

Communication, Networks, and Disruption in *Twin Peaks:
The Return*

by

Aaron O'Quinn

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Abstract

The network model has become a powerful tool for shaping an imaginary of social organization and communication in contemporary life. As individuals become increasingly connected via communication technologies, we also face a heightened sense of alienation and disorientation. In this thesis I argue that David Lynch and Mark Frost's eighteen-episode television series *Twin Peaks: The Return* crafts a roadmap through this disorientation. By drawing attention to historical events represented in the series, namely the Trinity nuclear test, I will show the ways in which the series is interested in how specific aspects of American history created the foundation for contemporary notions of communication breakdown. I connect this historical framework to a textual analysis of *The Return* to argue that the series' aesthetic engagement with intense affects, namely anxiety, is connected to how it represents networked modes of communication.

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Introduction

In our daily lives, interactions with communication technologies are seemingly endless. I often begin my day scrolling down the feed of images provided by the hundreds of accounts I follow on Instagram, an image and video sharing social media platform. I look at and “like” the photos posted by hundreds of people, most of whom I have never interacted with outside this specific digital context. We are connected across great networks often without even considering their implications. After looking at my Instagram feed, I will check my email, and then open another software application on my cellphone that provides me with information about the weather forecast. After this I will open yet another software application that tells me when the next bus will be arriving at the bus stop nearest my apartment via Global Positioning System (GPS) technology that allows my cellphone to share my exact location with this app. While I wait for this bus, I can read and respond to Facebook messages from my mother, I can send text messages to friends expressing my irritation that the bus I am waiting for is late, and I can check Instagram again. All of this banal description of the ways in which I use my cellphone each morning is an articulation of the inescapability of networked digital connection. This is a uniquely contemporary routine. To explain to someone living in the year 1990, under otherwise identical circumstances to mine, what I just explained here would likely result in a confused response: “What is Instagram?” they might say. I like photos posted by people I have never met who live great geographical distances from me. I laugh along with a video of a puppy sneezing that my mother sends me. I am able to track the movement of the bus I wait for in real time. I belabour this point not to give the reader insight into the details of my own daily routine but to indicate the ways in which digital

networks and devices have fundamentally changed the ways in which we communicate with one another.

Twin Peaks: The Return (David Lynch and Mark Frost, 2017) is a television series that is obsessed with how we communicate. It maps the complicated and interconnected networks of communication across geographical space and then through time. In representing these networks, narratively and formally, *The Return* reveals a concern with how the past, the pasts of characters and of American history, effects the present. *The Return* is the eighteen-part continuation of the series *Twin Peaks*, which aired on ABC (American Broadcasting Company) for two seasons (a total of thirty episodes) between 1990-1991. Both *Twin Peaks* and *The Return* were created by American filmmaker, writer and multi-media artist David Lynch and writer Mark Frost.¹

Twin Peaks chronicled the lives of a large cast of characters in the titular small town after the murder of a young woman named Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee). The series drew from such disparate generic sources as the soap opera, murder mystery, police procedural, and teen romantic drama, all imbued with Lynch's particular postmodern sensibility. Chronologically, *The Return* picks up twenty-five years after the events of *Twin Peaks*. Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) has been trapped in existential limbo in the Red Room while his evil doppelgänger roams free in the outside world, not keen to go back from where he came. This serves as the centre of a sprawling story of multiple plot lines, only some of which intersect with Cooper's story. Cooper

¹ *Twin Peaks* had multiple episodes directed by Lynch but utilized a more traditional television production model of using multiple writers and directors throughout the run of the series. With *The Return* each of the series eighteen episodes is written collaboratively by David Lynch and Mark Frost, and each episode is directed solely by Lynch. *Twin Peaks* was followed by the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* directed by Lynch, co-written with series writer Robert Engels, which was released theatrically in 1992.

eventual escape from the Red Room involves his body being pulled through an electrical socket and into an empty living room in a home in Las Vegas, Nevada. His reappearance in this world prompts a disappearance of an identical double, a manufactured version of Cooper's body, named Dougie Jones. Dougie lives in Las Vegas², with his wife Janey-E and son Sonny Jim, where he works as an insurance salesman. Having been trapped in the Red Room for twenty-five years, Cooper is not quite the character viewers remember from the original series. He is nearly mute, communicating only through repeating pieces of phrases said to him back to the original speaker. Still, Cooper/Dougie's stilted version of oral communication seems effective. Everyone Cooper/Dougie interacts with gleans meaning from what he is telling them by repeating their own words back to them.

Meanwhile, at the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Department, Deputies Hawk and Andy, as well as Sheriff Truman's brother (the Sheriff Truman of the original series has, within the diegesis, become very ill and, as a result, been replaced by his brother as Sheriff), begin combing through the evidence from the Laura Palmer case once again at the insisting of the Log Lady (a local woman who always carries with her a small log and who acts as a kind of small town mystic). In Philadelphia, Cooper's former FBI colleagues are alerted to the arrest of Mr. C (Cooper's evil Red Room doppelgänger), and believing this to be their long missing friend, travel to meet and interview him. And once there, they discover that this Cooper is not the man they remember. These main stories converge in the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Department in the series penultimate episode for a confrontation

² In Chapter One I explore *The Return's* representation of the first nuclear bomb test, which took place in New Mexico in 1945. In the post-war years much of the nuclear weapons testing that would occur on American soil would take place in Nevada, with a small tourist industry cropping up around these tests. While the series never makes this connection explicit, it remains a pertinent example of the broader historical connections being made in *The Return*. See, David E. Nye's *American Technological Sublime*.

between the forces of good and evil. As I mention earlier, this series is obsessed with how we communicate. The idea of communication, especially its perceived problems, is imbued into each of the main stories I have mentioned, and, as well, is explored throughout the series many, less central, stories.

The notion of communication as a problem is borrowed from John Durham Peters' book *Speaking Into the Air*, a guiding text for the theoretical framework of this thesis. In his introduction Peters states that "only since the late nineteenth century have [humans]...defined ourselves in terms of our ability to *communicate* with one another" (1). Peters argument is "at once a critique of the dream of communication as the mutual communion of souls, a genealogy of sources and scenes of the pervasive sense that communication is always breaking down, and a reclamation of a way of thinking that avoids both the moral privilege of dialogue and the pathos of breakdown" (1). In this thesis I argue that in *The Return*, creators David Lynch and Mark Frost are engaged in a similar project, dissecting the ways in which our notions of communication have become so central to our understanding of ourselves as human subjects. In *The Return* most forms of communication pose a problem, not just those that are technologically aided. In this way, Lynch and Frost diverge from Peters' critique in some ways, presenting the idea of communication, especially as it is understood under contemporary technological and networked circumstances, as a barrier to understanding. As well, communication is imbued with particular anxieties, which reveal themselves in the interactions between characters, as well as those interactions characters have with communication technologies that proliferate the series. Peters argues though, that communication is not, and perhaps was never a problem. The idea of communication as a problem is a human invention that

leads us to create solutions, from pen and paper as a means of recording speech, to cellular telephones as a way to bridge great physical distances between communicating subjects. Each of these new technologies does not, and cannot, solve this proposed problem, and they ultimately only add to the anxieties surrounding the notion of communication. The series stages this “problem” largely by imbuing the various technologies with anxious affect. This sense of anxiety becomes a dominant mood through which the series communicates its own problems with the idea of communication.

Lynch’s fixation on objects of communication technology (telephones, video cameras, televisions, hearing aids, computers) is a feature that can be traced throughout his work in both film and television. While it is not as centrally placed as it becomes in *The Return*, communication technologies and the affects they produce in the characters, as well as the viewer, is present throughout the *Twin Peaks* cycle³. One of the original series’ most memorable moments involves the camera lingering on the handset of a telephone through which the anguished cry of Laura Palmer’s mother, Sarah, is transmitted after she learns of her daughter’s death.

Anxiety is the dominant mood of *The Return*; formally and thematically this feeling pervades the series. Communication technologies, presumed solutions, are not presented as such, but rather as the cause of further alienation of the individual. Communication technologies create an additional layer to the problem they have been positioned in their very manufacture to solve. Further, communication technologies as presented in *The*

³ To borrow a term from Lynch scholar Martha Nochimson, I will refer to the whole swath of *Twin Peaks* televisual and cinematic media as the “*Twin Peaks* cycle” while distinguishing the original series as *Twin Peaks*, and the film and *The Return* by their respective subtitles when necessary.

Return have the strange effect of disembodiment their users. This effect of disembodiment plays an important role in understanding the anxiety that pervades the series. The web of connections--between the nuclear bomb and the computer, between the computer and the network, between the network and the anxiety that all of this manifests--creates a picture of communication that is in a state of breakdown. *The Return* presents a world littered with the detritus of this breakdown, a kind of communication dystopia, wherein this degradation is working its way through the system. Through interpretation and close analysis of this series I will argue that *The Return*'s aesthetic engagement with networked modes of existence provides a map to the affective conditions of networked contemporary life. Faith in the network, in communication technologies, is misplaced. A sense of disorientation immediately precedes the recognition of breakdown and can be seen in terms of the realization of the totality of the network, the absolute structure, and these "are the moments that are the most disorienting, the most threatening to the integrity of the human ego" (Galloway, Thacker 5). This threat can be read in Cooper's final line of dialogue in the series, a question ("What year is this?") that is an expression of the dislocation, as if he looked up and saw the expansive web of networked connection in the sky above him deteriorating in real time.

In the twenty-six-year gap between the end of *Twin Peaks* and the beginning of *The Return* we have seen massive shifts in communication technologies and these shifts are reflected in *The Return*. The series amplifies (to borrow a term from radio) the role various communication technologies play in everyday life. These communication technologies are the facilitator of the anxious affects felt through and throughout the series. In 1991 when the series went off the air, cancelled by ABC after ratings dwindled

during the series' second season, the internet was only just emerging as a mass media platform. *Twin Peaks* fandom evolved on the World Wide Web message boards dedicated to culling the show for clues to its many mysteries. By the summer 2017, when *The Return* premiered on the cable channel Showtime and through the channel's adjacent online streaming service, the internet was a ubiquitous presence in everyday life. The internet is in fact the medium through which most viewers watched *The Return*: on the Showtime Anytime streaming service directly or through other streaming services such as Amazon Prime in the United States, CraveTV in Canada (Littleton, n.p.)⁴. This technological shift is integral to my approach to the series, not only as a means of distribution but as a thematic concern being worked out by the series' creators.

The Return is particularly interested in how individuals in contemporary society engage in and experience not only the act but the idea of communication. The show foregrounds communicative acts and experiences as they are facilitated by technological objects. Prominent examples within the series include laptop and desktop computers, cellular and landline telephones, and hearing aids, to name only a few. The series is interested in how these technologies extend the human capacity for face to face oral communication into new realms via disembodiment. What *The Return* thematically mines from these technological developments though is not a communication utopia. The series instead presents us with the very opposite: a communication dystopia that is marked by anxiety. The anxiety I describe is represented throughout the series in a number of ways. Perhaps most noticeably through a dissonant sound design highlighted in moments of crackling electricity, and mechanical whirring. These sounds can be off-putting, and

⁴ I do not intend to study the online fandom of *Twin Peaks* here as there has been a wealth of scholarship on this subject already.

downright unnatural, and are often paired with ominous tones that proliferate the soundtrack. As well, this anxiety can be felt in the often odd, stilted language used by characters in oral communication. A scene early in the series features the imprisoned doppelgänger of Dale Cooper speaking to Gordon Cole as if in a code known only to him. The sense of disconnection this creates between the two characters is mired with anxious affect. In the world of the series, even the seemingly simple, oral communications between individuals can become imbued with the anxiety of confusion and misunderstanding.

In *The Return* this anxiety is then linked to the technological objects used to facilitate communication, creating a sense of object anxiety. I use the term object anxiety to describe the particular anxious affects that are directly connected to technological devices that are utilized to facilitate communication, those proposed solutions to the problem of communication. The particular origin for this anxiety is established in the series by linking the rise of networked communication technologies to the advent of the nuclear bomb in the mid-twentieth century. While the proliferation of networked communication technologies is a global phenomenon, in *The Return* it is given a particularly American context due in large part to the setting of the story within American locales and the narrative importance of the Trinity test, the culmination of the Manhattan Project, an Allied government funded project to create the first atomic bomb during the Second World War. *The Return*, I will argue in Chapter One, establishes a historical origin for its anxious affects by linking the rise of networked communication technologies with the nuclear bomb. If “the network” is meant to be a model of connection, *The Return* stages its deterioration and deteriorating effects.

How do I define this nebulous network? The term itself has various uses and applications: television networks, computer networks, professional networking, terrorist networks, etc. Each of these touch on certain aspects of how I use the term throughout this thesis, as well as inspire one to consider the often simultaneously concrete and abstract visions of what the network is. The network, networks and networked existence are three terms specifically I use throughout to refer to a broader system of connection, an organizing principle of information, and a contemporary mode of living guided by networked logic. One of the problems confronted when describing networks is their abstract qualities: they can be visualized but are often times invisible, they facilitate connection but can lack a certain tactility. Networks can be visualized as a web of connected nodes: small dots that have been scattered at random but each of these nodes is connected to one another in various formations by a series of lines. The network is vast, and, in this way, it is unknowable (abstract) to the individual in its entirety. This unknowability shrinks the position of the individual within the network, one can lose a sense of self when confronted with the vast workings of the network as mapped onto their existence. It is something unseen, but which organizes aspects of daily life: how we communicate, with whom, and when, and such interactions are often facilitated by the communication technologies that have proliferated into our daily lives. This is, more specifically, what I mean when I refer to networked existence: the way in which the network has evolved to encompass more than the military and bureaucratic functions of its origins and can now be found in various aspects of the everyday life of individual subjects. This is due in large part to the widespread acceptance of networked technology into personal and domestic spaces, we have accepted an internet of things. Personal

computers and smart phones (essentially a computer shrunk down in size) are examples of the kind of networked technology I refer to, both of which are also developed with goals of easing communication.

Steven Shaviro further describes the network in a way that I draw from directly throughout this thesis, arguing that it is,

A self-generat[ing], self-organizing, self-sustaining system. It works through multiple feedback loops. These loops allow the system to monitor and modulate its own performance continually and thereby maintain a state of homeostatic equilibrium. At the same time, these feedback loops induce effects of interference, amplification, and resonance. And such effects permit the system to grow, both in size and in complexity (10).

In *The Return* this complex network spans location; from the titular town of Twin Peaks in Washington State, to New York City, North and South Dakota, Las Vegas, Nevada in the series contemporary setting, and then the desert of New Mexico in 1945 and '56. The show's geography also broadens to spaces that are a bit harder to pin down, existentially confused spaces such as the Red Room and the Black Lodge. These supernatural spaces intercut with the more natural spaces and contribute to the ways the series is exploring the consequences of networked existence and the anxiety of communication. These networks, between characters and their settings, function as highways of transmission and communication, moving signals through them that are picked up as part of the network. But the noise of the signals within this network are also contributing to its breakdown.

In *Network Aesthetics*, another key text for this thesis, Patrick Jagoda looks to the network as a means for better comprehending a particular and emergent aesthetic appearing, notably, at the end of the twentieth century and the opening years of the twenty-first century. Jagoda describes networks as “a limit concept of the historical present, [they] are accessible only at the edge of our sensibilities. Networks exceed rational description or mapping, and it is at this point that we might turn to aesthetics and cultural production for a more robust account” (3). This “network aesthetic” is built on a sense of disorientation; it is a structure so large and so complicated that it becomes difficult for any one individual existing within it to fully comprehend the enormity of the system within which they exist. Jagoda argues that network aesthetics present an opportunity for a meditation on and exploration of this new way of existing within the broad and complicated networks that have come to define contemporary life. Networks, Jagoda argues, represent the “inherent contradiction of art and literature,” which “makes [them] so well suited for grappling with the internal complexities, unforeseeable emergences, and relational intensities that make up the network imaginary” (26). What *The Return* represents with its specific “network aesthetic” is not only the network proper but the degradation and breakdown of the network itself. A fear of the network imaginary here comes into focus, even as individuals are invisibly connected across large distances there is something wrong in this system, something malignant is deteriorating the threads of connection. In this way, the structure of this thesis reflects the non-linear network strategies employed by the series. I use Part Eight of *The Return* as node around which I organize the broader argument of this thesis and then move through the series in a non-linear way to explore the ramifications of the Trinity test flashback sequence. Such an

approach utilizes network structures similar to how they are used in and throughout the series. *The Return* represents a large body of work, a study of it in its entirety is outside the bounds of a project like this, and as such I pull from distinct moments that best illustrate the consequences of networked existence and anxious affect from the series eighteen episodes.

In this thesis I argue that *The Return*, through representing network existence both thematically and formally, is deeply concerned with the threat posed by communication facilitated by technological objects. This threat is an existential one, connected to the anxiety that is produced in characters by technological objects and the broader, entrapping network that these objects facilitate. Thematically, *The Return* does this through its representation of anxiety inducing communication technologies and the particular affects that are associated with them: fear, dread, mystery. These technologies have the additional effect of disembodiment in their use by individuals. As well, these technologies are the facilitators of the network and the representation of a networked existence and the shrinking effect it causes in the individual presents an additional anxiety to these objects. Formally, the television serial format allows *The Return* to represent the widespread aspects of the network in an interesting and complex way. A similar claim can be made about *Twin Peaks*, with its large cast and many interconnected plot lines, but what *The Return* adds to this equation is the expansion of this format to the world outside of the titular town of Twin Peaks. The network has grown to reflect the contemporary setting of this new addition to the *Twin Peaks* cycle. As well, the series takes up the anxiety produced, I argue, by networked modes of existence, as a formal conceit and interest through its use of a dissonant, mechanical sound design. In Chapter

One, I explore the way in which the voice is made to be one of these dissonant sounds via the disrupting presence of the Woodsmen. Both thematically and formally then *The Return* shows us the way that networks and their facilitating technologies have created a crisis for the subject and fertilized the ground for an anxiety toward and complete breakdown of communication.

John Durham Peters critiques the influence of information theory on communication theory. He considers how Claude Shannon's work in the late 1940's shifted the "problem" of communication from a theory of significance to one of signals (23). Peters' description of this history plays an important role in the way I position and employ aspects of information and communication theories in my analysis of *The Return*. The "signal" as, Peters here describes it, is not the message, but the carrier of the message. "Significance", the content and meaning of communication, is dismissed by the rise of information theory, according to Peters. Returning to the way in which the different pieces of the *Twin Peaks* cycle were distributed presents us with a useful example of this. *Twin Peaks* which was aired in what was understood under old media paradigms as a traditional way: through signal from television network to individual television sets. If we follow Shannon's model of the signal here, then it is not the content or meaning of the program one watches on their television set in 1990 that is of interest to the theorist, but rather the signal that brought it there. This is a significant shift, one that Peters is highly critical of, that focuses us on an abstract current that is invisible to common sight. *The Return* is a series that is thematically invested in these signals and how they form the foundation of technologically aided communication. Further, Peters critique of communication theory centers around the notion of it as a theory interested

primarily in the signal. Shannon's formula is one of compression, shaving all but the most necessary information from the signal so as to be able to fit more onto a single line. This removes the textures of communication, as Peters' states it "makes problems of relationships into problems of proper tuning or noise reduction" (Peters 5). In this way, *The Return* is much more closely aligned with Peters, as the series makes this noise a narrative focus. Further, this kind of technologically influenced thinking has found its way into a much broader lexicon: descriptions of the human brain as a computer, emotions that need to be processed, interpersonal complications can be solved through proper communication. All of which indicates the way a language of communication theory has been mapped onto contemporary existence. It has become a way of life.

Beginning with a historical approach to communication theory will allow me to first posit the connection between communication and network technologies and the atomic bomb as an origin for the anxiety that pervades *The Return*. In Chapter One I argue that the twin histories of the computer and the atomic bomb and how this is represented in Part Eight of *The Return* establishes an origin for the anxious affect that is so integral to my analysis of the series. Proposing the Trinity Nuclear test as a moment that unleashes a mass trauma that allows through a spectral presence whose purpose becomes a disruption of communication in the form of noise on the signal. *The Return* places this anxiety as originating in a distinctly historical (and American) context by representing the real-life Trinity nuclear test in a spectacular fashion, showing viewers what "could not be both seen and survived" (Rennebohm 59). From this connection between the computer and the bomb, and into the context of the Cold War, comes network technology as I have described it previously. Chapter Two examines the

contemporary setting of the series in order to understand how the anxiety of the show gets attached to particular objects. Through close analysis of examples of characters' interactions with communication technologies, I will argue that the anxiety that was born in Part Eight has infected the network and its facilitating technologies, the result of which is the pervasive anxiety that is the dominant mood of the entire series. In Chapter Three, the focus shifts slightly to the oral mode of communication represented in the voice and its use in extremity. What we are then left with is the breakdown of communication and this represented in the scream, a primal response holding no debt to language. The series ends with the scream of Carrie Page/Laura Palmer, a scream that literally blows the lights out and ends any chance we may have had at overcoming our communication anxiety. With this breakdown comes the opportunity for subjects under networked modes of existence to return to subjectivity. But this return is troubled by the series' overt need to create links to its past.

What *The Return* presents us with is an opportunity to consider the widespread anxiety that is induced by the act of communication and the technology developed to "better" facilitate it. To refer once more to Peters' who writes that "Communication is a registry of modern longings...To understand communication is to understand much more. An apparent answer to the painful divisions between self and other, private and public, and inner thought and outer world...It is a sink into which most of our hopes and fears seem to be poured" (2). In *The Return* there is a hope that some bridge can be erected between individuals that will allow them to understand each other more fully. But in a world where communication is already in a state of breakdown this hope can never be

fully realized, it is in fact rebuked by the final scenes of the series in which language ceases to contain meaning and the only response is to scream out into the night.

1. The Origin of Anxiety

1.1 Introduction

On July 15, 1945, at exactly 5:30am the first atomic bomb was detonated, lighting up the desert of Alamogordo, New Mexico. The blast, which was so bright the light produced could for a moment be seen from space (Siracusa 20), was both magnificent and terrifying. The image of the mushroom cloud blooming forth from the blast would become ingrained in American culture as a symbol of the absolute destructive capabilities now possessed by human beings. This detonation was a test, codenamed ‘Trinity’ by those working within the group tasked with the creation of atomic weapons at the height of the Second World War. This group, dubbed the “Manhattan Project,” was overseen primarily by General Leslie Groves and physicist Robert Oppenheimer, who at the sight of the Trinity detonation was reminded of a quote from Hindu scripture: “I am become Death/shatterer of worlds” (Siracusa 20). At once disquieting premonition and striking realization of the utter destruction this new weapon would cause when put to use. And it would be, only months later on two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, by the American military in an effort to end the War. The atomic bomb serves as a powerful symbol of rupture, an incredible weapon harnessed for the most terrific destructive capabilities. It also presents a rupture in our power over nature. This image of the bomb, the Trinity test specifically, serves as well as the starting point for the argument I make throughout this chapter. It comes in Part Eight of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, when the contemporary setting of the series is suspended in order to take viewers to this moment in 1945. *The Return* is capable of showing us the Trinity test from an impossible vantage

point, one that begins from a distance, gradually moves toward the blast as it unfolds and eventually goes inside becoming entirely enveloped by it. In this chapter I will use this sequence in Part Eight as well as what follows it as a nodal point to which I connect the rest of the series as well as the broader argument of this thesis. What I argue we are presented with in Part Eight is an origin for the anxious affects produced by interaction with contemporary communication technologies that pervade the series. Beginning with the atomic bomb and connecting the history of its development and employment to the history of the computer will show how networked communication technologies essentially came to be. Working from this historical perspective I argue that the depiction of the Trinity nuclear test in Part Eight serves as an origin, within the *The Return* and the broader *Twin Peaks* cycle, for the representation of the anxiety that permeates the series.

How can anxiety be represented with image and sound? It is a pervasive feeling, indiscriminating and potentially multiple in source of origin. A feeling that works its way up from the pit of your stomach, creeps out from the back of your mind, weaves itself through you and consumes. It is triggered by *something* though: a sound, an object, a look, an individual, a presence. But if we look beyond the immediacy of the affect can we begin to discern an origin? This feeling then becomes an active state: one is made to feel anxious, and in *The Return* anxiety is the dominant mood. Technological objects facilitating communication are an intimate part of the network, doing much of the leg work of communication within it. In an essay for the *New York Review of Books* Adam Thirlwell highlights the “lavish attention paid to communication networks,” in *The Return*, as well as “their physical embodiments: intercoms, cell phones and text messages, laptops, hearing aids” (n.p.). The communication networks described by

Thirlwell are as well the source of anxious affect I have singled out, while the physical embodiments do the work of inciting this anxiety in the characters. The objects of communication technology, the cellphones, the computer banks, the hearing aids, are all contributing to this pervasive sense of anxiety. In a simple summation *The Return* can be described as “anxious”. Affect, in the series, is often of a more intense variety, “highlighting a quality of excess, a quality of “more than”” (Hillis, Paasonen, Petit 1). Such extreme feeling becomes both a thematic and formal concern that weaves its way through the series; its stories, its characters. *The Return* explores this feeling as a mode of contemporary life, caused in large part by a reliance on networked communication technologies, the “frequent if not near-constant prosthetic connections to information, communication, and media technologies” (Hillis, Paasonen, Petit 2). This networked way of life has become a seemingly inescapable part of contemporary existence, a new constant. Characters in *The Return* are trapped by this mode of being, forced to live in networked spaces, otherwise risk becoming irretrievably lost in the woods of disconnection. But the anxiety of networked existence did not come about out of contemporary circumstance alone. *The Return* posits such affect as being rooted in the twin histories of the atomic bomb and the computer, from which our contemporary understanding of the network is born.

“July 16, 1945. White Sand, New Mexico. 5:29 AM (MWT)” reads a slowly revealed title card imposed over the image of a desert shot in stark black and white. This sudden move back in time occurs sixteen minutes into Part Eight, after briefly following Mr. C and his accomplice Ray. The opening includes, as well, a brief cut to the Roadhouse bar in Twin Peaks for a performance by the band Nine Inch Nails before

moving suddenly from the contemporary setting to 1945. As the words fade away we hear a voiceover, a scratchy noise, sounding as if patched in from a distant radio, counting down until at the proclamation of “one” the frame is consumed by the brilliant white of a detonation. A mushroom cloud blooms forth filling the frame, and we have been made to witness the detonation of an atomic bomb (see Figure 1). What we hear is not the sound of explosion but instead a musical piece entitled “Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima” by Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki. Originally composed in 1960, Penderecki’s piece uses a combustion of string instruments to create an aggressive sound that reflects the notion of a noise beyond the human sensorium. “Threnody” also reflects the aggressive and strange, distorted and supernatural sounds emitted by the presence that will cross into our world as a result of this explosion. The music continues as the camera moves steadily into the blast where fire rolls in technicolour (see Figure 2), followed abruptly by a black on white static snowfall. These abstract images are a representation of the inside of the blast. In his book *American Technological Sublime* David E. Nye recalls the descriptions given by American military officers who were witness to hydrogen bomb testing in the post war period. Nye writes, “many of them expressed awe and wonder at the power of the blast, the intensity of the light, the shock waves, the winds and the unusual colours” (232). Nye describes the atomic bomb as being a technological object that surpasses the feeling of the sublime, invoking instead “sheer terror, leaving trauma and a life of radiation poisoning in its wake” (232). The combination of Penderecki’s screeching musical piece with the abstract interior visuals invokes Nye’s descriptions of witness accounts of hydrogen bomb detonations. Human perception fails to comprehend

what it has been made witness too. Here, in *The Return*, the abstract picks up the lack of faltering human perception.



Figure 1, the Trinity test in *Twin Peaks: The Return*

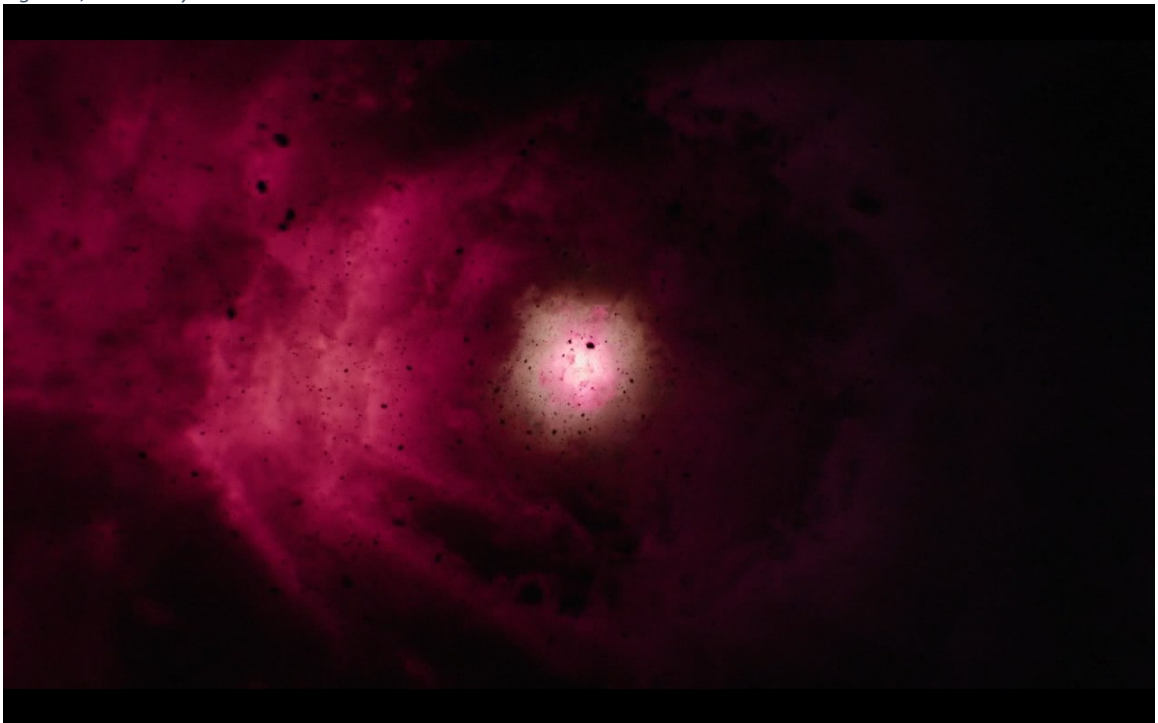


Figure 2, inside the blast

This is, I will argue throughout this thesis, what *The Return* does: represent the unrepresentable, the series crafts an aesthetics of confusion that is rooted in this moment in Part Eight. In this chapter I will explore how such an aesthetic is a response to contemporary modes of networked existence and the communication technologies that facilitate it. Here, I will establish a robust historical framework in order to better articulate how a particular history of the network is being evoked in Part Eight. I will then move to an analysis of how a contemporary understanding of network dynamics positions us to consider new aesthetic categories for comprehending these circumstances. I am framing Part Eight as an origin story for the anxious affect that in this series has attached itself to the network and communication technologies. By taking viewers back to the Trinity nuclear test, *The Return* is giving us a perhaps confused but deliberate historical point from which to attempt to orient ourselves. What *The Return* represents with its specific “network aesthetic” (a term borrowed from Patrick Jagoda) is not only the network proper but the breakdown of the network itself. The fear of the network imaginary comes into focus, even as individuals are invisibly connected across large distances there is something wrong in the system, something malignant is pulling at the threads of connection.

1.2 The Computer and the Call

As John Durham Peters argues, the atomic bomb and the computer share a common space in the cultural imagination with “the computer stand[ing] at the latest moment in history and the bomb at the last one” (25). These two technologies, the computer and the bomb, “represent” an important aspect of our understanding of how technical fields, such as communication, broaden beyond their initial use, creating new ways of culturally

speaking about complex technical issues. This shared cultural space is inherently tied to the social and cultural landscape of mid-twentieth century America. Peters highlights especially those years during and after the Second World War, when “communication theory became an account of meaning as well as of channel capacity” (23). Peters cites Warren Weaver, an American mathematician, who worked with Claude Shannon on “A Mathematical Theory of Communication,” as well as provided a general introduction for a version of the text published in 1963. Weaver’s introduction to Shannon’s work was a key text in the expansion of the term communication from mathematical theory to something much “broader.” It is this expanded understanding of communication that I use throughout this thesis, and which Peters cites as being particularly attractive to various facets and industries of post-war society. Peters goes on to state that “Information is often spoken of in nuclear terms: its half life...its fissions, and its molecular or granular quality. It shares semiotic space with subatomic physics, coming in bits, flashes, bursts, and impulses, and is often treated as mental photons: the minimal quanta of the cognitive stuff” (25). He articulates the notion of a shared language developing between atomic physics and computers in order to demonstrate a bleeding between categories. This bleeding through of conceptual language continues as computers become increasingly ubiquitous and humans adopt a computer-based language to describe various aspects of their interpersonal relationships, as well as intimate feelings. This is a consequence of the broadening of communication that Peters’ describes. While such an understanding derives meaning from Shannon’s mathematical theory, what “communication” considers goes beyond formula for shaving noise from telecommunications signals. The computer and the atomic bomb are both technologies of the particular cultural moment Peters

describes, when communication theory blossoms from a mathematic formula to a much more encompassing cultural theory.

Technology, like those objects of communication that *The Return* obsesses over, become the instrument of our alienation. These instruments, while popularly used, are not operationally understood. Further, they are developed with the intention of bridging the supposed “painful divisions between self and other, private and public” (Peters 2) that the very idea of communication brings forth. In *The Return* we see the alienation and the anxiety caused by the characters use and misuse of communication technologies.

Throughout the series communication technologies reveal their own strange status as a further cause of the particular affects that they are believed, and functionally intended, to solve. Communication technologies are created in order to ease communication, telephones bridge physical gaps and allow individuals to communicate across large distances but they do not solve the inherent problems of being understood. Networks, as well, do the work of connection. That connection is seen throughout *The Return* but this particular network is in a state of breaking down. This breakdown can be traced to the historical origins of the communication and technological object anxiety felt throughout the series. *The Return* represents the way in which a mass trauma can manifest through various technologies, those technologies which were put forth as problem solvers. When these technologies are misused, as we see in Part Eight, the effects are strange and reinforce the more abstract anxiety that is felt around objects of communication. This is seen in particular in the way Part Eight uses the radio as a technology of mass communication and how it interacts with the network.

Narratively the series operates within broader networked logics, and it is within this structure that interaction with communication technologies take place. As mentioned in my introduction, via Steven Shavrio and Patrick Jagoda, the network as a concept and structure is vast, complicated, and abstract. The series reflects this within its own large, complicated and interweaving network of stories and characters. Characters and storylines from the original series are picked up here twenty-five years later, while new characters and stories are introduced. In the intervening quarter century these characters have continued to “live” developing new familial and interpersonal connections and relationships that are picked up in *The Return*. The network of the *Twin Peaks* cycle has grown exponentially and reflects the ever more complicated and technologically dependent networks of contemporary life. Objects, or devices, that do the work of connection within this network become subsumed within the network structure along with individuals. These objects, communication technologies, do the work of connection within the network. For instance, in Part Eight, the radio becomes a central object through which the Woodsmen deliver a message. This strange message carries with it strange affect, that is, in part, related to the inherent unknown represented in the operation of devices such as the radio. This unknowability is exaggerated further in the series contemporary setting where communication technologies are even more prevalent. Computers, cellular telephones, GPS tracking devices, to name a few, all work within the broader network, and represent a kind of unknowable technology that is nevertheless ubiquitous and utilized daily. This unknowability is too a cause of anxious affect, as characters use these communication technologies alienated from the knowledge of how they operate, how they do the work of facilitating network connection.

The technologies I want to begin with, the computer and the atomic bomb, were developed in tandem in this mid-twentieth century period, both with the goal of serving the needs of Allied governments and their various military operations. The first computers were developed for the purpose of decoding messages that would aid in locating the positions of German military ships and submarines during wartime. The development of the modern computer is largely attributed to the code breaking machine created by British mathematician Alan Turing, who worked on the project for the British government during the Second World War. As Friedrich Kittler writes in the essay “The Artificial Intelligence of World War: Alan Turing”: “From May 1941 on, the enemy...listened in on Enigma [German] commands...The fact that Enigma was a machine also made mechanical crypt-analysis possible. As a pseudo-random generator, the cipher-typewriter produced nonsense only with respect to systems whose period fell short of its own. Turing’s Goddess, however, discovered regularity in the jumble of letters” (249). Turing’s creation, this machine that cracks code, will have significance far beyond the use for which it was made. This wartime computer sets the basic template for every computer system that comes after it, it is the basis upon which much of our contemporary communication technology is built. In describing the process of Turing’s simple computer Kittler explains, “This is the whole of it. No computer that has ever been built - or will ever be built - can do more” (247). What we have in Turing’s machine is the origin of the computer as a form of communication, based on the coding and decoding of messages, that will dominate throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.

As the computer developed from the Turing machine into a more advanced form of networked communication, anxiety surrounding the destructive capabilities of the atomic bomb developed alongside it. As networked communication technologies continued to develop, their use became connected to the tracking of the use of nuclear weapons by other (often enemy) nations. Within this framework develops a technologically aided network of communication. These networks are imbued with the anxious affect birthed by the use of the atomic bomb, the beginning of a period that saw increased international nuclearization, and the introductory years of the Cold War. What networks do is decentralize information, spreading it across points in broader system for reasons of security. The reasoning goes that in the event of a nuclear strike on one point in this system the broader system would remain operational. The information would simply travel through another pathway. This is the basis for how the internet (as understood in contemporary contexts) is conceived and constructed. Alexander Galloway describes the origins of this structure as “designed as a solution [to] the vulnerability of the military’s centralized system of command and control during the late 1950’s and beyond. For, the argument goes, if there are no central command centres, then there can be no central targets and overall damage is reduced” (29). He then places the structure of the internet in juxtaposition with the structure of a nuclear attack, a centralized force against its inversion, one that is non centralized (Galloway 25). The network then is dispersed, not located in any single physical or digital space but connected across many. Galloway, as well, presents us with a useful historical anecdote that “[b]oth the internet and the interstate U.S. highway system were developed in roughly the same period (from the later 1950’s to the late 1970’s) for roughly the same reason (to facilitate mobility and

communication in case of war)” (35). This is a useful connection, allowing us an image of the network to keep in mind when considering a concept that can be seem quite slippery and abstract.

Here, I will return to John Durham Peters’ description of the communication theory developed by Claude Shannon as “explicitly a theory of “signals” and not of “significance” (Peters 23). Shannon’s paper, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication,” published in 1948 for Bell Laboratories (a wing of what would become the AT&T communications company), established the groundwork for the, then, increasingly technical field of communication studies. As Peters’ describes, Shannon’s paper had multiple applications for multiple fields of study, as well as fields of commerce. For academics it gave “a vocabulary well suited to the country’s newly confirmed status as a military and political world leader”, for telephone companies it gave them “a technical definition of signal redundancy and hence a recipe for “shaving” frequencies in order to fit more calls on one line” (Peters 23). In both formations Shannon’s theory of communication set the template for study of communication as it would move forward in the public imagination, the academy, and in economic markets. Shannon’s “signals”, as described by Peters, have of course mutated since the paper was initially published seventy years ago, but in some instances not much has changed at all. Beyond (but still including) basic telecommunication, the signal now refers to the signals that move between other kinds of communication networks, perhaps most notably the computer networks already described. These networks have mutated from the existing networks, an adaptation of the old to better service new technologies. Such signals represent something abstract and without a physical form, they are the invisible

connective tissue of modern technologically aided communication. This presents us with an image of unseen lines, especially when it comes to cellphones and computers, that snake above and below us and in *The Return* there is a particular affinity for the unseen. This is represented through sonic cues like the crackling and snapping of electricity and sound effects insinuating a crackling that comes from nowhere, sounds emitted by the open air.

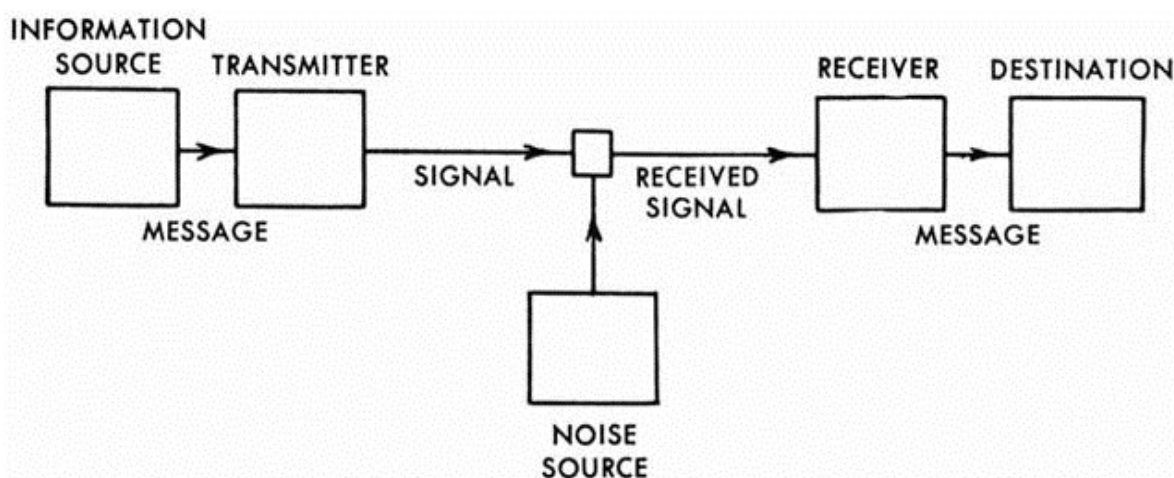


Figure 3, Shannon's diagram for telecommunications

I here want to consider and establish Shannon's formulation of communication as well. A fairly simple diagram (see Figure 3) illustrates Shannon's concept: an information source sends a message through a transmitter; the information becomes the signal that then encounters a receiver on the other end which is the final destination. In the centre between the signal being sent and received is noise. What Shannon's "A Mathematical Theory of Communication" proposed was a way to shave as much noise from the signal as possible in order to get the most information in the signal through to the receiver to result in a message of highest quality. Noise represents a threat to the

purity of the signal and Shannon's mathematical model represents how much of this noise can be shaved off while allowing for the signal to remain legible. From this is Peters conception of communication theory as one of signal rather than significance. Shannon's theory is one in which the signal shaved of unnecessary information becomes central. In his essay on compression, aptly titled "Compression: A Loose History," Jonathan Sterne looks to Shannon's model as well. Sterne refers to Shannon's article as "one of the founding documents of data compression" (40), and describes how in his diagram "[s]peech must be "compressed"...before it is transmitted by a transmitter" (40). Here, compression is reduction, it is a process of "removing redundant elements of a message, be they letters in the alphabet or numbers in the calculation of Pi" (Sterne 41). In Shannon's formulation, something is necessarily lost in telephonic (or any technologically aided) communication. Something is left on the cutting room floor of transmission. This is an important consideration when dealing with the communication technologies facilitating a breakdown of communication. What information is being shaved from the message as it makes its way through the network that facilitates technologically aided forms of communication? And how does *The Return* represent this noise, which threatens to disrupt the purity of the signal?

1.3 The Network and the Problem of Communication

I use network, networks, and, networked modes of communication, here and throughout to refer to the broader systems of connection at work. The distinct problem posed by networks is their invisibility, they facilitate connection but can lack physicality. Networks can be best visualized as a web of connected nodes: small dots that have been

scattered at random, but which are each connected to one another in various, random formations as a series of lines. The network is vast, and, in this way, it is unknowable to the individual. This unknowability shrinks the position of the individual within the network, one loses a sense of self when confronted with the vast workings of the network as mapped to their existence. It is something unseen, but which organizes aspects of daily life: how we communicate, with who, and when, and such interactions are often facilitated by the communication technologies that have proliferated into our daily lives. Recall my description in the introduction of networks as a widespread acceptance of an internet of things into daily communications, the ways in which the network has evolved to encompass more than the military, bureaucratic, and mathematical functions of its origins and can now be found in various aspects of the everyday life of individual subjects.

Steven Shaviro's description of the network is helpful to recall here: "a self-generat[ing], self-organizing, self-sustaining system. It works through multiple feedback loops. These loops allow the system to monitor and modulate its own performance...At the same time, these feedback loops induce effects of interference, amplification, and resonance...such effects permit the system to grow, both in size and in complexity" (10). As discussed in my introduction, the network of *The Return* spans geographical location, as well as into supernatural spaces like the Black Lodge and the Red Room. These supernatural spaces intercut with the more natural spaces and contribute to the ways the series is exploring the consequences of networked existence and the anxiety of communication. These networks, between characters and settings, function as highways, in Galloway's sense, of transmission and communication, moving signals through them

that are picked up as part of the network. And introduced in Part Eight is a presence whose purpose is disruption and breakdown. I want to recall as well Jagoda's network aesthetics and how these networks "are accessible only at the edge of our sensibilities" (3). The network aesthetic is built on a sense of disorientation, a structure so large and so complicated that it becomes difficult for any one individual existing within it to fully comprehend. This is what works, like *The Return*, which engage in network aesthetics allow us to do. They "open up concentrated access to forms of participation, interaction, absorption, and apophenia as well as less controlled experiences of overload, confusion, distance, and paranoia that defamiliarize a networked historical moment" (Jagoda 28).

Consider the Trinity test sequence of Part Eight and what immediately follows. From the stark black and white photography that captured the initial blast the rolling wave of colour that follow come as a shock. From this cacophony of abstract image and sound there is a cut that places us at an empty gas station. Shot in the same stark black and white as the blast, the shot of the gas station is from straight on so that for a moment everything is symmetrical, the image has a brief moment of harmony before it begins to disintegrate. The gas station begins to emit smoke and become populated by stuttering shadows, the same shadowy figures, the Woodsmen, those transient crust punks we have seen sporadically throughout the series. These figures move about the frame in bursts similar to a kind of poorly rendered stop motion animation and the sound accompanying them is just as stuttering and scraping. Going from inside the bomb to this gas station creates another disruption in orientation. Is this place located within the bomb? Is it some temporally dislocated space activated along with this atomic bomb? We aren't given a clear answer as the scene moves from the gas station and back into the rolling abstract

images of the bomb and then to a faceless grey figure floating in darkness. This figure emits a long strand of vomit like ooze, organic looking with a spongy and sticky quality. It is slime and spit and pieces are peeling off. As the camera moves up this strand of slime an orb emerges with the familiar face of BOB, the demonic spirit in possession of Dale Cooper's body in the series contemporary setting. What is understood as a natural space is overtaken by the Woodsmen, figures of disruption that come from some other place. What Part Eight represents explicitly is the series of events that lead to a tear in the fabric that separates these spaces, the break in the red velvet curtain that acts as a barrier. Behind the curtain is the space that we see within the bomb, the rolling fire and the gas station, the grey figure floating and oozing the BOB orb. These are a part of the non-places that we are already familiar with: the Red Room, the Black Lodge, the supernatural places that are so integral to the *Twin Peaks* cycle. The network becomes confused, signals are mixed up in what will eventually culminate in breakdown.

In *The Return* it is more likely that the signal will be somehow intercepted, misinterpreted or disrupted by forces outside the control of any character. Signals, though perhaps lacking in significance, do the work of connection, the work of communication. They do travel when individuals cannot, they bridge the physical gaps that exist between people. But they are weightless, they lack tactility, these signals are present, but they cannot be seen. And they contain meaning, in so much as they do, only in their arrival, in the successful moving of a message or the voice from one point to another. Even then the meaning of the message in this context lies in its status as signal. *The Return* explores this notion by focusing attention on the signals, on the way in which meaning is being communicated. *The Return* represents a meditation on the way in which we communicate

and the persistent anxieties the activity creates for us. In this way signal and the network make up the aesthetic concerns of *The Return*. The broader context of the series operates as a network of characters, some of which interact with others, some exist in their own bubble, but all of which contribute to a greater sense of a network that is in a state of breakdown. If the network is understood as the broad series of connections between individual nodes, a web of connections between individuals, it then shrinks the individual sense of self when confronted with the enormity of the network. In this way, the network is everywhere, everything and everyone.

Communication is, if not exactly a problem, a concern throughout the series, “a registry of modern longings” (Peters 2). Again, Peters: “To understand communication is to understand much more. An apparent answer to the painful divisions between self and other, private and public, and inner thought and outer world, the notion illustrates our strange lives at this point in history. It is a sink into which most of our hopes and fears seem to be poured” (2). But communication technologies do not do their invented duty. And this concern is mediated by technologies that are meant to solve, or at least salve, these issues but often only contribute to making such “problems” even greater. Communication technologies are a piece of the contemporary network existence, their purpose being to bridge a gap between individuals that is often real (physical distance between two people) but sometimes merely perceived. In this way the anxiety becomes objectified in communication technologies and these objects become imbued with the sense of dread, becoming triggers for affect in characters. This is a symptom of a larger illness: finding your individuality, your notion of self in question, in a state of flux, as a result of contemporary networked existence. The network shrinks the individual, makes

them a node, a small point in a much larger web whose importance is often tied to the connections they have to other nodes in this web. I establish the idea here before moving into further analysis of Part Eight as it is important to consider the objects that facilitate communication. However, this idea of object anxiety will be brought directly into focus in the following chapter. What we discover in *The Return* is that this network is in a state of breakdown. The network of *The Return* is no longer a sustainable model, if it ever was. As well, I want to recall how Jagoda conceptualizes the network as “a structure composed of links and nodes...a figure for proliferating multiplicity that at once enables and challenges our very capacity to think” (3). This description echoes Adam Thirlwell’s assessment of the endings of Lynch’s films as “delight[ing] in letting worlds that should be separate seep into each other—culminating in the absolute disorientation” (n.p.). The network aesthetic is built on this sense of disorientation. With this in mind I move into a more detailed analysis of Part Eight of *The Return* in order to illustrate how this is being represented. It is within Part Eight as well that I can begin to further establish the origin of the communication anxiety that proliferates throughout the series.

1.4 The Disrupting Presence

After the Trinity test sequence, a cut takes the viewer to a vast, purple ocean. The camera glides smoothly along, skimming the top of this ocean, and then moving up to show us a grand stone castle climbing up out of the water. A cut takes us inside this castle where a woman is sitting alone next to a large sculptural object (one that looks very familiar to one we will see later on) that snaps with the sounds of electricity, the kinds of sounds we associate with the invisible activity of telephone lines I have previously

discussed. From behind this object emerges the Giant, or the Fireman as he is referred to by another character later in the series (as well as in the credits for Part Eight), another spectral presence from the *Twin Peaks* cycle. The remainder of this interlude has the Giant emitting a golden orb with the face of Laura Palmer on it, a kind of opposite to the BOB orb we saw before. The woman we saw sitting down earlier in the scene, named Senior Dido in the credits, take the orb and releases it so that it can enter a large cinema screen that is playing for them what we saw earlier: the Trinity test. A lone emission of purity within a mass of destruction.

From this strange place outside the “real world” of the series the action then moves back to the American Southwest, now in 1956. In the New Mexican desert an egg lays in the sand and begins to tremble and crack, hatching a small creature with the body of a frog and the insect wings of a fly, it doesn't have any discernible eyes. Is this another product of the atomic bomb, a mutated and bizarre consequence? The thing shakes itself free of the gooey detritus of birth and begins to drag its body across the desert sand. A cut to another shot of this same desert has a shadow descend from the top of the frame. The shadow forms as one of the Woodsmen, and we see them become corporeal and shamble across the sand. There is one of these Woodsman that stands out from the rest: he wears a hunter's cap with the flaps pulled up and has an unlit cigarette hanging from his mouth, the whiteness of the cylinder, seemingly glued to his bottom lip, stands out against his darkened face. He resembles the Sixteenth President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, with his long, gaunt face, sad expression and chin beard (see Figure 4).



Figure 4, the Woodsmen approach

On a desolate strip of road, the Woodsmen approach a car driven by a middle-aged white man, a woman (also middle aged, also white) sits in the passenger seat. The car is brought to a stop as the Woodsmen approach and surround the car. The Woodsman with the cigarette, the one who looks like President Lincoln, approaches the driver's side window. The man inside rolls down the window, it would seem in order to communicate with this stranger. The Woodsman asks only one question: "Gotta light?" and he asks it over and over in a voice that is grotesquely distorted, deep and mechanical, more like the clicking and hissing of a machine, brought down multiple octaves, then the recognizable voice of a man. In her essays on *The Return* for *Artforum*, writer Sarah Nicole Prickett aptly describes the voice of the Woodsmen as like "a cello bow scraped across a rock face" (n.p.). The driver and his partner both begin to scream and push their bodies back in

fear. More Woodsmen approach the car from the front and the passenger side of the car. The main Woodsman continues to intone, asking his simple, strange question. The couple in the car continue to yell, a sound which becomes distorted beyond recognition. Their screams become a cavernous sound, a disturbing disruption of the human scream. It is in this way that I want to describe the Woodsmen as disruptors of the network. Their presence, one that is born or brought forth from the atomic bomb, is one of disrupting the signals of the network, causing kinks in the system. Further, I will position the Woodsmen as the noise in the signal, the disruptive presence in Claude Shannon's formulation of the signal.

Here, the human sounds of communication, the voice, is changed in a disturbing way. The ordinary sounds of speech are made to be something else, and a technology is changed by the very presence of the Woodsmen. This disruption, I argue, is the main function of the Woodsmen within the larger networked structure of *The Return*. They are the ghosts in the machine, or rather the network, and they are a decidedly unfriendly presence. Their interaction with the couple in the car, while menacing, is not physical. They do not touch them or cause them any direct bodily harm, but their presence, while frightening on the surface, causes a much deeper affect response in the couple. This anxiety manifests itself as the distorted scream. A scream is an extreme sound (a signal of communication breakdown, but also a potential return to subjectivity as I will explore in Chapter Three, although that is not the case here) but an inherently human one, and the presence of the Woodsmen changes that. This is the first example of their disrupting presence, in the next they will inhabit another communication technology more directly

and perhaps to more insidious purpose. In this we can see further how the Woodsmen are noise, disrupting the clean signals being sent through the network of communication.

From here, the main Woodsman makes his way from the strip of deserted highway and toward a slightly more civilized area. He comes to a radio station whose broadcast we have already seen being listening to through three different characters throughout the area: a waitress working in an empty diner, a mechanic working under the hood of a car, and a young girl as she gets ready for bed after an evening out with her classmate. The Woodsman enters the radio station and approaches a secretary with the same utterance that disrupted the couple in the car. The secretary begins to scream as she is approached and is quickly silenced by the Woodsman who grabs her head with one hand and crushes her skull. She is left lying on the floor, blood seeping out around her head. The Woodsman then enters the main part of the radio station, where a DJ is broadcasting the song that we have heard playing out of all the radios we have seen. The Woodsman approaches the DJ in a similar fashion he did the secretary: asking his simple question, and then proceeding to crush the head of the DJ with his hand. With the DJ dispatched the Woodsmen interrupts the broadcast of the pop song that was playing, pulling the needle abruptly off the record. He then takes control of the microphone and begins to recite a kind of poem: "This is the water, and this is the well. Drink full and descend. The horse is the white of the eyes and dark within." A more complicated use of language and voice than we have heard from him previously but just as obscure in meaning and interesting in its effects. As the Woodsman continues reciting his poem we cut between the three people we have been shown previously to be listening to the radio broadcast in some capacity. One by one, the waitress, the mechanic, and then the young girl all begin

to fall asleep where they are. The waitress and the mechanic both fall to the floor, the young girl simply lays down on the bed she was already sitting on, “what is noise to one may be message to another” (Krapp xvi). The noise, as that which threatens to disrupt the signal, is represented in the presence of the Woodsmen. In this particular example, what the Woodsmen act as disruptors, working within signals to enact noise. They are the disruption of the signal and cause of this strange affect to those on the ultimate receiving end of the signal. As the young girl falls asleep and the Woodsman’s voice continues to come through the speakers of the radio beside her bed the creature from earlier reappears outside her open bedroom window. Having made it from its birthplace in the desert to the home of this young girl the creature then uses its insect wings to lift itself up to the window ledge and crawl inside. It approaches the sleeping girl whose mouth begins to open as if on command and the creature crawls inside. The young girl’s mouth closes, again, as if on command.

Wireless communication grew in popularity within domestic spaces in the early years of the twentieth century, bringing with it a certain anxiety around the “voice from the void” as Jeffrey Sconce describes it in his book *Haunted Media*. “Boundaries of time, space, nation, and body no longer seemed to apply, and although this provided a giddy sense of liberation for some, it also threatened the security and stability of an older social order in which body and mind had been for the most part coterminous.” (Sconce 63) In his descriptions of early radio anxieties Sconce presents us also with an early example of anxiety surrounding networked existence. These negative feelings revolve around the free-floating nature of this new form of communication technology, the way in which it makes the body, as physical anchor, inconsequential. This is, in part, what the network

does: it dissolves the firmly felt physical boundaries keeping us in place. But this is also what is happening in the final sequence of Part Eight, representing this ghostly use of radio broadcast technology. The blurring of boundaries as Sconce describes is at the heart of the disruption occurring with the presence of the Woodsmen. The Woodsmen act as the ghost, the haunting presence, in the network in a similar way to what Sconce articulates as being within other, earlier, kinds of radio technologies. Here, the voice from the void is given a form, is embodied, and this only serves to fulfill the anxieties that were in the air. It uses the broadcast technology to strange effect. It only exists within our world by some collapsing of the more firmly held boundaries that occurred with the detonation of the atomic bomb. The act of disruption committed here by the Woodsmen is one that is directly related to the technology that they are disrupting as well. This time the disruption comes with the use of the radio broadcast, but the effects are similarly as strange. The use of a specific communication technology here is an important distinction between the first instance of disruption and this one. This disruption, and the way in which it centres on the misuse of a particular technology, places it within the sphere of the technological anxiety that is present throughout the series. *The Return* places a specific historical point as an origin for this anxiety more generally, a birth of the evil that pervades the series. I intend to explore that historical origin in more detail farther on while here I want to begin to explore a theory of technology that will set the ground work for that historical origin.

The radio disembodies the voice and projects it, creating a phantom sound in the process. It is important that the embodied voice is juxtaposed against the disembodied voice in Part Eight. We see the Woodsmen, as actors of disruption, engage in both an

embodied (using the voice against the couple in the car) and a disembodied (using the voice over the radio) communication in order to enact their particular disruption of communication technologies. Radio is also a technology of mass communication, capable of reaching many individual listeners at once. Mass disembodiment is the function of the radio the Woodsmen actively disrupt in their use of it. The intention is somewhat obscured but that the creature from the desert enters the mouth of the young girl after the broadcast does point us to it being a disruption with insidious consequence. The instrumentality of the radio broadcast as a technology end up disrupted, distorted, and changed. It is misused. This, *The Return* suggests, is the result of what the Trinity test has brought forth. It is a confluence of technology and time. How that develops into the contemporary setting leads to a more pronounced anxiety, one that develops alongside the technology that is imbued with this affective state. Sconce tracks the way in which early accounts of wireless technologies, like the telegraph, were imbued with a kind of supernatural and anxious feeling. There were “fantastic accounts of wireless technology,” Sconce writes, that “were decidedly more anxious, pessimistic, and melancholy” (61-62). In Part Eight this feeling can be seen in the radio, reinforced by the supernatural presence that deliberately misuses it. Sconce further describes that these “Fantastic accounts of wireless suggested hazards of disembodiment...lurking in these mysterious atmospheric oceans” (69). The image of the radio waves of the wireless world evoke the ocean, along with its characteristic vastness and mysterious, unexplored depths. What kinds of presence could be hiding in these depths? In *The Return*, the fears of Sconce’s early twentieth century wireless adoptees echo concerns over the inability to properly

understand technology intertwine in the figure of the Woodsmen and their supernatural misuse of the radio broadcast.

The Woodsmen have adopted communication technology for their own strange purpose, disrupting the uses of the radio broadcast, mastering this technology in their own way. The disruption of ordinary speech, language, another kind of communication technology, is a display of their supernatural mastery over other forms of communication technology. The Woodsmen are the supernatural presence living in ether, in the depths of the mysterious ocean of wireless radio waves. The atomic bomb detonated during the Trinity test has brought this presence forth, creating a tear that allowed them to move from one world to another. Now that they have found presence in the world they begin to move through it and inserting themselves within the burgeoning network. From this newly inserted presence comes the exaggerated sense of anxiety as well that grows around objects of communication technology. The disruption of the radio broadcast sends a signal that will reverberate through the network of *The Return*, corrupting and causing an intense anxious affect.

1.5 Conclusion

Networked existence and communication technology are the purveyors of the particular anxiety that plagues the characters of *The Return* and this anxiety now has an origin. The explicit connections made in Part Eight between the atomic bomb and broadcast communication technology creates a link to other forms of communication technology explored in the contemporary setting of the rest of the series. Surrounding all of this is the wide spread trauma opened up by the atomic bomb that rests within the

characters populating *The Return*. Anxiety is an affect response to the forced conditions of networked existence. Both this anxiety and its cause have their origins in the Trinity nuclear test and the psychic repercussions of the creation, use and proliferation of the atomic weapon for these characters. This origin is poisoned ground, scorched Earth, it is destructive and positioned in *The Return* as a kind of national original sin. The consequences of this is the slow and inevitable communication breakdown suffered by the characters. The historical approach to communication I use here, and that *The Return* represents, forms the connective tissue between the atomic bomb more and the technologies with which it shares this entwined history: the computer and the earliest examples of networked communication technology. These communication technologies, especially the computer, develop into the objects of mass communication that populate the contemporary setting of the series. But something has changed irrevocably because of the link created between the bomb and the development of communication technologies. Now there is an anxious affect attached to these objects, one we see represented throughout *The Return*. Computers, cellphones, hearing aids, and other objects of communication technology become imbued with an anxiety, they are meant to solve a problem and ultimately end up contributing to a further sense of alienation.

2. Object Anxiety

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter One I establish Part Eight as a centrepiece in my assessment of *The Return*, arguing that it features the origin of anxious affects that pervade the series. In my analysis of Part Eight I argue that the Woodsmen act as disruptors of the signal, situating them as an invading force upon the network. I want now to return briefly to Part Eight to introduce the notion of “object anxiety” and how I will be using the term throughout this chapter. A key scene in Part Eight, detailed in Chapter One, involves the main Woodsmen taking over a radio broadcast station in the desert of New Mexico. I want to situate this sequence as the initial moment chronologically of object anxiety. I describe object anxiety as those particular affects produced through the individual interaction with communication technologies. Such technologies, being the means through which communication is facilitated, have become an integral part of the networked mode of existence I argue is being represented in *The Return*. I return again to John Durham Peters’ assessment that communication theory is one of “signals” and not “significance” (23) and the signal plays a role in how I make use of the term “object anxiety” throughout this chapter. It is at its core an anxiety of the signal, of the effects of what the signal is capable of: who it connects us with, the potential for confusion at how, and the inescapable web of the network in contemporary society. The signal manifests in the object of communication technology, here in Part Eight in the radio, elsewhere landline and cellular phones, computers, intercoms, and this manifestation is the driving force of this object anxiety. Throughout this chapter, I will argue that the object anxiety

represented in *The Return* is a consequence of the pervasive and abstract structure of the network and how it touches various aspects of our existence. Further, and working from media scholar Marshall McLuhan, the technological object while outside the body extends the capabilities of the body (54). This extension changes fundamentally the security of embodiment. The history of communication technologies, as Jeffrey Sconce argues in *Haunted Media*, is one rife with a cultural anxiety toward how these technologies extend and ultimately disembody the subject. Through analysis of two sequences, one from Part Fifteen and the other Part Sixteen, I will argue that the anxious affects produced by *The Return* are firmly rooted in this sense of disembodiment via communication technologies. We may take for granted the security of our bodies but what *The Return* shows us is an aesthetic concern toward the insecurity of bodies.

The Return brings out this anxiety prominently through a focus on the disembodiment effect communication technologies can have on the user during the act of communication. These technologies, such as the telephone or radio, have the effect of disembodiment the speaker on both ends, making the voice heard divorced from the body. The disembodied voice is made a signal, taken from the body, transformed, and broadcast. Sent through the network, transformed and received on the other end (recall Claude Shannon's diagram for telephonic communication described in Chapter One) by technological objects of communication. Part Eight shows us the potential for strange consequences of disembodied communication in the way the Woodsman's broadcast disruption forces listeners to sleep. In his assessment of the telephone and the adopted etiquette of its use, John Durham Peters argues that "the looseness of personal identification lies at the core of the telephone's eeriness" (198). In part, this eeriness can

come from the possibility of not knowing exactly who is on the other end of the line. This feeling is compounded by the odd notion of hearing the voice coming out of a material, inanimate object, while the body to which the voice belongs remains unseen. This rule does not apply exactly in every circumstance since the advent of video calling technologies like Skype and FaceTime, and while I do not deal with that kind of communication here explicitly the anxiety around video calling technology does require brief mention. While not represented explicitly (the Skype call in the series is not imbued with any special anxiety worth noting) in *The Return*, a certain anxiety exists around surveillance via camera embedded into desktop and laptop computers, as well as cellular telephones. And in *The Return* we have already seen bodies in a state of flux. The imposition of the network on daily existence shrinks the individual to a node and along with that destabilizes a sense of self (Jagoda 3). The various objects of communication technologies further add to this loss of self via the effect of disembodiment they occur on users. Further, in its representation of networks *The Return* is particularly interested in the way that the boundaries of the self can become blurred when the individual interacts with the network through objects. Characters who are interacting with communication technologies, and therefore are in contact with the deteriorating network, are having the boundaries of their sense of self blurred. The sense of object anxiety incurred then becomes a dominant aesthetic mode of the series. The totalizing effect of the network trickles down through the objects of communication technology. In an aesthetic sense *The Return* does not exactly embrace embodiment. A state of material embodiment is not to be taken for granted and is consistently threatened, often via communication technologies, with the discomforts of disembodiment. Embodiment, then, becomes a

source of great anxiety as characters struggle to maintain the boundaries of their own bodies.

To better understand the notions of embodiment and disembodiment I will establish a theoretical framework around these ideas. To do so I turn to Vivian Sobchack's introduction to her book *Carnal Thoughts*, where she writes of embodiment as "the lived body as, at once, both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object*: a sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities and agency that literally and figuratively makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others" (2). Sobchack describes embodiment in a twofold way; as both object that experiences subjectivity and as a subjective experience housed within the physicality of the object, the body itself. Sobchack draws on an existential phenomenology "philosophically grounded on the carnal, fleshy, objective foundations of subjective consciousness as it engages and is transformed by and in the world" (2). Building on this understanding of the embodied subject will be important to the textual analysis undertaken further on in this chapter wherein the embodied-ness of particular characters is put in question. Positioning the embodied subject as the lived body, with all that entails, then places the disembodied in opposition to this way of being. The disembodied subject becomes a figurative subject, existing outside a material realm. Further, a "phenomenological inquiry focuses on the phenomena of experience and their meaning as spatially and temporally embodied, lived and valued by an objective subject" (Sobchack 2). To represent disembodiment then is to draw figures away from their fleshiness, to represent them in such a way as if they are no longer *in* the world. In *The Return* this is represented in one way as a separate world that exists apart from the material one where these disembodied subjects come from and

sometimes return to: the Red Room, and the Black Lodge. It can be seen as well in the fractured bodies throughout the series; bodies that are doubled or “manufactured” to hold the place of someone who has been trapped in the non-places of the Red Room and Black Lodge, understood as an existential limbo. As is the case with characters such as Diane, Dougie, and Philip Jeffries. In the material world of *The Return* this binary (living/non-living, embodied/disembodied) is further complicated by networked communication technologies that proliferate and facilitate connection. These technologies, which have the effect of disembodiment on the user, also figure at the centre of anxious affects. The fear of disembodiment is a site of anxiety, the threat that communication technologies pose to disrupt the connection one has to the physical self. This contributes to the object anxiety that I will describe throughout this chapter. I argue that this anxious affect comes from interaction with those objects which facilitate the network for the individual user of communication technologies. The anxiety stems from tuning them into unknowability, the vastness and the abstract nature of this mode of existence. In representing it as such and not instead simplifying the network and communication technologies *The Return* makes anxiety its main mood and mode, and part of this anxiety stems from becoming dislocated from the body.

In *The Return* the viewer is confronted with this disembodied effect of communication technologies that are such a ubiquitous part of contemporary life. What the series pushes further in its representation of this effect is the breakdown of the network and of communication more broadly. Further, by drawing terminology from Eastern religious mysticism Lynch and Frost utilize what is, perhaps, an unfamiliar language through which to challenge understandings of how the network fractures the

subject into even more unknowable realms. While this association creates a pertinent metaphor for comprehending what is occurring it does not aid in nailing the notion of the network down in a concrete way, in many ways it complicates it further. It lends the network a supernatural power, representing it as so beyond the individual subject that it must be referred to with a language tied to religious mysticism. And yet, every time we are shown the consequences of networked existence something supernatural does seem to occur. The Woodsman's radio broadcast, Diane's interaction with her cellphone, Mr. C's with the landline telephone in Jeffries room; each of these culminate in supernatural occurrence. They show us an interaction with communication technologies that have effects beyond the rational. That this network in *The Return* is in a state of breakdown as well contributes to this. It is acting out, beyond what we know of it or how we expect it to operate.

In this chapter I will argue that the representation of object anxiety, in direct relation to communication technologies, is an aesthetic and thematic concern in *The Return*. At the same time, these technologies have been poisoned by their association with the atomic bomb and the disrupting presence brought forth as a result of its detonation in the series diegesis. This presence insinuated itself into the networks that would be created as a result of the nuclear bomb and rising international tensions during the Cold War. The objects of communication technologies that are a near ubiquitous presence in contemporary life are, in *The Return*, imbued with this presence. This lies at the root of the sense of object anxiety I have described as occurring throughout the series. In *The Return* embodiment is threatened by the network and its attendant communication technologies. I will use two examples, each from later in the series, as part of my textual

analysis in this chapter, the first of which centres around the character Diane Evans (Laura Dern) particular object anxiety. We learn Diane has been a victim of sexual assault, and that her body replaced by an identical double. In this example the object anxiety centres around the cellular telephone she uses to communicate with Mr. C, the man who assaulted her. Along with the character of Diane, I use an interaction between Mr. C (Kyle McLachlan) and Philip Jeffries (David Bowie/Nathan Frizell). This sequence illustrates both object anxiety and the aesthetics of disembodiment via communication technologies. I will focus on the way in which networked existence shrinks the individual through these objects, a notion borrowed from Steven Shaviro and Patrick Jagoda and explored in Chapter One. As well, it is not a coincidence that both scenes discussed in detail occur close to the end of the series. I have argued that the network represented here is in a state of decline. And as such the closer we get to the end (and to the series final moment of communication breakdown) the more we will see the consequence of this decline seeping into the narrative.

2.2 Diane, Disembodiment and the Cellphone

I will begin my analysis with a particularly Diane-centric sequence from Part Sixteen, which serves also as the final appearance of the character in this body. Diane is a constant presence throughout the *Twin Peaks* cycle but one who appears in different forms. In *Twin Peaks* and *Fire Walk With Me*, Diane is the recipient at the other end of a tape recorder into which Dale Cooper dictates his thoughts and makes requests through. In these early “appearances” she is Cooper’s personal assistant and her presence (if she even exists physically, her presence at this point is questionable) is entirely disembodied:

we never see her, we only get a sense of her potential through Cooper speaking through his tape recorder. This earlier iteration of the character can be understood as the kind of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) that has become ubiquitous in the very communication technologies that are the cause of Diane's anxiety in *The Return*. Diane in *Twin Peaks* and *Fire Walk With Me* is similar the personal assistant A.I. users of contemporary communication technologies have become accustomed to as immediate inclusions on their devices such as Google's Alexa or Apple's Siri. Diane is, in all parts of the *Twin Peaks* cycle, a character associated with the interface. Here, I turn to Alexander R. Galloway's understanding of the interface as "less as a surface but as a doorway or a window" (30). Galloway goes on to describe the interface as "not something that appears before you but rather is a gateway that opens up and allows passage to some place beyond" (30). Galloway's description of the interface here incites many of the images of movement between boundaries, from a material world to a non-place like the Red Room, from the comprehensible to *something else*.

In *Twin Peaks* and *Fire Walk With Me* the interface is the tape recorder and it is an interface that only Cooper interacts with. In this sense Diane is entirely interface, she can be understood as only a passage from Cooper to Diane, who is less an embodied presence than the potential of one. But in *The Return*, Diane is given a body, appearing in this body first in Part Five, sitting alone in a bar where she is approached by Cooper's former FBI colleague Albert Rosenfield (Miguel Ferrer). She is persuaded to join Albert and FBI Director Gordon Cole (David Lynch) as they travel to South Dakota to confront Mr. C in prison, who they believe to be their missing colleague Dale Cooper. In *The Return* this Diane is burdened with the trauma associated with what happened between her and Mr. C

during their last meeting at some point after the end of the second season of *Twin Peaks*. This assault is unseen to viewers but is described and serves as a moment of violent fracture for the character. Throughout *The Return*, Diane is often shown handling a cellphone, it is an iPhone 5 model, surrounded by a protective plastic case that adds a colourful polka dot design to the back of the phone. A design that matches her finger nails, which are each painted in a different colour, and her equally colourful outfits. And now Diane, embodied, is given her own interface through which the particular dynamic from those earlier entries in the *Twin Peaks* cycle is re-enacted, but in a much more sinister way.

As the scene begins there is a cut to Diane sitting alone at a hotel bar while the recognizable “*Twin Peaks* Theme” begins to fade out on the soundtrack. This is the recognizable theme that opens *Twin Peaks* and *The Return* (also appearing in *Fire Walk With Me*, it is a constant sound in the cycle), and both versions were composed by Angelo Badalamenti. Before the song can entirely fade out there is a light buzzing as Diane’s cellphone vibrates, indicating it has received a message. She places her cigarette down into an ashtray, picks up the phone and there is an abrupt cut to a close up of the screen. The music cuts off just as abruptly and we see a message (from Unknown) that says “: -) ALL.” We recognize this as one of Mr. C’s coded messages, which have been shown to viewers several times throughout the series. These coded messages have appeared on Diane’s cellphone in a similar manner throughout *The Return* but she has not reacted to one so viscerally in scenes prior to this. There is a cut back to Diane and she is physically startled (see Figure 5), gripping the phone tightly she shakes before there is a cut back to the phone screen and she opens the message, directly interacting with the cellphone

interface. She then opens her purse, takes a drink and continues to noticeably shake. There is a quiet, ominous tone on the soundtrack beginning before Diane says, “Oh, I remember, oh Coop, I remember.” After this she picks her phone back up and types a long series of numbers: coordinates that lead to the town of Twin Peaks, specifically the Sheriff’s Department. Here we see Diane’s interaction with the cellphone interface directly, through which she communicates a physical location, a window to another place. A cut showing us the inside of Diane’s purse, sitting in her lap, reveals the small handgun in her bag.



Figure 5, Diane reacts to Mr. C's message

The cellphone she clutches is revealed quite early on to be her means of communication with Mr. C, and the two share a coded language expressed over text message. They use this shared code so that she is able to keep him up to date on the

investigation of which he is the target. She is a classic double agent, a femme fatale figure who betrays the “good guys” she is working with in order to prove a strange loyalty to the “bad guy.” On the plot level this indicates a piece of Diane’s anxiety toward her cellphone, it is the means through which she is communicating with Mr. C and thus betraying her former FBI colleagues. Her loyalty is fractured. The cellphone then also figures as a conduit of her trauma, through it she is communicating with the figure who is at the root of a particular traumatic experience. The sexual assault, which Diane will recall in detail further on in the scene, represents a moment of fracture for the character. As a disembodied personal assistant in the original series to embodied character in *The Return*, Diane is consistently connected to some version of Cooper entirely through these devices of communication technologies. With this comes a sense of control over Diane’s body by Cooper, which he exploits through a violent assault. Introduced to us as a disembodied potential, the Diane that viewers are introduced to in *The Return* represents a fractured kind of embodiment beset by an experience of trauma. This fracturing is further exploited through the object anxiety caused by the characters interaction with the cellphone.

“Any invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies,” writes media scholar Marshall McLuhan, “and such extension also demands new ratios or new equilibriums among the other organs and extensions of the body” (54). The objects of communication technology that proliferate *The Return*, in McLuhan’s formulation, extend the body of users. The user of the cellphone, Diane in this case, is experiencing the kind of extension described by McLuhan. The aesthetic choices made for Diane as a character, how she dresses, and the colour of her fingernails is reflected in

the way she has adorned her device. In *The Return* such extensions are far more sinister, as the extending technologies are those which facilitate a network in breakdown. Further, “To behold, use or perceive any extension of ourselves in technological form is necessarily to embrace it” (McLuhan 55). While McLuhan posits this extension as a utopian one, I argue that *The Return* does not. Instead, these extensions of the self via technology are a cause for anxiety, and with Diane specifically are an extension to past trauma. What *The Return* does as well, is begin to account for the ways in which such technological extensions of the individual can extend psychically as well as physically.

The signals sent from Mr. C’s burner phones in the form of text messages are coming from a part of this disrupting presence, akin to the Woodsmen, that has infected the network through which the signals are sent. If it is the signal that is the key to communication theory, it is here the signal that holds within it a menace and anxious affect: the noise as represented by the Woodsmen and those other disruptions. Anne Balsamo considers forms of “technological embodiment” through consideration of how new media “signal ways in which the ‘natural’ body has been dramatically refashioned through the application of new technologies of corporeality” (215). Established in Chapter One is the notion that the network, which facilitates and moves this signal, disrupted by the presence of the Woodsmen. This disruption works as an infection, the results of which we are now seeing in the contemporary setting where Diane is so attached to and yet anxious about this particular communication technology. Returning to the scene previously described, Diane then closes the purse, composes herself and gets up from the bar, at which point a clanging, industrial song begins to play. This song continues to play as Diane moves from the bar and through the hotel hallways until she

reaches the room the FBI agents have set up as a temporary headquarters. The song is “American Woman” as performed by the band Muddy Magnolias and remixed by David Lynch. The song has been heard previously, in Part One, when we are introduced to Mr. C. In that scene the song played before we ever saw him, as his car drove through dark roads at night with the headlights illuminating a small strip of the road. The song has been distorted and stretched by Lynch in this version created for *The Return*. Both the percussion and vocals are made deeper, stretching the distance between the percussion and making the voices sound more akin to what we heard coming from the mouth of the Woodsmen in Part Eight. The song is a distorted reflection of the idea of communication breakdown represented in *The Return*. Lynch has disrupted the sound of the song, similar to how the Woodsmen disrupt communication in Part Eight.

As Diane approaches the hotel room there is a cut to Gordon Cole inside the room, he turns his head slowly as if anticipating her presence. There is another cut to a POV shot from Diane of the hotel room door from the outside. The music cuts as Diane is framed in close up, standing directly in front of the door. There is a cut back inside the room where Cole tells Diane to come in without even being alerted by a knock, and again there is that ominous tone on the soundtrack. I argue this sequence is a culmination of the object anxiety that has surrounded Diane throughout the series. The way in which the character is represented in her interactions with the cellphone, with an anxiety that seems to build each time she is made to look at this device, all come to head with the visceral physical reaction she has to receiving her final message from Mr. C. It is in this sequence as well in which she recalls the specifics of her final interaction with Cooper/Mr. C, and the trauma that it has caused her. Here, object anxiety is tied to these more intimate

traumas that have been enacted upon the character. This trauma, intermingled with anxious affects, stems specifically from Diane being sexually assaulted by Mr. C at some point chronologically after the second season of *Twin Peaks*. The body of Cooper's evil doppelgänger, having escaped from the Red Room possessed by the evil BOB, enacts this violence and then through communication technology retains his ties to Diane as she joins the FBI agents in their investigation years later. This puts the object of communication technology at the centre of the anxious affect, it is the conduit through which this pervasive feeling is represented. After telling her story to the collected FBI agents Diane is killed by them as she attempts to pull the handgun from her purse. Her body then disappears and reappears in the Red Room (one of those existentially disoriented spaces) where her head explodes leaving behind a dark void and a small golden "seed." The seed is an indication of this Diane's status as "tulpa": a concept from Tibetan and Indian Buddhist religious mysticism.

In *The Return*, the "tulpa" represents the way in which the self, and the body, can become fractured. The first time this term is used in *The Return* is by FBI Agent Tammy Preston (Chrysta Bell) to describe a strange "Blue Rose" case, named for a flower, the blue rose, which does not occur naturally. Blue Rose is the term used in the *Twin Peaks* cycle to designate FBI cases that deal with the strange, inexplicable, and supernatural. The first such case involved Gordon Cole and Philip Jeffries (another story told but never seen) encountering a previously missing woman who had a mysterious double she could not account for. The word tulpa has been translated differently from Tibetan and Indian Buddhist texts, its meaning sometimes shifting slightly in translation. As Natasha L. Mikles and Joseph P. Laycock describe in their article "Tracking the Tulpa: Exploring the

“Tibetan” Origins of a Contemporary Paranormal Idea,” “a tulpa is a being that begins in the imagination but acquires a tangible reality and sentience” (87). This echoes my earlier descriptions of Diane’s various ways of being throughout the *Twin Peaks* cycle. The Diane we have seen in *The Return* is one such double, a fractured version of herself, a self which has already undergone a process of fracturing: first going from being disembodied in earlier parts of the *Twin Peaks* cycle, and then to being embodied in *The Return*. Here, this fracture is the product of trauma both immediate and much broader. The trauma of the assault is immediate to the character, while the broader trauma is connected to what a forced state of networked existence does to the self. I do not intend to dive too deep into religious mysticism here, but I argue the idea of the tulpa and how it is represented in *The Return* operates as a broader metaphor for disembodiment that will be helpful. To place this specific piece of Tibetan and Indian Buddhism into the series creates a link that connects how disembodiment via communication technologies is represented throughout the series. I want to return to Anne Balsamo’s conception of “technological embodiment” in order to fuse together the Eastern religious mysticism with the very material communication technologies at work in *The Return*. In her essay “Forms of Technological Embodiment: Reading the Body in Contemporary Culture” Balsamo writes:

For whatever else it might imply, this merger [of the ‘technological-human’] relies on reconceptualization of the human body as a boundary figure belonging simultaneously to at least two previously incompatible systems of meaning - ‘the organic/natural’ and ‘the technological/cultural’. At that point at which the body is reconceptualised not as a fixed part of nature, but as a boundary concept, we

witness an ideological tug-of-war between competing systems of meaning which include and in part define the material struggles of physical bodies (215).

While Lynch and Frost utilize an explicatory language tinged with a particular Buddhist mysticism, when paired with Balsamo's reading of the technological-body there is an illumination of how this language speaks to the networked mode of existence. Diane's body is one that has been extended by her use of the cellular telephone, it has become a prosthesis along the theoretical lines of McLuhan. It is also a body that has been previously understood as a technological prosthesis for Cooper, in the form of the tape recorder. Balsamo's formulation pushes this notion a bit further, illustrating the technologically aided body as being one that becomes unfixed from nature. In the *Twin Peaks* cycle this unfixed-ness, this state of bodily flux, is represented in Diane's move from the material world to the non-place of the Red Room.

In *Haunted Media*, Jeffrey Sconce explores the supernatural properties attributed to the radio by the early adopters of the technology. In his discussion of Thomas Edison's attempts to create a radio-based device that would be able to contact the spirit world he singles out how such a device "evok[es] radio's fundamentally unsettling paradoxes of presence within absence, isolation within community, and intimacy within separation" (Sconce 82). I want to extend this description of the effects of one communication technology to other forms. Continuing with the example of Diane this technology is the cellular phone, the object of anxiety that she has been most directly tied to. One of the fundamental aspects of these communication technologies is the disembodied effect that they place on communication. Communication technology, especially cellular and landline telephones, disembody the act of communication, allowing individuals to

communicate between great physical distances. Sconce argues this position as a main source of the anxiety inducing effects of using communication technology: that it essentially takes the individual away from their own body during an inherently physical act and allows them to communicate with other bodies that are not physically present. This work of communication is facilitated by the broader network that maps the series and traps the characters within itself. Further, I have positioned the figures who disrupt communication (the Woodsmen) as the ghosts in the machine, or perhaps more aptly the ghosts in the signal. With their origin and the origin of communication anxiety established in Part Eight, this presence is now present in contemporary communication technology and the signals that facilitate how these technologies connect. Sconce argues further that the development of new communication technologies “evoke...the nervous ambivalence of wireless, a simultaneous desire and dread of actually making such extraordinary forms of contact,” e.g. with the dead (83). In *The Return* it is not so much the dread of contact with the dead but a certain ambivalence toward wireless communication technology is similarly at work. It is an anxiety surrounding the disrupted signal, and the network in a state of breakdown. The presence of the Woodsmen is now ubiquitous through the network, whether we see them or not they are disruptors of the signal, or the noise. This is why I referred to them earlier as ghosts in the signal. Such a description aligns their presence as disruptors of communication technology more closely with that of the “supernatural” history of telecommunications discussed by Sconce. And while Sconce locates his history much earlier, *The Return* places the origin of “haunted” communication technologies as a consequence of the nuclear bomb. This focuses the

haunted history of *The Return* directly in a twentieth century context that speaks to the contemporary setting of the series and the associated technologies.

As I have argued, Diane's object anxiety is inextricably linked to who she is in contact with via the device: Mr. C. This lends to the object a power, which in many ways controls her. Before she dies Diane remarks "I am not me," after looking down at her cellphone and seeing again the message that Mr. C has sent her. This statement of disassociation can be linked to the particular object anxiety. Communication technology by disembodiment the subject creates for that subject a strange relationship to the technology. This relationship is one fraught with the anxiety that I have been describing as it further insinuates them within the inescapable confines of the network. This disembodiment is something *The Return* represents at times as a literal process, but it is also an apt way to understand the effects of networked existence on the individual. And since the objects of communication technology facilitate this confinement it is these objects that are doing the work of this pervasive anxiety, having been brought in to nearly every aspect of daily life. The subject is now confronted with the near constant sense of disembodiment. With Diane this manifests itself literally, she is a double, and she is apart from her body.

2.3 Philip Jeffries: New Embodiments

To further understand the effect of disembodiment via communication technologies I will move now to a study of the character of Mr. C, and his strange interaction with Philip Jeffries. In Part Fifteen Mr. C arrives at the gas station, and it is the same one we have seen in Part Eight when the camera enters the bomb during the Trinity test. In my

analysis of that sequence I discussed the existentially confused nature of this gas station: is it a space located within the bomb or has the bomb created a tear in the curtain between the worlds where this place exists? Here, Mr. C drives up to the gas station, seemingly without having crossed any supernatural borders to get there, but the space maintains strange affects. He is approached and led inside a room above the gas station by a silent Woodsman. Inside the room above the gas station there is another Woodsman, who flips a switch that unleashes a crackling of electricity and a strobe light effect. This space connects *The Return* to *Fire Walk With Me* in a durational way. Time between these two entries into the cycle has obviously passed but some aspects of action and interaction seem unchanged. For example, the Woodsman in the room above the gas station is the same as the one seen in the room on top of the convenience store in *Fire Walk With Me*. The space and the Woodsmen have deteriorated over time and yet they seem attached to certain functions, as the Woodsman who flips the switch was seen repeating the same action in a previous entry in the *Twin Peaks* cycle. The first Woodsman then leads Mr. C through a hallway and during the sequence the image is overlaid by another image of a dark forest, and as the camera follows the two individuals through the hallway, another is moving through the woods simultaneously. The two images being laid over top of one another is an indicator of the confused boundaries in this space, similar to how it was a confused image within the bomb. Mr. C eventually reaches a door and when he passes through it the other side is the parking lot of a motel. A woman stands waiting and leads him to the room where we are introduced to the new Philip Jeffries. Jeffries, who first appeared in *Fire Walk With Me*, has been heard in *The Return* but up until this point has gone unseen. The version of Jeffries that Mr. C meets

here is a voice emanating from a large sculptural object that somewhat resembles a tea pot (see Figure 6). After their conversation, Jeffries disappears, leaving Mr. C alone in the room with a ringing landline telephone that when answered transports him to the inside of a phone booth outside the gas station.



Figure 6, Philip Jeffries as object, the non-human body

Whether cellular or landline, the telephone is an object facilitating the connections being made in *The Return*. And an anxious affect is produced by the disembodied experiences of communication that these devices create for the user. The act of communication is no longer reliant on physical contact or proximity and the oral aspect is cast through the signals being sent that make up the phone call. The voice may come from the individual, but it is turned into signal, packed onto the line, and then shaved down to its most necessary data, removing the noise that would otherwise disrupt the

signal. The voice becomes the signal as it stretched from speaker to listener. This is part of what makes Philip Jeffries such an interesting figure as he appears in *The Return*: he has become disembodied but his voice remains intact, it is the same voice we hear coming from his original body in the dream/flashback sequence earlier in *The Return* that reuses the scenes of the character's appearance in *Fire Walk With Me*. Jeffries occupies this strange space of being two things at once: he is disembodied but still with a voice in a way that mirrors the process being facilitated by the telephone. It should be noted as well, that in *The Return* the original "body" of Jeffries is played by David Bowie, while the voice is performed by Nathan Frizell in both contemporary and flashback sequences, another way in which the voice is divorced from the body it is supposed to belong to.

Anne Balsamo theorizes the "human-technological" as the body modified by technology, the biological as reinscribed. The disruption of these boundaries "becomes the place where anxieties about the 'proper order of things' erupt" (Balsamo 216). I have situated the origin of anxious affects a bit differently in my reading of *The Return*, but I believe Balsamo's framework is still helpful in understanding object anxiety, especially when paired with McLuhan's notion of technology as an extension of the user. I have positioned my argument in opposition to certain aspects of McLuhan's: technological extension is not a utopian one. How then does Jeffries' new embodiment fit into this framework? I have begun to parse out the ways in which Jeffries as a character represents a doubled sense of embodiment: the character as he appears in *The Return* is both in human and non-human bodies. The voice that is attached to both of these "bodies" is not the voice of the actor who plays the character in his human body. And all of this can be confusing. But in this confusion, similar to the confusion of Diane's tenuous

embodiment, we can see how the particular network aesthetics at work in *The Return* are being used in order to imagine new ways of understanding the networked mode of existence.

It will be helpful here to recall Peters' assertion that "The looseness of personal identification lies at the core of the telephone's eeriness" (198). When using the telephone there is only the voice on the other end, a signal that is received and a listener who is then forced into the position of becoming a listener. The voice on the line, much like Jeffries' own here, is disembodied and coming forth from an object, and it is the object that perpetuates the anxious affect. Peters further argues the particular communicative power of the telephone when he states; "Communication suggests contact without touch. To talk on a telephone is to identify an acoustic effigy of the person with a embodied presence" (128). Again, signal over significance. The voice may be divorced from the body, but it is still tied to orally representing that body. Jeffries' voice is no longer attached to a proper body but when heard it is recognized by characters as belonging to Jeffries. The sculptural object that Jeffries has become still speaks with the voice that can be recognized, in this way Jeffries' represents communication technologies, such as the telephone, in an aesthetically different way. Jeffries is represented as an object with a voice, but that voice simultaneously belongs to the object and is disembodied. And as the user, the voice is our only tie to the potential of embodiment.

Further, the telephone works as a micro example of how the network is operating throughout the series more broadly. The network, which I have argued via Shaviro and Jagoda in Chapter One, shrinks the individual and makes them a node in the much wider

web, is functioning more particularly through the telephone. Here, in both examples I have cited thus far, the telephone is the object that does the work of the network. The object is facilitating the broader goals of the network and this network is in a state of breakdown. If the connective tissue the of the network is degrading, as I have argued, then it is through these objects that this work is being done. When characters are interacting with these objects they are coming in contact with the deterioration, and the subject is confronted with the breakdown of the network. Recall Diane claiming to not be herself in the moments before her death immediately after having that visceral reaction to her cellphone and her text message interaction with the man who assaulted her. Mr. C too has a visceral reaction when Jeffries' disappears, and he is left with a ringing landline telephone that when answered transports him from the motel room to a phone booth outside of the gas station.

Mr. C is led by a Woodsman to the motel room where Jeffries is introduced in this strange, new body. The two have a conversation that, like his conversations with Diane and Gordon Cole, sounds as if it is being conducted in a kind of code known only to those within the conversation. In this scene, before Jeffries disappears, there is a close up shot on Mr. C's face which is illuminated by a flickering overhead light so that all we can see in the darkness is his face. Mr. C asks, "Who is Judy?" to which Jeffries replies, "You have already met Judy." Mr. C's confused response to this, "What do you mean I have met Judy?" directly precedes the first ring of the telephone. This instills a sense of confusion, especially since Jeffries seems connected to the network in ways that this embodied character is not. There is a cut back and forth from the ringing telephone to Mr. C's face as Jeffries disappears and he asks again 'Who is Judy?' As Mr. C approaches

the telephone there is the sound of electricity on the soundtrack as a bright white light illuminates the dark room. There is then a cut to the outside of the gas station which pulses with smoke and light, similar to what was seen in Part Eight, with the sound of crackling electricity. There is then a cut to an empty phone booth that Mr. C suddenly appears inside, holding the handset of the telephone. He looks at the telephone, his movements jerky, the stop motion effect that again we saw occurring in the Woodsmen in Part Eight. He then hangs up the receiver and leaves the phone booth. In this space the communication technology takes on strange function: it moves the body from one place to another, as well as disembodying the voice of the speaker. This adds an additional aspect of materiality to consider in the landline telephone. Landline telephones already are imbued with a materiality, a physicality, in their use. The phone has a body where the receiver sits, the receiver is the object that a user will hold up to their ear, through which they receive the voice in their ear. The phone is then plugged in via a wire in order to connect it to the network. This physicality is a key feature of the landline telephone and one that places it in contrast with the cellular. The signal attributed to the cellular phone is articulated in a more abstract way. It is in the air, free floating, connecting to and then pinging between towers. In this sequence Mr. C takes on the properties of the signal through use of the landline telephone.

I want to position this blurred boundary with terms established by Ken Hillis in his study of virtual reality where he states that “such quasi-magical thinking [in reference to the philosophy of Terence McKenna] also speaks to the contemporary Western subject’s fear of being lost in space, or at least lost in the world” (5). Hillis is writing in relation to how virtual reality interfaces superimpose information directly through user displays.

Such displays are framed as reducing information, “[t]o layer information over sight assumes that information will become fully *known*” (Hillis 5). This returns us to the problem of communication and the technologies developed to facilitate it: we want to be fully understood and hope these technologies bridge that gap. What the aesthetics of *The Return* grant us, especially in the examples provided so far, is not a solution to this problem but further complications. Hillis goes on to say that

in a culture increasingly reliant on visually dependent simulations of reality, what is beheld has also become highly ambiguous for the abstracted Western mind. Not only is it difficult to trust (*extend* belief) that, say, an unknown photograph has not been digitally remastered into something very different from what the camera first captured, but also the epistemology inherent in McKenna’s and Gelernter’s argument seems resistant to trusting actual physical experience (6).

While *The Return* is obviously not dipping into the world of virtual reality (at least through direct representation) I believe that Hillis’ assessment of that medium’s aesthetics can be helpful here. There is something of a distrust of the communication technologies, and their position as facilitating communication in a degrading network makes them objects of further suspicion. Jeffries’ telephone is acting out in supernatural ways, moving bodies and working beyond its prescribed limits. Sudden bodily transportation is another way in which *The Return* visualizes the disembodiment effects of these communication technologies. In a disrupted network these technologies, which normally have a disembodiment effect on the user, act out in even stranger and more unpredictable ways. The network aesthetic of *The Return* is one of utter disorientation, in which the body can no longer be properly located spatiotemporally. In which case anxiety becomes

the dominant affect associated with communication technologies. Jeffries new “body,” too, has this disorientation effect, as what we see and what we hear does not always match what we already know of the character from both *Fire Walk With Me* and flashback sequences in *The Return*. This new Jeffries presents us with an unfamiliar interface that shares information in similarly unfamiliar ways. This rather extreme disembodiment contributes further to a network aesthetic that prizes a confusion over a clean understanding of connection. Confusion, a web of interconnection so massive it becomes incomprehensible to the individual, is part of the network as it has been incorporated into my argument. Disorientation, as well, is integral to how Jagoda articulates the network aesthetic. *The Return* does not represent this confusion for the sake of it, but to represent the network through its formal structure, as well as in particular characters in their interactions with communication technologies.

2.4 Conclusion

As I have argued throughout this chapter, representing object anxiety in direct relation to communication technologies is an aesthetic and thematic concern in *The Return*. At the same time these technologies have been poisoned by their association with the nuclear bomb and the disrupting presence brought forth as a result of its detonation. This presence insinuated itself into the networks that would come as a result of the nuclear bomb and international tensions during the Cold War. Communication technologies that have become further objectified so as to be a near ubiquitous presence in contemporary life are, in *The Return*, imbued with this presence. This lies at the root of the sense of object anxiety I have described as occurring throughout the series. Connected

to this is the ways in which communication technologies disembody the user. In Chapter One, I built upon pre-existing definitions and theories of the network and its associated aesthetic possibilities in order to establish a foundation of disorientation. This feeling of disorientation comes from the size and ubiquity of the network when considered as a whole. It is a structure so vast and abstract that the individual becomes lost in the maze of it. And, as I argued throughout this chapter, it is those technologies that facilitate the network do the work of disembodiment. Questioning the stability of embodiment within this broad networked structure is at the core of what I argue *The Return* is doing. It is creating a network aesthetic of confusion, of signal without significance.

In Chapter Three I will further this argument by examining the way this anxiety has moved in part from the technological network and into the human network. This movement is at the centre of how *The Return* represents a complete communication breakdown with the extremity of the human scream. The scream is at once a sign of a complete breakdown and a potential return to subjectivity that is lost in the networked mode of existence.

3. The Scream

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter One I posited the advent of the atomic bomb and networked communication technologies as an origin for the anxious affect that pervades *Twin Peaks: The Return*. These technologies share a parallel history and, in *The Return*, what comes forth from one ultimately infects the other. In Chapter Two I explored how this anxious affect manifests in objects of communication technologies by disembodiment of users and foregrounding the effect of networked existence on the individual. Under this mode of existence, the self becomes a fractured thing, and in representations of interactions with communication technologies, the boundaries of the body become destabilized. I argued that communication technologies extend the body in *The Return*, but unlike Marshall McLuhan, the series does not posit this as a utopian extension. Through *The Return*, I demonstrate how these extensions become a source of anxiety surrounding the dissolving boundaries of a body previously believed more firm, less porous. And if these boundaries are dissolving, as I argue, what is left of the body and can it, as the subtitle of the series suggests, be returned to?

As a potential answer *The Return* gives the viewer a scream. Of course, the series gives the viewer many screams, but it is the one that ends the series that stands out the most. This final moment scream, occurring in Part Eighteen, and coming from Carrie Page (Sheryl Lee) will form the basis of my textual analysis in this chapter. I argue that this scream is a moment of absolute rupture, a breakdown in communication and a signal that the networked mode of existence that dominated the series is no longer in place. I

will build this argument with a theoretical framework in which I return to those scholars that have been the foundation of my previous chapters: John Durham Peters, Marshall McLuhan, Vivian Sobchack, and Steven Shaviro. In addition to this I will incorporate the work of affect theorists Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth in order to articulate the ways in which affect operates along a networked logic of signals that move between not only people but devices. To build on this and to articulate the new status of characters in the series left without the old models of networked communication technologies, I turn to Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, as well as Mark Fisher's analysis of Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, and the accompanying theorization of hauntology and lost futures. In doing so I hope to illustrate that the mode of interconnected nodes and networked existence that *The Return* has presented viewers does finally (as I have promised) rupture in the series final two episodes. With these structures gone we find characters unmoored from spatiotemporal specificity, free floating agents who I figure as ghost-like, as they attempt to reconnect with a past that no longer exists, and a potential future that no longer seems possible.

3.2 Affect as Signal

Here, I will return to the notion of affect and its theorization, explored briefly in Chapter One, to craft a framework around these questions. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth position affect as "those intensities that pass body to body (human, non-human, part body, and otherwise) ...those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves" (1). In Chapter Two, I explored how such

intensities can and do pass from object to individual, from technological interface to human interface in *The Return*. In a network that is infected by the disturbing presence of the Woodsmen, these intensities become quickly hostile. I describe them as the *anxious affects* that result from the interaction with those communication technologies that extend our human sensorium. Gregg and Seigworth's presentation of affect further posit bodies as defined "not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect" (2). Affects here can be understood like those signals that pass through the network, unseen in their transfer but felt in their arrival. In the case of Diane, as I argue in Chapter Two, these signals are a cause for the excavation of a trauma deeply felt that also represents a moment of fracture. And the notion of communication theory, as described by John Durham Peters, as a theory of "signals, and not significance" (23) has been a guiding light throughout this thesis. I want to wed the notion of the signal to that of the transfer of affect to argue in this chapter that in the wake of disembodiment, due in large part to these signals, the subject is forced to return to itself. This return is represented in the scream, a primal sound that signals the breakdown of the network and of communication more broadly.

In a piece examining the legacy of *Twin Peaks* written for the online culture publication *Vulture*, critic Matt Zoller Seitz highlights the series (referring only to the first two seasons and *Fire Walk With Me*) "willingness to plumb the emotional depths of its characters with the white-hot intensity of a 1950s melodrama or a 1970s Italian horror film, without distancing devices, and often without facetiousness or irony" (n.p.). This description pinpoints a certain function of affect as it pertains to communication, not only within earlier instalments of the *Twin Peaks* cycle, as Seitz refers to, but that can be

extrapolated to *The Return* as well. Emotion in *The Return* is oft expressed in an extreme register. Before Carrie Page's scream in Part Eighteen, which I will explore in more depth further on, there is another scream which occurs as a similar moment of intensity and breakdown. The end of Part Fifteen takes the viewer to the Roadhouse Bar, a common setting for the end of episodes of *The Return*. As the scene begins a show is in progress, there are cuts from the band performing and then back to the audience dancing. There is then a cut from the band performing to a medium shot of a woman sitting alone in one of the booths. She is approached by two heavies in leather jackets who enter from the right of the frame. There is a cut back to the band on stage and the audience, full and moving, wildly taking up the floor space of the bar with their bodies, all flailing limbs and bobbing heads. The two heavies then literally pick up the woman sitting in the booth, moving her from her seat to the floor where she sits cross legged and seemingly unfazed by this forced relocation. Her expression does not change and any expected emotional response we may have as viewers is withheld. A cut then places this woman in the centre of frame, another cut follows to the band performing on stage and to the audience, and back, and then forth. Returning to the young woman on the floor she extends her arm, almost insect like, and begins to crawl across the floor of the bar. Her movements are hesitant, careful and slow, her facial expression is now pained as she moves on all fours across the floor. She moves through legs in the crowd of concert goers like denim reeds through which her vulnerable body must navigate. She eventually stops, and she screams, a strobe light bursts in unison with the band performing (see Figure 7). From this scream the screen cuts to black against which the credits are displayed. This scene illustrates the

affective register of the scream in *The Return*. It is a primal, pre-verbal form of communication that expresses an intensity being expelled from the body.



Figure 7, a woman crawls and screams in the Roadhouse bar

Analyzing *Fire Walk With Me* in his monograph on the filmography of David Lynch, Justus Neiland points to the importance of the melodramatic quality of many of Lynch's characters. "Melodramatic characters, too," Neiland argues, "are radio-active: not plausible, psychologically motivated individuals so much as receivers and transmitters in a mediated network of affect and action. The melodramatic environment is tailor-made to host the kinds of affective transmissions that pulse through, and de-realize, the character vessels of Lynch's films" (81). Neiland is tuning into the way affect moves between and through characters, like signals between radio devices and this speaks to the way in which these characters overflow with emotion. The scream is another such

instance of this flowing over. It is an extreme gesture, a communicative implausibility that articulates nothing but affect. The scream of this young woman in the Roadhouse Bar is an overflowing, an expression of affective intensity that is just beyond words. It signals the state of communication in the series as being in constant breakdown. It is a signpost of what is to come in the final moments of *The Return*. I argue this is an example of the scream as a breaking point. From the scream there is a cut to black, it marks a violent aural end to the episode, signalling a break from which we cannot return. In this instance the young woman is subsumed by the crowd on the dance floor before she screams. Following the network logic of that has been a backbone of my argument throughout, this is an instance of the individual screaming in response to being subsumed by the network mode of existence. The crowd in the Roadhouse is composed of a large group of anonymous, flailing individuals, dancing nodes in a web of interconnection, while the young woman sits off to the side on her own but still existing within the same space. When she is forcibly removed from her place she crawls into the middle of the crowd, and then screams, while the camera focuses directly on her face, the legs surrounding her are obscured. She is consumed by them and her only response to scream out, signalling a potential return to subjectivity, but resulting in a cut to black, nothingness.

3.3 Screaming into the Void

Michel Chion describes the *screaming point* in cinema as “the unthinkable inside the thought...the indeterminate inside the spoken...unrepresentability inside representation” (77). The scream is a breaking point, “a rip in the fabric of time...a fantasy of the auditory absolute” (Chion 77). *The Return* ends with a scream. One of the

final images of the series proper (I am making this distinction to indicate a separation between the final image and the image over which the end credits of the episode play, an image borrowed from Part Two of *The Return*, which I will briefly discuss later on) is of Carrie Page's face contorted in terror as the sound of her scream gushes out of the black hole of her mouth. This scream is a reaction to dislocation, from time and space, but also a return to a subjectivity previously relinquished under a networked mode of existence. Carrie's is not the only scream in *The Return* (the aforementioned Roadhouse scream for example) but it is the final one, and the one that I will focus the bulk of my textual analysis in this chapter on. Carrie is a character introduced late in *The Return*, retrieved by Special Agent Dale Cooper from her home in Texas in Part Eighteen (the final episode of the series). She is hesitant but there is also a rotting corpse on her couch she seems eager to gain some ground on ("I do have to get out of Dodge" she says as much to herself as to Cooper). Carrie, though, is also Laura Palmer, or at least looks exactly like Laura Palmer had Laura Palmer not been murdered and wrapped in plastic twenty-five years ago in Twin Peaks. This connection is made because Carrie is played by Sheryl Lee, the actress who played Laura Palmer and her shockingly identical albeit bespectacled and dark-haired cousin Maddy Ferguson in the original *Twin Peaks* cycle. This potent casting choice poses yet another body in state of flux, the origin of which is confused and unmoored from the chronology as it has been presented. Carrie's scream really is a "rip in the fabric of time" (Chion 77) as she is confronted with becoming dislodged from her body, from her familiar spatiotemporal grounding.

I have been working from Steven Shaviro's notion of the network as "a self-generat[ing], self-organizing, self-sustaining system...work[ing] through multiple

feedback loops...[which] induce effects of interference, amplification, and resonance. And such effects permit the system to grow, both in size and in complexity” (10). In Chapter One, I place Shaviro’s description of the network into conversation with Patrick Jagoda’s notion of the network aesthetic, which posits the network as “a limit concept of the historical present...accessible only at the edge of our sensibilities” (Jagoda 3). I argue for *The Return* as an example of Jagoda’s network aesthetic, although one that is representing the network in breakdown. If the network is a site of disorientation, a massive web of interconnected nodes, the shape of which becomes blurry when considered in totality, what is left to the subject within that network when the network structures begin to deteriorate? The network, as I have argued along the theoretical foundation of Shaviro and Jagoda, in its totality shrinks and even subsumes the individual. It can be difficult to discern one’s place in the face of such a massive, complicated, and ultimately incomprehensible web of interconnection. The scream represents a break from this paradigm. The networks that make up *The Return* are represented as in a state of breakdown, seeded on the scorched earth left by the atomic bomb, malignantly infected from the outset. This infection comes most obviously in the form of the Woodsmen, an evil presence dragging itself forth from a tear in the red velvet curtain that separates worlds. The Woodsmen are the malignant signals, corrupted information, viral glitches.

The Woodsmen have haunted as much of this thesis as they do this series. A presence at times confronted, as I do most directly in Chapter One, while also hovering around the edges of others, as they do with my study of Philip Jeffries in Chapter Two. And the Woodsmen are key to much of my analysis of *The Return*. I argue they are the

infection, the impetus for network breakdown. Their presence is connected directly to the advent of the atomic bomb, with the Trinity test creating the tear through which their strange presence enters the world of *The Return*. Though, as I noted in Chapter One, their presence does not begin in *The Return*, but in *Fire Walk With Me* where they are not quite so ashen faced, and wherein their homestead is only slightly better kept up. But it is in *The Return* that their strange presence is truly felt, wherein they become conduits of the anxious affect I describe. Despite some peculiar chronological confusion, it is not until the contemporary setting of *The Return* that the Woodsmen are seen on the other side of the curtain proper, mingling in moments of ordinary interaction (ordinary at least in terms of David Lynch) on this side of the Red Room/Black Lodge. Recall that these spaces, the Red Room and the Black Lodge, are figured in the series as supernatural, existing outside the normal boundaries of space and time. In Part Eighteen the Woodsman's presence is not seen but their absence can be felt as their work as disruptors seems to be finished. With the network now broken down their job is done, and they have disappeared. What is left for the disruptors once the system they find themselves in has been disrupted to the point of absolute rupture?

The Woodsmen, these "dirty, bearded men" as Gordon Cole (David Lynch) describes them, flicker in and out, but seem drawn specifically to the stranger spirits of the *Twin Peaks* world. They emerge in the aftermath of the Trinity nuclear test, one appears in a jail cell when William Hastings is arrested for the murder of a middle school librarian, another appears when Air Force Lieutenant Cynthia Knox examines the decapitated and improbably youthful corpse of Major Garland Briggs. They appear over the body of Mr. C when he is shot by Ray in Part Eight, and then again when he is shot

by Lucy in the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Department in Part Seventeen. The Woodsmen appear when Cole and Albert investigate a black-hole like anomaly in the sky in South Dakota, and in this case they, somehow, cause William Hastings' head to explode while he sits, hands cuffed, in the backseat of a squad car. Their presence has figured into so much of my argument regarding the network as being in a state of breakdown; and while the Woodsmen may not be the direct cause of this breakdown (it was a network built on soiled ground, nothing good was ever going to grow) they have served as agents of disruption. They are omnipresent in the network of *The Return*, presenting themselves when characters seem to be moving toward those supernatural spaces of the series, which I have described as the non-places of the *Twin Peaks* cycle. Agents of disruption, malevolent mediators of the boundaries between worlds; an appearance by Woodsmen is bad news. But after the death of Mr. C the Woodsmen disappear. The BOB orb emerges from Mr. C's chest and is destroyed by a green gloved young man with a supernaturally powerful punch before it could merge with another body and begin a new cycle of evil. I have argued that the Woodsmen are disruptors of the network, but they do not thrive in its absence. This networked system houses them, it is part of what bore them into this world in the first place, allowed them to move freely between the places and the non-places of the worlds in *The Return*. When the network breaks down, the Woodsmen have no network to further infect, to move through, and their presence is perhaps no longer necessary. Perhaps evil, in *The Return*, can end up being as banal as a signal through the network, and with no one on the receiving end the signal is dropped. But this anxious affect is not fully gone. Such affect has been rerouted from the communication technologies described in Chapter Two, facilitated by the network, onto characters, Carrie

and Cooper, who now find themselves dislocated from previously established foundations of time and space.

As John Durham Peters writes: “The past lives selectively in the present. History works not in a solely linear way but by being arranged into various constellations” (3). And this is illuminating for understanding not only how the Woodsmen are operating throughout *The Return* but how communication and network breakdown can be understood as well. Above I mentioned how Carrie Page becomes unmoored from a spatiotemporal foundation which in turn forces her scream, a moment of absolute rupture, but also a return to subjectivity. The scenes which lead up to this moment of break involves Dale Cooper retrieving Carrie Page from her home in Texas and bringing her to Twin Peaks. The pair ultimately end up at what viewers will recognize as the Palmer household. In *The Return* we have seen Palmer family matriarch Sarah within this home, as we did in the other pieces of the *Twin Peaks* cycle. I bring attention to this detail to distinguish the Palmer home from the overtly supernatural spaces of the series. Cooper’s journey from Twin Peaks to Texas and then back involved the crossing of supernatural boundaries in some way, but the Palmer home is still represented as being rooted in the natural world of the series. When Cooper brings Carrie Page back to the Palmer household though *something* has changed, and drastically. The most obvious change is Carrie herself, she is not Laura Palmer, former resident of this home, though she looks exactly like her. The woman who answers the door at the (former?) Palmer household is not Sarah Palmer, and this woman has never heard of a Sarah Palmer or a Palmer family who has ever owned or lived in this house. After this disquieting interaction Cooper and Carrie move away from the house, walking down the pair of front steps almost in unison,

and both of them end up standing in the quiet, empty street (a practically desolate and open landscape compared to the crowded Roadhouse dance floor), lit in the sickly orange glow of streetlights, sharing a look of mutual confusion. Where are they? Who are they? Carrie looks toward her new guide and Cooper asks without looking back at Carrie, “What year is this?” This question sparks a viscerally affective response in Carrie, an intensity moving between them. Her eyes move from Cooper to the house and then close. Carrie takes a deep breath before the voice of Sarah can be heard. Her voice haunts the soundscape asking for Laura, screaming out for her as she does in the pilot episode of *Twin Peaks* before she learns of her daughter’s death. There is a cut from Carrie to the house and back to Carrie in close up. Her body visibly tenses, gathering up as if *something* enters her, and this tension is released in a scream, a moment of complete break, first aural, then visual. As she screams (see Figure 8) there is a quick cut to Cooper reacting by looking to Carrie, followed by a cut to back to Carrie and then a cut to the Palmer house where the lights pulse and burst, before cutting to a black screen. I have pre-empted this scream as a return to embodied subjectivity, but I cannot claim this as a miraculous return. With the network of *The Return* in a state of consistent breakdown, this return to embodied subjectivity does not clear the confusion incurred by networked modes of existence. Instead, it adds to it by raising a further confusion of the embodied subject becoming unmoored from time and space.



Figure 8, Carrie Page/ Laura Palmer screams

I want to return to Vivian Sobchack's description of the embodied subject as "the lived body as, at once, both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object*: a sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities and agency that literally and figuratively makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others" (2). This description brings up earlier descriptions of affect as those intensities moving between bodies (Gregg, Seigworth 1), as well as those utopian hopes, dashed throughout *The Return*, of communication as being a mode through which we can make ourselves fully understood. The body is an object with subjective experiences. Thoughts and feelings ostensibly live within the body, ineffable and without materiality. And yet these feelings, like the dislocation felt by Carrie Page, become response in incredibly physical ways: she screams, a pained and visceral response to her situation. Recall my further analysis of

disembodiment in Chapter Two as a process of becoming a figurative subject, existing outside of a material realm. This realization, that Carrie's sense of embodiment has shifted, is cause for her scream. The scream, as affect response, is extreme, an expression of the pervasive anxiety of the entire series. I have positioned the breakdown of the network as a return to the body, a return to this "objective *subject* and a subjective *object*" (Sobchack 2). Sobchack gives us a slippery definition, the body as something abstract whose boundaries are perhaps less defined than generally admitted. *The Return* positions the body in this way, as I argue primarily in Chapter Two through the characters Diane and Jeffries. The body in *The Return* is variable, it can have multiple iterations throughout time, and these variations can also exist simultaneously. Networked existence fractures the individual, as we see primarily in Cooper/Mr. C/Dougie, or in the two bodies of Philip Jeffries seen in two distinct points in that character's history, or in Carrie Page/Laura Palmer. Collapse, of time, of space, and of these multiple bodies coming into contact, contributes to breakdown. And these bodies, ultimately, encounter trouble when existing simultaneously. The consequence incurred is the moment of absolute communication breakdown I have been promising throughout.

Here it will be helpful to return to Peters' notion of communication as an idea. Peters' posits those communication technologies, that I have positioned as producers of anxious affect, not as a solution to the problem of communication but a further hindrance. Counter to some of the more utopian visions of communication technologies that have appeared throughout this thesis (though these utopian visions are not something I have agreed with) Peters' asserts that "No central exchange exists where I can patch my sensory inputs into yours, nor is there any sort of "wireless" contact through which to

transmit my immediate experience of the world to you” (4). And this, what Peters is here suggesting, is exactly the problem of the idea of technologically aided communication, running counter to the utopian visions (McLuhan and his extensions for example) of communication technologies. Users extend themselves via these technologies with the dream that immediate experience can be transmitted via technological device. I can send messages with text, images, sounds, and small symbols that supposedly represent a range of interior and exterior emotions, all via a single device, and all in an attempt to make myself the most understood as is possible with the tools provided. And yet, I cannot make myself understood, not fully, only ever, and even then, *hopefully*, in part. In this contemporary circumstance, that of the pervasively proliferated network, “[c]ommunication...makes problems of relationships into problems of proper tuning or noise reduction” (Peters 5). *The Return* though is not interested in noise reduction, but a kind of noise amplification, similar to the way the series ultimately prizes signal over significance and affect over numbness. Noise reduction is a concept I utilize in Chapter One via Jonathan Sterne. There, Sterne refers to it as compression, a process of “removing redundant elements of a message, be they letters in the alphabet or numbers in the calculation of Pi” (41). Sterne expounds on Claude Shannon’s “Mathematical Theory of Communication” in defining compression. In *The Return* redundant information is seemingly left on the signal, we receive this signal noise and all. Remember the young woman who crawls through the crowd at the Roadhouse, a character we have up until that moment never seen and will never see again. Her purpose then is only to amplify noise and affect.

Further, this is the vision of the network, and its technologically aided devices: that ubiquitous connection will ease our communication ills, our bodies abilities extended by these technologies. And yet, “networks, by their mere existence, are not liberating; they exercise novel forms of control that operate at a level that is anonymous and non-human” (Galloway, Thacker 5). What I have argued throughout this thesis though, through Peters primarily as well as Galloway, and Shaviro, is that this solution, if coming from a poisoned origin, is not a solution at all. As I state in the introduction, faith in the network, in communication technologies, is misplaced. I have posited the breakdown of the network as a presence moving through the network like an infection or a disease, a description borrowed from Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker. Disease spreads, like information, through a network structure, a web of disparate individuals connected by contagion. In *The Return* the disease comes in the form of noise, represented in the presence of the Woodsmen, also proliferating through the network with hostile consequences.

This is largely how I have positioned the Woodsmen, as a kind of contagion in the network. They exercise a type of chaos within the structure of the network, but without it, nodes are left free floating with only the option to return to themselves. Thus far I have defined a way of understanding embodiment drawing from Vivian Sobchack. This understanding of embodiment was used primarily to explore the ways that characters in *The Return* become disembodied, detached from the material circumstances of their own bodies in a networked mode of existence. How then can I define a return to embodiment, to subjectivity, even if such a return is not necessarily a solution to the series communication dystopia? Turning to cultural critic Mark Fisher and his assessment of

lost futures and hauntology will provide a framework through which to move forward on the problem of re-embodiment and the return to subjectivity in face of breakdown.

3.4 Laura Palmer, the Ghost

Mark Fisher addresses the notion of a culture that has ceased a forward moving momentum and lost sight of the very possibility of a future. As a result, instead of moving forward, time folds in on itself.

In the last 10 to 15 years...the internet and mobile telecommunications technology have altered the texture of everyday experience beyond all recognition. Yet, perhaps *because* of all this, there's an increasing sense that culture has lost the ability to grasp and articulate the present. Or it could be that, in one very important sense, there is no present to grasp and articulate any more (18).

Fisher writes of the strange feeling that “the 21st century has [not] started yet. We remain trapped in the 20th century” (17). I believe that Fisher’s notion of time as folding in on itself, and remaining in a state of stasis, is useful for understanding the final scenes of *The Return*. I have referred to the ways in which Carrie Page and Agent Cooper find themselves unstuck from linear time when they arrive at the former Palmer household. This is due in part to Cooper’s efforts at the end of Part Seventeen to travel back in time to the moment when Laura Palmer leaps from James Hurley’s motorcycle and runs into the woods in *Fire Walk With Me*, setting into motion a series of events that end with her

murder. Cooper's intervention in this series of events is an attempt to save her life, but in the timeline he returns to he has seemingly erased the existence of Laura Palmer entirely.

The Return is a series reckoning with the past in a number of ways, both its diegetic history, and its representation of historical events, most of which I have articulated in my preceding chapters. The series deals with the historical realities of the Trinity nuclear test, and with how a violent assault in the past causes deep trauma in the present, as well as repurposing footage from the series past in its contemporary form. I describe bodies as becoming unmoored from time and space, being in states of flux as they reckon with the conditions of their present. Crucial to my application of Fisher's ideas here, too, is the way in which Cooper travels from the 21st century (2015/16, if Laura Palmer's Red Room premonition is believed, and she will see Cooper again in twenty-five years, *The Return* must take place earlier than when it aired) to a particular moment in the 20th century (1989, when Laura Palmer was murdered by her father) which serves as point of origin for the entirety of *Twin Peaks* cycle. An obsession with this particular moment located in the 20th century is an impetus for the folding of time in on itself. There is seemingly no way to move into a future wherein these characters have moved forward in any meaningful way, Laura Palmer is a spectre that keeps us focused on the past. This can be said of the original series where her death drives much of the narrative. As well as *Fire Walk With Me*, which returns viewers to the past and follows Laura in the week before her death. In *The Return*, Cooper takes an active role in stopping the future, the hero of the story creates the circumstances through which this stuck-ness in time can occur.

Fisher takes up Jacques Derrida's term "hauntology" to assess this cultural stagnation. Hauntology, from Fisher via Derrida, refers to "the way in which nothing enjoys a purely positive existence. Everything that exists is possible only on the basis of a whole series of absences, which precede and surround it, allowing it to possess such consistency and intelligibility that it does" (24). Derrida's use of the term connotes a capitalist present in which the spectre of communism lingers ghost-like due to its apparent defeat. Neoliberal capitalist structures have become dominant and now any alternative is seen as a ghost, a spectre of what could have been. While I do not intend to wade too deep into the waters of Marxist theory, this idea is helpful for exploring what is left of the individual in a possible post-network society. This term brings up the spectre, the haunting presence of the past in the present and the future. Fisher quotes Martin Hagglund from his book *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, wherein Hagglund argues "Derrida's aim...is to formulate a general 'hauntology'...in contrast to the traditional 'ontology' that thinks being in terms of self-identical presence. What is important about the figure of the spectre, then, is that it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is *no longer* or *not yet*" (qtd. in Fisher 25). While I have figured the Woodsmen as a ghostly presence in the network of *The Return*, in their absence these two figures, Cooper and Carrie, unmoored from time and space become a new kind of haunting presence. Both Dale Cooper and Carrie Page are incredibly familiar faces to viewers. The smiling homecoming queen image of Laura Palmer particularly recurs throughout the *Twin Peaks* cycle. Whether she is Laura Palmer or Carrie Page, the face of actress Sheryl Lee anchors viewers with familiarity, we see this face during the opening credits of each episode of *The Return*, the familiar portrait

still sits on a side table in the Palmer household, it is unboxed and displayed in the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Department, the sight of it makes her former boyfriend Bobby Briggs burst into tears. When Senior Dido releases the golden orb, which contains this portrait of Laura she kisses the image with an "overwhelming love and tenderness" (Rennebohm 60). The presence of this long dead young woman is intensely felt, and her recurring image reminds us of the tragedy at the heart of this story. Cooper is also a familiar face, one that in *The Return* has been mostly warped through fractured bodies. Cooper is Mr. C and Dougie Jones, but neither of those bodies is the character viewers remember. And after twenty-five years in the Red Room/Black Lodge the Cooper we knew never fully returns.

"Haunting, then, can be construed as a failed mourning. It is about refusing to give up the ghost or - and this can sometimes amount to the same thing - the refusal of the ghost to give up on us" (Fisher 28). Cooper cannot give up on the ghost of Laura Palmer even when the body he recognizes as Laura Palmer is no longer Laura Palmer. And so, he takes this new, but familiar, woman back to old haunts only to instigate a moment of rupture, a meeting of the past, or one's expectations of the past, with a future that no longer seems possible. It should be noted that within the diegetic world of the *Twin Peaks* cycle Cooper and Laura Palmer never met while she lived, he interacted only with her corpse and a Red Room projection/spirit in his dreams. To (perhaps boldly) rephrase a familiar quote attributed variously to two prominent Marxist philosophers; Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek: perhaps it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine a future without Laura Palmer. This creates a rupture in the present, and in the ways which existence has been organized primarily along networked understandings. My

initial question, can the body be returned to when these structures fall away, seems strange given that I have now positioned Carrie Page as a kind of ghost. But in these final moments she, and Cooper, are confronted with their own unstable position in time and space, a result of network corruption and breakdown. The only communication left to them in this moment is oral. Cooper asks his odd, perhaps even nonsense, question and Carrie reacts with her scream. And in this she seems to grasp something he does not (at least totally): that organizing their existence under previously established categories like time is no longer relevant. After Carrie screams and there is a cut to black a shot from Part Two of the series is shown, in which Laura Palmer whispers something unheard by the viewer into Cooper's ear. This image is identical, save for the aged actors, to one from the first season of *Twin Peaks*, in which Cooper has a dream wherein he visits the Red Room and Laura gives him the identity of her killer only for Cooper to wake up and not remember. It is Laura who has always had the answers Cooper needed. *The Return* brings viewers back again and again, folding time to posit that there is no escape from networked existence. What we are left with instead is the somewhat dire conclusion that our subjectivity is so hindered by networked modes of existence that the only option is to return us to an earlier point in the hope that this time Cooper can make a different choice.

3.5 Conclusion

Looking back to Michel Chion, the scream is “the indeterminate inside the spoken” (77), it is the giving of sound to the unknown. And there is much here that remains unknown: who is Carrie Page? Where is Sarah Palmer? What year is this? These unknowns are all too questions of identity, space, and time, which I argue, Carrie and

Cooper have become detached from. Carrie's scream rings out as a potential answer to these indeterminate questions while remaining indeterminate. The scream is a kind of utterance, but an extreme one, and one, as I argue, that signals the breakdown of communication. Communication, in its many forms, has been a problem in *The Return*. I have focused primarily on those technologically aided instances of communication, though in my analysis of Part Eight, I briefly mention the ways in which the Woodsmen disrupt oral communication as well when they confront the couple in the car. This confrontation led to the scream of that woman to become distorted in response to the rough voice of the Woodsman. Even with all of our faculties and technologies communication is difficult, making one's self understood is a challenge. This challenge, or problem, is left unsolved by the abundant technologies we have crafted to aid us, as I have argued along the lines of John Durham Peters.

I argue that the scream in *The Return* represents the breaking point of communication. It is a response to network failure and posits a return to subjectivity. The network aesthetic of the series is vast and one that is founded upon the advent of the atomic bomb. In *The Return*, the bomb, the very first detonation of which we are shown in Part Eight, is a trauma that haunts the series. It is a signal of lost futures. Mark Fisher's claim about the way in which culture has ceased any forward momentum in the first decade of twenty-first century is reflected in *The Return*. Here, though, it is the moment of the Trinity nuclear test in which time stops. In Part Eight the Giant (/Fireman/????? as he is referred to variously in the credits of *The Return*) and Senior Dido watch the atomic blast on a cinema screen, and in response to the evil that this has allowed in to the world they give the world a light that bears the face of Laura Palmer. The figure of Laura, too,

as I argue in this chapter, represents another halt in the history of the *Twin Peaks* cycle. She is a presence, a spectre, from which the series cannot escape. Her future is lost because of trauma and violence that ends in her death, and there is nothing that any of these characters can do to bring her back. History cannot be rewritten; the network cannot be restructured to make up for those evils that it has facilitated. An attempt to rewrite time and jumpstart history leads only to an absolute communication breakdown. In this breakdown there is a slight hope for a return to subjectivity, to the self that had become so minimized under networked modes of existence. But this return is troubled by the return, again, to the moment of Cooper's dream frozen in time.

The "objective *subject* and a subjective *object*" (2) of Sobchack's description of the lived body is an even more slippery proposition in *The Return*, where lived bodies are not always possessed by their rightful owners. The return to subjectivity that I have argued occurs at the moment of the scream in Part Eighteen is not an inherently hopeful return. It is a return based on the realization of trauma, and of having to become in a violent world. Returning Carrie Page to the Palmer household restores this trauma to a body that was, seemingly, otherwise living without it. A return to subjectivity here is a return to the past, not a move toward a future. And this past, like whatever is left of the world these characters inhabit, is as dark as the empty street where Carrie and Cooper end up with nowhere else to go.

Conclusion

How can we confront this networked mode of existence? The communication technologies that facilitate network trappings are ubiquitous, and we engage with them constantly. Cellular and landline telephones, computers, radios, all keep us connected but also result in a shrinking of subjectivity. We become nodes in a vast network, the shape of which is unimaginable to the individual. Throughout this thesis, I argue that David Lynch and Mark Frost's television series *Twin Peaks: The Return* is concerned, aesthetically and formally, with these questions of networked connection, communication technologies and the consequences they have on subjectivity. Affect is the primary mode through which the series generates an engagement with these concerns, and anxiety is the dominant mood. Anxious affect proliferates through the series via networked communication. Cellphones and radio sets become conduits of intense affect exchange, objects that transfer these disturbing feelings from lifeless interface to bodies that are ostensibly full of life. In *The Return* these technologies are sites of potential danger, they do not fulfill the utopian promises of connection and understanding, instead they only foster further confusion. They disembody, they place users in various states of flux, they dissolve the physical boundaries of our bodies. If one cannot trust these boundaries, then what can one trust?

Through a strategy of longitudinal storytelling, Lynch and Frost are able to pick up a story and mythology they began in 1990 and utilize it to reflect these uniquely contemporary themes. Try as we might, and characters in *The Return* certainly do, there is no going back to a pre-networked time. We are stuck in these circumstances and all we can do is try our best to make ourselves understood to each other with the tools we have

been given. If *The Return* can be understood as a map it is one that matches the networked structures I have described as reflected formally throughout the series. Its routes are not always clear, it does not take us from one place to another with ease but instead shows us a number of circuitous routes. The series moves from the contemporary moment to the historical past, it detours from characters and stories we are familiar with to ones we have never seen and never see again. It provides a map for understanding the complex and abstract nature of contemporary networked existence, but it does not do the work of making sense of these various routes through it. Much like the vast networks it is structured after, *The Return* is a series filled with, perhaps even revels in, a sense of disorientation. This disorientation can, perhaps, be summed up best in Dale Cooper's series ending question, "What year is this?"

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