I was. When giving the doll it was instantly obvious from his facial expression that he did not get the gift at all. I was disappointed, partially because he did not like the gift – and partially since I thought the doll was very neat and realized that I wanted to keep it myself. (Tomas, b. 1976)

8 See "Miniature Dale Cooper Figure With Damn Fine Accessories" by Twin Pie on Nov 5, 2013 at <http://welcometotwinpeaks.com/shop/dale-cooper-collectible-figure/#ixzz3z6bePcNSat>, Accessed February 3, 2016.

7. RE-PLAYING TWIN PEAKS

This has happened before. It is happening again (Burns, 2015: 22).

The re-playing of *Twin Peaks* is oddly, but perhaps not surprisingly encouraged in the fictional guidebook *Welcome to Twin Peaks* in a 'Audrey Horne Photo Look-Alike Contest':

Do you look like Audrey Horne or just act like her? Do your saddle shoes steam, I mean, do you really have the look? Send us your best Audrey-like photo and an essay of an hundred words or less explaining how is it you look like you do, or rather, like Ms. Horne does. First prize winner will have his or her photo published in the *Gazette* and receive a \$100 gift certificate. Please include your name and *Twin Peaks* address with photo. Remember, a lot can be done with make-up, lightning and the spirit of deceit. (Wurman et al., 1991:103)

The 'wrapped in plastic' concept has evolved into an online meme which provokes and inspires people to cosplay and photoplay Laura Palmer either physically or through their toys. Cosplay (abbreviation for costume play) relates to the now global phenomenon of manga and anime, and refers to dressing up and playing your favorite character from popular culture. The activity does not limit itself to the dress – in cosplay the players try to get closer to the character with behavior and mimicry. Cosplay gives the players an opportunity to toy with a character, even to become a 'toy' herself (Heljakka, 2013: 355). The comment made by interviewee "Jennifer" (b. 1986) illustrates how the re-playing of *Twin Peaks* further manifests in cosplay practices:

I have seen role playing and costume playing with characters of the series by people my age, which suggest to me that the impact of the series was very big because even younger generations are playing to dress up like the characters for Halloween and wanting to collect objects of the series. (Jennifer, b. 1986)

Nevertheless, what is of more interest for the article at hand, is the re-playing of *Twin Peaks* through material artefacts. Let us now turn to "Pinkkisfun" (b. 1975), who has re-played the series with her Blythe dolls.



FIGURE 4. "SHE'S DEAD. WRAPPED IN PLASTIC". PHOTOPLAY BY PINKKISFUN, 30TH OF NOVEMBER 2013.

Author: What motivated you to begin the re-playing of *Twin Peaks* by making your own versions?

Interviewee: Maybe I first figured that it is something unique and that no one does this, it felt so silly [...] *Twin Peaks* is, in a way a scary [TV] series and such a cult series and to do that with dolls. But of course people do it. People do all kinds of things with dolls. (Pinkkisfun, b. 1975)

The choice of the toy used in re-playing the scenarios of *Twin Peaks* has an effect on the aesthetic of the outcome. When exploring the images as posted on Flickr which toy with the 'wrapped-in-plastic' scene it becomes apparent that different dolls have been used. With its 50 years and over of history, everyone (at least in the Western world) is bound to recognize Barbie. However, Blythe or Pullip dolls which are more recent toy-types with their large heads, big, moving eyes and 'cute' facial features, and are not as known as Barbie, offer the re-players a chance to distance themselves from the over-commercialized and perhaps dated (Western)

aesthetics of the character and allow a more contemporary, more intriguing (and Eastern) take on the action⁹. Doll-types, like the aforementioned, are popular in customization practices. Customizers try to produce the best version of beloved popular fan objects, says Godwin (2015). For example, action figure customizers privilege realism over the fantastic and after duplicating a beloved fan object's definitive appearance, clothing, and/or accessories in one-sixth scale, customizers often pose and photograph action figures in recreations of iconic scenes (Ibid.).

9 Blythe, despite its 'Japanese look' is the original creation of American company Kenner (known especially for its Star Wars action figures) from 1973. Kenner has since been acquired by one of the largest toy companies in the world, Hasbro. Contemporary versions of Blythe carry almost the same look as Kenner's original designs, but are manufactured and marketed under Hasbro's license by Japanese toy company Tomy Takara. Pullip, on the other hand, is a Korean toy brand, popular among both young and mature toy fans around the world. Another point to be made here is to consider the use of other toy-types in the re-playing of *Twin Peaks*. Although they could not be seen on for instance Flickr as frequently in this context as other character toys, it is justifiable to consider how different the re-playing of *Twin Peaks* would appear, if re-played with LEGO characters or Sylvanian Families (animal) figures.

Contemporary doll play does not necessarily limit itself to manipulative interactions with the toy, but extends to both multiple media platforms and physical playgrounds, when cameras are appropriated in the play scenarios. Mobile camera technologies afford spatial or locative play¹⁰. When studying visual practices of adult toy players and an activity or adult play pattern I have named photoplay, it is possible to perceive its mimetic nature. Without the utilisation of photography and sharing on social media, the mimetic quality of contemporary toy play of fans, or the “deliberate imitation of an act or text”, which Paul Booth refers to as *pastiche* (2015: 2), would remain largely unknown.

The images of the re-played *Twin Peaks* scenes with Blythe dolls and interview excerpts employed in this article demonstrate a case study conducted as a part of my explorations of adult toy play: the play of a Finnish Blythe doll player I have interviewed, observed and played with for this article. She uses the name “Pinkkisfun” on her blog and on Flickr. Her (play) work making homage to *Twin Peaks* is in progress. Besides sharing her photoplay on Flickr, Pinkkisfun also creates unique items such as coin purses and carry-ons for dolls related to *Twin Peaks*. As is the case for many participants of *Twin Peaks* fandom, Pinkkisfun has been a fan of the series since first seeing it in the beginning of the 1990’s. Her fandom manifests through special appreciation of certain characters in the series, which becomes clear in her photoplay. The cult viewer enjoys repetition, for example reciting favourite lines (Lavery, 1995: 14). The mute, toyified characters which appear in the photoplay of Pinkkisfun and several other photoplaying fans showcasing their images on photo management application sites on social media, operate more on the level of the material and visual than the textual narrative, but often include captions with popular phrases from the series. One of the most memorable and re-played scenes of *Twin Peaks* for fans is the one in the pilot, in which Pete Martell finds the murdered Laura Palmer’s body by the water, as illustrated by an interview excerpt:

Author: Which scenes do you find particularly significant?

Pinkkisfun: The opening scene, in which, was it Pete who finds Laura and [says] “She’s all wrapped in plastic”. [...] I have made the opening scene, the one in which Laura is in the water. And then, I have made [a version] of the Log Lady... Perhaps the fin-

est one is the one of Laura, wrapped in plastic. [...] I was driving somewhere with ‘J’ and I knew about the place where there is cold water and where there surely are no other people around at that time of the year [...] and it really was so much fun and it was really scary as the picture [result of photoplay] became so scary, and in some way, so realistic.

Wrapping up dolls in plastic does not materialize out of nowhere as a contemporary play practice and strategy for re-playing *Twin Peaks*. *Twin Peaks* related literature from Howe (2013) reveals that the practice has its point of origin at the offices of Lynch and Frost themselves, where Lynch’s assistant Shimatsu-U is said to have wrapped up a Barbie doll in plastic and hung it on a Christmas tree:

In fan culture, Laura Palmer is always portrayed as having just been murdered. Indeed, among the most highly sought after and valuable objects for sale on the online auction sites are the ‘wrapped in plastic’ dolls. In 1990s Mark Frost’s assistant, Paula K. Shimatsu-U, took a Barbie doll, stripped off all its clothing, wrapped it in plastic and then bound it in tape. This doll, which she hung on the Christmas tree at Lynch/Frost Productions, was so popular that she subsequently assembled a large group of replicas and had Sheryl Lee sign the tape of each one. These dolls typically sell in the \$50-100 range (‘The Laura Palmer Doll Is Back!’ in Howe, 2013: 43).

As the quote from Howe illustrates, the toy-related ‘Wrapped in plastic’ meme seems to have its origins at Lynch/Frost Productions, although it is likely that it spread among fan communities as a more viral photoplaying theme only after the launch of social media platforms, where the re-playing could spread with less effort. Long before the Internet meme, “Wrapped in plastic” was also the name for the *Twin Peaks* fanzine published between 1992-2005 by Win-Mill Productions – a platform on which fan art and fictions could be published.

In fanfiction, “enthusiasts are able to enter the creative register by injecting their wishes and desires (and even themselves) into their favourite narratives”, writes Howe (2013: 44-45). In photoplaying of the ‘Wrapped in plastic’ meme it is not only that dolls that play the part of Laura Palmer. It is important to note that e.g. on images shared on Flickr, it is the re-players themselves who are sometimes willing to become Laura¹¹. Nevertheless, even for fans not interested

10 An example of a hybrid and social location-based game is the recent Pokémon Go developed by Niantic.

11 See photographs tagged ‘Laura Palmer’ on flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/search/?text=laura%20palmer>. Accessed February 3, 2016.



FIGURE 5. THE ‘WRAPPED-IN-PLASTIC’ MEME PLAYED WITH AN ARTISTICALLY CUSTOMIZED MY LITTLE PONY BY MARI KASURINEN: “MY LITTLE LAURA”, 2016.

in toyified versions of *Twin Peaks*, the photoplay including a Barbie, Blythe or Pullip doll may function as source of enjoyment, as illustrated in an interview excerpt:

Author: What kind of feedback or comments have you received concerning your *Twin Peaks* versions?

Pinkkisfun: Really, really good and supportive feedback. And people who do not care for dolls at all can oversee that this includes dolls. They see and appreciate [the re-play] even if it involves dolls.

And then again, doll people, they are maybe a little twisted and usually like *Twin Peaks* so it is two birds with one stone.

Besides the scene depicting the discovery of Laura’s body, another iconic set of scenes from the series are the dream sequences taking place in the ‘waiting room’. The Red Room, first appearing on Agent Cooper’s dreams is significant for fans (Pheasant-Kelly, 2013: 99).

Although the use of toys and the notions of play in relation to photoplay inspired by *Twin Peaks* may at first seem to inject an additional dose of humour into the reading of an otherwise quirky and weird world envisioned by Lynch and Frost, there is another way to think of the element of play as an avenue for coming to terms with the darker themes of the series. Campbell (in Reeves et al., 1995: 190) provides an alternative reading of the either nihilist or progressive understanding of the suggested postmodern playfulness of *Twin Peaks* by stating: “Playfulness can be a way to confront issues that may be so horrific and dreadful that there’s no other way.” Playing as an activity is neither not always merely a fun-seeking activity, but also a way of dealing with the inevitable darkness present in factual and fictional human life. Even toy play has its serious side. Moreover, it is possible to consider the playful interaction with the darker themes of the series as a strategy of fans to encounter the complexity (and horror) of the narrative in ways that are fraught with paradox: for many, toys represent tools for happiness, but toy play at an adult age may also employ themes from the darker sides of human behavior.



FIGURE 6. TOYIFIED VERSIONS OF “BOB”, “LAURA PALMER” AND “DALE COOPER” IN JENNIFER RAMIREZ’S AMIGURUMI, 2016.

At the end of the series I felt sad, said Lynch. I couldn't get myself to leave the world of *Twin Peaks*. I was in love with the character of Laura Palmer and her contradictions, radiant on the surface but dying inside. I wanted to see her live, move, and talk (Lynch and Rodley 2005: 184 in Burns 2015: 83).

The role of toy-related practices in relation to the re-playing of *Twin Peaks* seem to enable fans of the series and fans of toys to revisit the intriguing and unique, narrative world of Lynch and Frost. Re-playing the characters, scenes and overall atmosphere of the series may give fans a possibility to re-experience *Twin Peaks*. Also, to toy with *Twin Peaks* may assist in keeping the fantasy alive, while waiting for the upcoming season of the series. Presumably one, that will offer fans plenty more possibilities to enter the world of the television series, through toys and play. The questions that remain unanswered but offer possibilities for further research: Are fans re-playing *Twin Peaks* for keeping Laura Palmer's memory alive? Or rather, does *Twin Peaks* represent a world that despite its acts of terror functions of a constant source of pleasure and as such, in the minds and creative acts of players, needs to happen again? Based on the findings of the study represented here, the motivations to toy with *Twin Peaks* are manifold. But there is one undeniable common nominator for re-playing the series – to, through toying – remember, re-experience and never forget.

8. CONCLUSIONS: LET'S PLAY IT AGAIN!

David Lynch has said about his films: "All my movies are about strange worlds that you can't go into unless you film them. That's what's so important about film to me. I just like going into strange worlds" (Lynch in Wolf, 2012: 1). Similarly, toy play at an adult age, allows the player to step into a "place both wonderful and strange" and in the case of re-playing *Twin Peaks* through photoplay, to re-enter a world dreamed up by David Lynch's imagination.

In sum, based on the results of my study it is viable to claim that *Twin Peaks* is continuously toyed with through at least two different mimetic approaches and strategies of re-playing: first, by the commercial, designerly and artistic creations and versions of the characters of the series – the 'designer', 'art' or 'DIY' toys, as created by Bearbrick and Twin Pie, as demonstrated here. Secondly, in the play scenarios of adults who use mass-produced – e.g. Barbie, Blythe or Pullip

dolls, or customized versions of them in play patterns such as photoplay as illustrated by the re-play of Pinkisfun in this article. The study at hand shows how fans of *Twin Peaks* have a desire not only to influence how toyified versions of e.g. Dale Cooper and the Log Lady come to existence, but further, also in the re-playing of the series by mimicking its narrative with toys. When narratives, such as TV series or films, turn into transmedia phenomena, the possibility for the fan to attach to the content multiplies. In other words, when toys are produced based on a TV series characters, fans are able to physically manipulate them and to immerse themselves in the re-playing of the narrative either by mimicking actual scenes or developing the meanings and storylines based on for example on the parodying of them. Alternatively, with a TV series that has not spawned into various spheres of physical merchandise, fans have to use their own creativity in re-playing of the series.

Often, the toy play of adults, especially the play patterns in association with photoplay, is based on transmedia phenomena like *Twin Peaks*. What started as a television series is now present in many forms of fan culture, both as re-played narratives and as physical objects, including toys¹². An important facet of the re-playing of *Twin Peaks* is socially shared photoplay, which functions as evidence for both the creation of DIY or self-made toy versions of characters and re-creations of iconic scenes familiar from the series. Through photoplay, both the players themselves and other fans of the series may revisit the world of *Twin Peaks* again and again. In terms of these ideas, the results of photoplay could, more than anything, be understood as realizations of the spontaneous, less rule-bound and creative play potential, representing the concept of infinite play. In the words of Geraghty, "digital spaces such as eBay, shop websites and fan-made pages offer the fan collector the potential for unlimited archives and images, knowledge and other digital ephemera" (2014: 161). What I would further suggest, is that the images, especially in the case of photoplay, offer potential players ideas on how to get into play with their own toys. Re-playing, then, means to 'toy' with the original content - to remember, re-create and once again experience what was of importance for the fan in the first encounter with the media product.

The various re-playing patterns spawned by *Twin Peaks* and shared on social media by adult toy players demonstrate the show's depth of cultural importance. To conclude, it is

¹² For more on adult toy play with transmedial dimensions, see e.g. Heljakka (2015a).

perhaps fitting to argue that not only the log will have something to say about the re-playing of *Twin Peaks* for the followers of the cult series in the future. Apparently, so will all the ludic manifestations related to it – both the artistically altered toys and the products of photoplaying with them, as illustrated in this article. Based on my analyses of *Twin Peaks* fandom in contemporary toy cultures I would also state that fandom is indeed, not only playful, but a form of play continuously (and perhaps endlessly) inspired by the TV series that once became a cult and never was forgotten. Infinitely re-played and happening again.

What the launch of Lynch's upcoming season of *Twin Peaks* will result in, in terms of character toys such as dolls, action figures or soft toys, remains to be seen. Time will tell, for example, whether or not the Washington-based toy company Funko will develop and market its own line of 'cutified' *Twin Peaks* characters in the manner it has toyified a significant number of characters known from transmedia phenomena. Despite any possible and upcoming commercial merchandise of licensed items in relation to *Twin Peaks*, the fans of the series are always able to re-play the series according to their own choice of physical materials such as various playthings that have their own backstories with no connections to *Twin Peaks* whatsoever. On the other hand, in the creative hands of fans and artists, new versions of *Twin Peaks* characters may be endlessly created. How these become perceivable to the world is through the means of social media and in this way, function as new invitations to infinite play.

Author: Will you continue this re-playing of *Twin Peaks*?

Pinkkisfun: Definitely yes. I do not have a specific image or scene in mind, but for sure I will. It would be such a treasure chest to close by saying 'no'.

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