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**It Is (Not) Happening Again:
Temporality and the Paternal Myth in *Twin Peaks***

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I would like to thank the forest, first and foremost.

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who gave me the confidence to stay inspired.

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The Failure of Paternal Time

One of the best-known lines in *Twin Peaks* comes when the Giant (Carel Struycken) warns that “it is happening again,” making time visible as one of the series’ central concerns (“Lonely Souls” 00:38:35–00:39:00). In other moments, time operates less explicitly but remains present in the structure of the series on multiple levels. In fact, time is not only written all over *Twin Peaks*. Time also structures *Twin Peaks* from within. Before developing this point further, however, it is useful to briefly situate the series: created by Mark Frost and David Lynch, the original ABC series aired from 1990 to 1991, followed by the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* in 1992 and *Twin Peaks: The Return* in 2017. Described as both “classic” and “cult” television, a status already pointing to its double position within television history, its cultural afterlife has been unusually persistent (Garner 137). The original series is set in a fictional small town in the Pacific Northwest, where the murder of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) sets the plot in motion. Because Ronette Pulaski (Phoebe Augustine) crosses the state line after escaping from the train car where Laura was killed, the FBI becomes involved, and Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) is sent to investigate. As the investigation progresses, the case becomes increasingly complex, and the series introduces an alternative Lodge temporality that begins to blur the boundaries between what is considered real and unreal.¹ Before the full depth of this alternative world becomes clear, the murder case is solved in the middle of the second season, when Cooper gathers several suspects, including Benjamin “Ben” Horne (Richard Beymer), Major Garland Briggs (Don S. Davis), and Leland Palmer (Ray Wise), who are also central subjects of analysis in this thesis (“Arbitrary Law”).

Scholarship has long treated *Twin Peaks* as a formally self-conscious and generically hybrid television object, from early work on its cult reception and televisual innovation to later accounts of quality TV, authorship, and narrative complexity (Lavery 5; Halskov 10–13). Another major strand has addressed Laura Palmer, gendered violence, incest, trauma, and the family, particularly in relation to the series’ fantastic mode and *Fire Walk with Me* (Stevenson 71, 75). More recent work on *The Return* has shifted attention toward revival, return, nostalgia, and the instability of narrative history (Ellis and Theus 25). Although this thesis focuses on the original series rather than the film or *The Return*, a brief overview of the scholarship is still necessary because *Twin Peaks* has shaped critical debate as a larger televisual phenomenon. It

¹ The terminology around the Red Room and the Lodges is not fully settled. For clarity, this thesis therefore refers to the visible, red-curtained space as the Red Room. “Alternative” is used in the same clarifying sense, although this temporality and knowledge are not secondary to the investigative frame but central to the series.

also shows why the series is such a rich object of analysis: its formal, cultural, and thematic concerns cannot be separated neatly, but work together within the same structure of meaning.

Rather than adding another interpretive account of what *Twin Peaks* means, or focusing only on time as a theme, this thesis shifts the focus to *how* the series produces meaning in a more structural sense and thus begins with the basic question: how does *Twin Peaks* organize time? As one of narrative's and television's most fundamental ordering principles and what Grosz calls "perhaps the most enigmatic, the most paradoxical, elusive, and 'unreal' of any form of material existence" (4), time is a particularly intriguing phenomenon to investigate in this context. Following this logic, the series first lures viewers "into a familiar pattern of connecting past and present in a causal relationship," but then introduces "abstractions and enigmas" that remove any stable sense of "reliability and logical causality" (Dunne and Song 240).

If time in *Twin Peaks* is not only a theme but a structural principle, then it also reshapes how forms of authority appear in the series. This is especially important for the father figure, whose authority has often been tied to a linear and teleological model of time. Considering the scholarship discussed above, however, one important focal point has remained only partially visible. Across these different critical approaches, father figures repeatedly appear as agents of violence or symbolic order, but they rarely become the central object of sustained analysis. This is particularly striking because scholarship has frequently addressed fathers indirectly, through questions of patriarchy, incest, domestic ideology, and family trauma, all of which rely on some model of fatherhood in the series. As Armengol Carrera notes, despite the extensive attention given to motherhood and despite the late-twentieth-century critical focus on patriarchy, "there is surprisingly no comparable in-depth analysis of fatherhood" (224). Similarly, Bueno, Caesar, and Hummel, argue that "we may have comprehended fatherhood too little for presuming to comprehend patriarchy so much" (8).

Within a teleological-linear model, the father is imagined as a figure of direction who links action to consequence and gives the future a recognizable form. Kristeva's description of time as "project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding" helps name this model as a structure of purpose and direction, which this thesis connects to the cultural authority of the father (17). Postwar American television made this idea especially visible. As television became "the most important discursive medium in American culture" (Lipsitz 42), series such as *Father Knows Best* presented the father as a figure through whom conflict could be

interpreted and contained, particularly in the context of ideological tensions of the 1950s (Coontz 28).² In *Twin Peaks*, however, this model is actively destabilized.

Since time is central to narrative, television, and the artistic form of *Twin Peaks*, and since the father figure has held a central place in U.S. television culture more generally, linking temporal structure to paternal authority offers a particularly productive way of approaching the series.

Methodologically, this paper combines narratological theory with audiovisual close reading. The theoretical framework first establishes the basic concepts of narrative time, before turning to “unnatural” temporal forms and finally to television temporality more specifically.³ A second theoretical strand addresses masculinity, the paternal myth, and postwar American television. The analysis then considers framing, editing, sound, performance, and mise-en-scène to examine Ben Horne, Major Briggs, Dale Cooper, and Leland Palmer individually before the synthesis and conclusion move to the broader structures and implications of the series, including open questions.

Twin Peaks undermines paternal authority by disrupting the temporal logic that traditionally allows father figures to function as carriers of order in American television. When causality weakens and closure fails, fatherhood no longer appears as a stable source of meaning. It becomes visible instead as a televisual role whose authority depends on the belief that time can be linearly organized toward consequence. This is not to say that paternal authority in *Twin Peaks* operates only through linear time. As the analysis will show, some father figures initially absorb non-linear forms of knowledge—visions, dreams, intuition—into their authority, and it is only when these forms exceed paternal containment that the underlying linear-teleological structure becomes visible as the condition on which that authority rested.

Theoretical Framework

In the following chapter, a theoretical framework is developed for analyzing how *Twin Peaks* connects paternal authority to temporal structure. The argument requires two related perspectives. First, it needs a narratological and televisual account of time. Second, it requires a cultural framework for understanding how and why paternal authority is tied to a particular perception of time in the first place. For this reason, the chapter turns to narrative and television

² In this paper, “culture” refers to dominant public narratives and media representations, not to American society as a homogeneous whole.

³ “Unnatural” is used in the technical sense of unnatural narratology, meaning a violation of Western mimetic assumptions such as linear time and causal sequence. It does not imply that such forms are abnormal beyond this framework.

temporality before moving to the paternal myth and its specific relation to masculinity and American television fatherhood. Together, these perspectives make it possible to read the father figures in *Twin Peaks* as structurally established roles.

Temporal Structures of Narrative and Television

“The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world” (Ricoeur 3). In fact, narrative does not simply take place in time but gives time its form by arranging events into relations of sequence, duration, expectation, and consequence. According to Mittell, this temporal dimension becomes especially important in television because time is “an essential element of storytelling” but “even more crucial for television” (26). Narrative coherence therefore depends on temporal relations, but these relations can operate on different levels. Coherence here means intelligibility. First, it refers to how events become understandable through temporal order. Later, in the discussion of myth, it refers to how ideology makes contradiction appear continuous and purposeful.

As time is one of the primary mechanisms through which expectations and breakdowns are produced in *Twin Peaks*, this part of the thesis establishes a narratological baseline. Genette’s and Bal’s concepts help describe how events shape narrative coherence through order, duration, frequency, sequence, and interruption. From there, the chapter moves to the limits of such reconstructive narratology. Although *Twin Peaks* often disrupts chronology in ways that can still be understood through reframing, some moments go further and unsettle the assumption that temporal disorder can always be reorganized into a stable linear sequence. For these cases, the chapter introduces unnatural narratology and the concepts of antimimetic temporality, temporal contradiction, pseudo-frequency, and the non-event. Finally, the chapter introduces Jason Mittell’s account of serial temporality to clarify why time is particularly important in ongoing television narratives.

Narratological Baseline

Because narrative meaning depends on how events are arranged in time, it is useful to begin with Genette’s foundational narratological vocabulary. His three central temporal categories are order, duration, and frequency. Order refers to the relation between the chronological succession of events in the story and the order in which they are presented in the narrative, which allows for phenomena such as analepsis, or flashback, and prolepsis, or flashforward (34–67). Duration concerns the relation between the amount of time an event would take in the story world and the amount of textual or screen space devoted to it. It includes summary, where story time is compressed; pause, where discourse continues while story time stands still;

ellipsis, where part of story time is omitted; and scene, where story time and discourse time roughly coincide (86–109).⁴ As events may be compressed, prolonged, or skipped, duration makes changes in narrative speed possible and thus also acceleration and deceleration. These changes also shape narrative rhythm, which in this context refers to the patterned pace and flow through which events, pauses, repetitions, and interruptions are organized over time. Pace, more specifically, describes the speed of that movement, including moments of acceleration, slowing, or stalling (“Pace”). Frequency describes how often an event occurs in the story compared to how often it is narrated, for instance when something happens once but is recounted several times (113).

Bal extends this framework by shifting attention from temporal arrangement alone to the way narrative elements produce meaning with a larger structure. Her definition of events as processes involving change or development is particularly useful here, since such change can only be perceived through temporal succession (*Narratology* 208). Sequence is therefore a condition of narrative intelligibility, but Bal also warns against treating it as a transparent temporal fact. Sequence matters not because it simply reflects time, but because it organizes events into meaningful relations in the first place (*On Story-telling* 2). Building on this, an event can be understood as a temporally structured occurrence that marks or promises change in the narrative. Its force lies not only in what happens, but in whether that happening becomes narratively consequential. This definition also makes it possible to account for delay, suspended development, and non-events, where causality and temporal progression become unstable (*Narratology* 208; Hühn 39–40; Lotman 51). This will be discussed in more detail below.

From this perspective, Genette’s and Bal’s concepts help explain how narrative coherence is produced. Readers or viewers understand events by relating them to what comes before and after. When that order changes, interpretation changes as well. A withheld cause can make an event appear unstable, while a later revelation can retrospectively transform an earlier moment into a clue, a misreading, or a scene whose significance only becomes clear after the fact. This also means that temporal form shapes development. A relatively linear arrangement can support expectations of progression and resolution, whereas interruption, delay or repetition can suspend those expectations, at least momentarily. Repetition may stabilize narrative memory by recalling an earlier scene, phrase, or gesture, but it can also alter meaning when the repeated element returns in a new context.

⁴ Here, Genette’s “scene” refers specifically to a relation of duration, not to the broader use of the term in film and television analysis. When this thesis later refers to scene analysis, the term describes the close reading of bounded audiovisual units, including image, sound, editing, performance, and temporal structure.

Further, Bal introduces the concept of interruption which is particularly useful here because it forms a bridge between ordinary narrative sequencing and more disruptive temporal forms. Unlike Genette's pause, which names the specific case in which discourse continues while story time stands still, Bal's concept of interruption describes a broader break in continuous progression. Chronology does not disappear but reaches the viewer unevenly: the narrative may skip segments, compress stretches of time, omit connections, or cut away and return later (*Narratology* 212). Once continuity is interrupted, temporal relations no longer remain a transparent background. They more clearly become perceptible as form.

A related concept is anachrony, one of the clearest ways in which a sequence departs from chronological progression. In anachronic structures, events are not encountered in the order in which they occur but are displaced backward or forward. This can delay explanation, retrospectively reframe earlier scenes, or unsettle the apparent direction of an arc (Bal, *Narratology* 84). Bal also distinguishes between objective anachrony, where the chronology of story events is displaced, and subjective anachrony, where past or future temporal material appears as the content of a character's consciousness rather than as an externally reordered event. Closely related is achrony, which names a temporal deviation that can no longer be analyzed or securely placed within a clear chronological relation (*Narratology* 97).

These devices show that manipulating sequence can "indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization" (Bal, *Narratology* 82). More broadly, Genette's and Bal's concepts provide a reconstructive baseline: they explain how narrative time can be reordered, compressed, interrupted, or repeated while remaining legible as a sequence. Even when chronology is disturbed, the viewer can still infer what happened, when it happened, and how events relate to one another.

Unnatural Temporality

The move to unnatural temporality begins where this reconstructive assumption becomes unstable. Ryan's insistence that "narrative sequence is a basically linear phenomenon" (176) marks this baseline assumption and clarifies how strongly narrativity remains tied to sequential intelligibility even where chronology is disrupted.

Alber and Richardson provide the missing conceptual rationale for this central move with unnatural temporality which they call a flexible field that is "still being created and refined" and is not meant to be "a rigorously unified approach" (2). They argue for a "dual, interactive model of mimesis and antimimesis" and insist that a purely mimetic theory remains incomplete when a text violates mimetic rules (6). Their proposed solution is not to replace

existing narratology, but to supplement it with “a second, additional poetics” (6). This is methodologically useful for the present thesis because it makes it possible to analyze conventional and disruptive temporal structures within the same work, rather than classifying a text as either simply mimetic or antimimetic.

To describe the mimetic, Alber and Richardson use the term “realism,” meaning representational practices that appear “congruent with lived experience” (3). Richardson similarly explains that in mimetic worlds, space and time remain recognizable extensions of the real world and are governed by a familiar “canon of probability” (3). Antimimetic representation breaks with this congruence by “violat[ing] some of the laws of everyday existence” and producing events that “cannot happen in real life” (3). This is particularly productive for *Twin Peaks*, since the series often builds everyday realism and then punctures it through temporal situations that cannot simply be reorganized in a linear way. In such moments, even full information may not restore a single coherent chronology.

Richardson’s account also clarifies why the familiar narratological toolkit can become strained at exactly this point. He keeps Genette’s basic distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, meaning “the chronological sequence of events that can be derived from the text” and “the sequence in which they are actually presented to the audience” (Richardson 100). However, he argues that many contemporary texts deliberately make that derivation unstable. Genette’s categories of order, duration, and frequency remain adequate for most nonfiction and most mimetic fiction (103). The difficulty arises in postmodern narratives that undermine the very distinctions on which a reconstructive model depends.⁵

For instance, reverse-chronological elements may invert causality so that effects appear to generate their causes, while contradictory narratives may present incompatible versions of events that cannot be reconciled through an either/or logic (106–8). Also, Genette’s category of frequency is complicated through pseudo-frequency, or the “near-repetition of events with only a slight variation” (103). In such cases, repetition does not simply mean that the same event is narrated more than once. Rather, the event seems to return almost as itself while differing enough to unsettle its place in a stable sequence. Further, through circular temporality the narrative may loop back to its own beginning instead of ending, so that the point of origin also functions as the point of conclusion (104–5).

⁵ Richardson identifies several further antimimetic forms—reverse chronology, contradictory narratives, denarration—that are not central to the present analysis but indicate the broader range of temporal disturbances his framework accommodates. Here, time may not simply be scrambled but rendered internally contradictory, circular, multiple, or “denarrated,” meaning that there is no underlying chronological grid that can be reconstructed from discourse (112).

In addition to that, Baroni specifies where temporal “unnaturalness” can be located (165). Building on the fabula/sjuzhet distinction, he argues that unnatural temporality may appear either in the sjuzhet, through the disrupted presentation of information, or in the fabula, when the story world itself contradicts basic assumptions about the forward flow of time and the irreversibility of the past (165–66). This distinction is useful for *Twin Peaks* because Lodge and dream sequences often operate on both levels at once: they resist secure placement within the series’ narration while also suggesting a world in which time does not reliably move forward.

Furthermore, it is important to understand how narratives not only create meaning through what happens, but also through what fails to happen. Building on the idea of events as processes of change, the focus is here shifted to eventfulness—whether a change counts as decisive—and to the possibility that absence can be narratively meaningful (Hühn 39–40; Lotman 51). A non-event is therefore not simply the absence of action, but a prepared expectation that fails to be fulfilled. This is crucial for the analysis of stalling because the legibility of non-events depends entirely on the narrative work that has set the expectation in place (Hühn 41).

Television Temporality

To understand how these temporal dynamics operate in serial audiovisual storytelling, however, the given models must be supplemented by a more medium-specific account. For this, the thesis turns to Jason Mittell’s *Complex TV* in which he argues that televisual serialization depends on temporal accumulation, where earlier events shape later developments and keep the story world intelligible across episodes (25–26).

Building on the theory outlined above, Mittell’s distinctions between story time, discourse time, and narration time help clarify how television shapes temporal experience at several levels at once. Story time refers to “the time frame of the diegesis,” that is, how events occur within the fictional world. Discourse time, by contrast, concerns the way those events are presented to the viewer, whether they are reordered, delayed, repeated, or withheld. Narration time refers to the process through which the story is communicated across the duration of viewing (26).

Because television unfolds across episodes, seasons, and repeated acts of viewing, serial form gives delay a specifically medial weight. Unlike a novel, which can be read at the reader’s own pace, serial television controls pace through episode duration and the enforced waiting time between installments. An episode can end without full closure, so that the interval

before the next installment becomes part of how suspense and memory are produced. Plotlines can remain active across longer stretches, while earlier scenes may gain significance only when later episodes reframe them. Serial television therefore creates temporal gaps, prompting viewers to anticipate, remember, interpret, and revise across an extended viewing process.

Repetition is central to this process. It can stabilize narrative memory by recalling earlier motifs, scenes, or conflicts, but it can also interrupt forward movement by returning the story to unresolved states. As a result, serial television often operates in tension between progression and recurrence. Fuchs puts this succinctly when he writes that “serial television thrives on the use of both repetition-as-sameness and repetition-as-difference” (63). In complex television, whose “key prototypes ... emerged in the 1990s,” (19) this tension becomes more pronounced because seriality is intensified through sustained development, uneven information distribution, and a more visible manipulation of chronology. Described as a mode that “redefines episodic forms under the influence of serial narration” (18), narrative complexity helps revise the expectation that narrative order will be restored quickly or cleanly. *Twin Peaks* belongs to this television moment, in which repetition and postponement become structurally central. In fact, Mittell identifies postponement as a key feature of many 1990s complex series, where long-term enigmas are prolonged (19). Unlike more self-contained narratives, which usually introduce and at least provisionally resolve conflict, the temporal frame in complex television is less bounded, and closure is more persistently deferred. In addition to that, Jowett, Robinson, and Simmons help clarify why this televisual temporality matters beyond plot mechanics as they argue that, notably in genre-mixed series such as *Twin Peaks*, where temporal play becomes a central aesthetic and interpretive demand, it is “not just appropriate but imperative to examine the nature of time” (1).

At this point, televisual self-reflexivity helps explain how, if television has established conventions for organizing time, a series can make those conventions visible. In Strank’s sense, self-reflexivity describes moments in which *Twin Peaks* marks the conditions of its own televisual construction when it foregrounds, for instance, framing, performance, and mediation as part of its narrative operation. This happens at the level of genre, where the series positions itself within historically developed television forms whose narrative expectations are repeatedly evoked and withheld or through represented media inside the diegesis, such as *Invitation to Love*, videotapes, audio recordings, and radio broadcasts (357–58).⁶ Roche’s definition of meta as an “acceleration of reflexivity” that comments on “the nature of the fiction

⁶ *Invitation to Love* is “the soap opera enjoyed by many Twin Peaks locals” (Graour 5)

itself” further helps support such understanding (16–17). Building on his definition, Giannini situates metatextuality within the historical context of U.S. television, arguing that it has been present from the medium’s early development onward (4). Because television has historically organized time toward containment and resolution, a series that withholds those operations can also make them perceptible as operations. For the present thesis, the point is not that every self-reflexive moment in *Twin Peaks* directly comments on television production. Rather, the series repeatedly exposes familiar televisual structures such as continuity, closure, genre expectation, staged performance, and authoritative roles, a perspective that becomes increasingly important in the close readings and is taken up more directly in the synthesis chapter.

1950s Television and Masculinity

If television is both temporal and self-reflexive, one of the things it can reflect on is the apparent stability of the identities it repeatedly stages. This is particularly important for masculinity, since postwar television often presented the father as a coherent figure of order even though masculine identity itself was historically variable and internally pressured. Before turning to the paternal myth and to its 1950s television representations, it is thus useful to begin with masculinity and the competing demands placed on men in postwar America. As Kimmel stresses, “Manhood means different things at different times to different people” and because of that “we must speak of *masculinities*” (5). At the same time, American popular culture, including television, still elevated certain dominant ideals as a benchmark although masculine identity was far less stable than these representations often suggested.

On the one hand, postwar American discourse continued to value a hard, aggressive masculine ideal, particularly in politics and the Cold War context, where strength and toughness were treated as signs of national resolve. On the other hand, everyday social roles were already shifting, and men were increasingly expected to be cooperative, family-oriented, and emotionally engaged both at home and in the workplace (Gilbert 3). This instability created cultural pressure for clearer models of masculine authority, notably in the family, while the stereotypical image of the 1950s as a period of “quiet, order, and security” conceals a decade shaped by “anxiety and fear,” in which normality was enforced with “a desperate passion” (Kimmel 236). In this sense, what appeared as normality was therefore also a form of normativity, since it turned a particular family model into a preferred standard. The father figure became one way of making that instability appear contained.

Just as there is no single model of masculinity, there is no single “1950s” (Gilbert 1) or as Ravizza puts it, “the fifties are not real” (7). According to her, they are “a mythologized

period” “based on a specific version of reality that has long lost its direct relation to the real ‘1950s’” (7).⁷ Television was crucial to this process of simplification because the decade was “the first era of American history to have a memory recorded by television, and the first to inspire nostalgic sitcoms about these pioneering days in the same medium” (Gilbert 1).⁸ In this sense, television helped the 1950s “depict itself visually,” especially through sitcoms that offered “idyllic visions of suburban families dealing with everyday problems” (Ravizza 14). Shows such as *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Father Knows Best* helped consolidate the idealized all-American family as a working father, housewife mother, children, and suburban home. At the same time, this televisual image depended on exclusion of “any moral ambiguity” as these family sitcoms produced a “simple and homogenized” picture of American society by “omitting any narrative” that would introduce moral ambiguity (Ravizza 16). As Coontz succinctly puts it, “[c]ontrary to popular opinion ‘Leave It to Beaver’ was no documentary” (29).

In the context of existing postwar tensions, this idealized depiction responded to uncertainty by giving paternal roles a clearer shape, namely, it “rushed in quickly to give dad a boost” (Kimmel 247). *Father Knows Best* makes this paternal logic unusually explicit through both its title and its central premise. Since the show has often been treated as emblematic of 1950s emphasis on men’s family roles, it can serve as a concentrated example of the broader televisual pattern at stake here (LaRossa 57). By making paternal authority appear a natural and reassuring factor at the center of domestic judgment and moral authority, it participates in a wider postwar pattern in which male authority, hierarchy, and paternal control could be presented as comforting features of family life (64). Over time, such series caricatured and celebrated white, middle-class suburban family life so effectively that they became largely synonymous with popular ideas of the 1950s. Even when suburban men’s working lives were becoming increasingly removed from domestic space then, television reestablished the father as the center of the household (Kimmel 272–73).

The model that emerges from this is therefore a televisual mechanism of naturalization in which the 1950s were simplified, the white middle-class family normalized, moral ambiguity muted, and paternal authority was made appear familiar and natural. Ravizza’s claim that

⁷ The decade’s later cultural power then depends on simplification as it ignored or omitted other aspects such as the Cold War, McCarthyism, and the Beat Generation to produce a more coherent image of the period (Ravizza 8).

⁸ Boym defines nostalgia as a longing for a home that is either lost or “has never existed,” which makes it inherently paradoxical: if the desired past could fully return into the present, nostalgia itself would disappear (xiii; Moisich Wierschem 163)

television functions as “the locale of memory” is particularly important here, since the public memory of the fifties became a media-driven image of white, conformist, suburban, middle-class stability (16). Savran helps clarify the political stakes of this point: popular culture participates in hegemony because its entertainment value helps “engineer consent” (6).⁹ The television father can therefore be understood as one way in which hegemonic power makes itself appear natural and legitimate by casting authority in paternal form.

Myth, National Narrative, and Paternal Authority

When discussing the paternal form and television in the context of the U.S. 1950s, the concept of myth is unavoidable. As a narrative form that gives ideological assumptions the appearance of natural and self-evident truth, myth embeds its values in stories that make historically specific meanings appear familiar and universally unquestionable. In this way, myth helps organize collective identity and offers models of action, while masking its own constructedness by presenting social and historical arrangements as “undeniable fact[s]” (Slotkin 5–6).¹⁰

A productive way into this topic is Paul’s work on U.S. foundational myths. In *The Myths That Made America*, she approaches fatherhood beyond its familial or social role as a symbolic figure shaped by national ideas of origin. Within the American context, the father often comes to stand for the promise of stability across time. One of the clearest examples of this is the figure of the Founding Fathers. By linking origin to paternity, the myth turns the beginning of the nation into a familial narrative and casts national authority in paternal form while the U.S. appears to be “endowed with a specific teleology” (12). In historical terms, teleology gives linear development the appearance of design as the past seems to lead meaningfully toward the present, and the present appears justified as part of a larger direction (“Teleology”). The Founding Fathers thus come to stand for rightful authority and for the belief that the nation’s history follows an intelligible line of development (Paul 197). In this way, myths’ force lies not in consistency, but in their ability to remain culturally active even when their internal tensions are clearly visible (11–13). Contradiction, in other words, can be folded back into new versions of the same larger story, and while contingency is pushed into the background, coherence and purpose are brought to the front (198).¹¹

⁹ Used here in the cultural sense of predominance by one group, or by a particular set of social and cultural ideas, within a society or milieu (“Hegemony”). It therefore refers less to direct force than to the normalization of certain values as legitimate and common-sense.

¹⁰ “[M]yth succeeds precisely when it passes unperceived, when it goes *without saying*, when it confirms a position set up as a protection against doubt, when it universalizes history by saying (without *saying* it), ‘That’s the way it is.’” (Bal, *On Story-telling* 44; Barthes 143)

¹¹ Doane’s account helps clarify the concept of contingency, even though her argument is situated in modernity. She describes contingency as “resistance to system, to structure, to meaning” and argues that it makes

To connect myth to television's social imagery, Himmelstein argues that television operates through a dense audiovisual language of "images, words, gestures, clothing, settings, music and sounds" and has become one of society's central repositories of ideology (5). Paternal authority on television is therefore produced not by plot alone, but by recurring formal habits. Paternal authority is understood here as the culturally legitimated capacity to organize meaning, action, and consequence from a position coded as paternal—distinct from masculinity, which names a broader field of gendered identity, and from patriarchy, which describes a structural system of male power. Paternal authority refers more narrowly to the operative form in which this system becomes legible through the figure of the father. Namely, where the father figure is standing, when and in what manner he is speaking, how conflict orients itself around him, and whether his presence promises explanation or repair. Drawing on Stuart Hall, Himmelstein defines ideology as the framework through which people understand the social world and their place within it (5). Myth then gives such frameworks a different temporal status. It "transforms the temporal common sense" of dominant ideology into cultural prehistory and apparent eternal truth (5–6), which is why the paternal myth can be understood as a temporal form of legitimation whose authority is rooted in continuity and inherited order.

Freeman's concept of chrononormativity helps link temporal norm to paternal legitimacy. Chrononormativity describes how bodies and roles are socially organized through "teleological schemes of events" (4). Within this logic, the past matters insofar as it predicts and becomes "material for a future" (5). Used selectively, this concept clarifies why attention to non-linear temporalities affects paternal authority at all: it unsettles the norm through which father figures appear natural and socially necessary.

After this theoretical groundwork, the connection between time, narrative, television, paternal myth, and authority becomes clear. The following chapter therefore turns to this connection in more concrete terms.

Analysis

Each of the four father figures examined here embodies a distinct mode of paternal authority. Ben Horne operates as a managerial father whose power derives from wealth and deal-making, oriented toward profitable outcomes. Major Briggs functions as a military father whose authority rests on rank and controlled disclosure, positioning him both as a guide to his son and

time "heterogeneous and unpredictable" (11). Thus, if the paternal myth is linked to teleology, then contingency names what disturbs that model: accident, unpredictability, instability, and the possibility that events are not absorbed by rational explanations.

as a state agent who regulates access to classified knowledge. Dale Cooper assumes the role of an investigative father, drawing authority from procedural competence and the reconstruction of cause from evidence. Leland Palmer occupies the position of a normative father whose authority is socially granted rather than actively exercised—his respectability defers scrutiny and delays accountability. Despite these differences, all four depend on the same underlying condition: the paternal myth is constituted by linear-teleological time. When causality weakens and temporal coherence fails, fatherhood can no longer function as a stable carrier of meaning.

The four father figures are discussed in an order that moves from the most externally visible form of paternal authority to its most internally concealed: from Ben's openly performed economic command, through Briggs's institutionally legitimated guidance, to Cooper's procedurally promised resolution, and finally to Leland, whose authority operates least visibly because it is granted by the social form of the normative father itself.

The established concepts inform a three-level analytical model. The first level is cultural and televisual ideology, meaning the expectations attached to father figures before individual scenes begin. Paternal authority is not a natural quality but a culturally produced position, made legible through inherited images of domestic order, institutional legitimacy, and moral guidance. This is where masculinity, the 1950s television father, and the paternal myth become relevant.

The second level is narrative form. It concerns the temporal mechanisms through which *Twin Peaks* organizes events, knowledge, and expectation. The analysis therefore asks how sequence, causality, delay, interruption, repetition, disclosure, and closure shape the legibility of paternal authority. This level is crucial because paternal authority often depends on the fantasy that disorder can be directed toward explanation and control. *Twin Peaks* does not abolish narrative coherence, but it repeatedly weakens linear progression by replacing quick resolution with stalling, forward movement with repetition, and closure with irresolution.

The third level is character logic. It concerns the specific way each father figure performs or receives authority within the cultural and narrative structures described above. Each analytical subchapter therefore begins by asking what temporal logic the respective father figure appears to embody and how this logic becomes visible in specific scenes. From there, the central question becomes what happens to paternal authority once this temporal logic is put under pressure. To examine this, the thesis focuses on selected scenes from the first two seasons. The scenes were chosen after repeated viewings according to their place within the larger development of the narrative, their usefulness for showing temporal structure and

character formation, and the clarity with which the respective paternal figure becomes legible in them.

Benjamin “Ben” Horne

Ben Horne is introduced as “an unscrupulous businessman and the owner of several businesses around *Twin Peaks*” (“Benjamin Horne”). Although accurate, this description only names the surface of his role. What matters for the following analysis is the temporal structure behind it. Ben’s authority operates through instrumental futurity: he can dominate a scene when he sets its pace, defines the goal, and turns interruptions into steps toward that goal. This authority is also spatially concentrated. Ben is virtually never shown in a home setting; instead, his office becomes the consistent backdrop against which his authority can be observed. This also shapes his role as a father to Audrey Horne (Sherilyn Fenn) and Johnny Horne (Robert Davenport). Family relations seem to become important to him only when they affect his work, which makes him a distinctly managerial father figure. The analysis traces how this temporal model first organizes his authority in business spaces, then fails in domestic relations, breaks down when events no longer follow his direction, and finally returns in other forms.

Business Authority and Instrumental Futurity

From his first appearance, Ben is marked in unusually explicit terms, and his temporal logic is inseparable from that characterization. In the first episode, Ben’s introduction is already framed through the image of fire (“Northwest Passage” 00:11:00–00:11:43). The scene opens with flames filling the shot before cutting to the room, where Ben stands in front of the fireplace while Leland sits below him on the sofa and looks up at him. The fire therefore visually anchors Ben’s position and links his authority to a controlled image of force, while the blocking organizes the scene around a vertical relation of dominance. Ben’s dismissive spit into the fire, after Leland raises a question that could complicate and thus slow down the deal with the Norwegians, sharpens this impression further by giving his authority an openly contemptuous quality. His suit and tie, together with the papers in his hand, visually mark him as a businessman. Even though he is initially framed from behind, he remains the compositional center of the shot. The take is notably long and static. The camera does not cut or significantly reframe until Ben himself exits, and only once he has left the frame does the scene shift into the conference room. His body thus has a structuring function within the scene, and forward-progression seems to depend on his movement. On the level of dialogue, his line “one verse, no chorus” condenses this logic into a single formula. What matters to him is the shortest

possible way leading to the desired outcome, which ties his authority from the outset to instrumental and compressed tempo control.

The following conference-room scene extends this logic (“Northwest Passage” 00:11:44–00:12:57). Ben is not placed at the exact geometric center of the frame, yet he functions as its visual anchor. The lines of the room converge near the fireplace behind him, against which he is framed again, and the seated businessmen form a semicircular arrangement that directs attention toward his standing figure. He alone remains upright and active at eye level, while the service staff in the background is part of his support. Again, and more clearly so, authority is spatially embedded. The camera’s restrained adjustment when Ben moves reinforces orientation, as if the frame itself were calibrated to his position and pace. Importantly, the scene does not simply show Ben exercising power; it shows him organizing the sequence. The translator’s difficulty in keeping up with him is particularly revealing in this regard. Ben does not slow down or interrupt his own speech to ensure clarity or mutual understanding. On the contrary, he continues speaking and keeps the meeting moving toward the signing.

That pattern becomes even clearer when Leland receives the call about Laura and excuses himself. Ben responds with “make it snappy, huh?” and immediately continues the presentation. The scene briefly acknowledges the narrative importance of what Leland is about to learn, but the editing returns to Ben’s speech, nonetheless, and keeps the scene anchored in his pace. In this way, an event of enormous emotional and narrative consequence is subordinated, even if only for a moment, to business continuity and it is precisely this subordination that Ben’s authority depends on.

The editing creates a brief spatial alternation through intercutting before resolving the separation when Ben approaches Leland in the lobby (00:14:30–00:14:48). The structurally revealing point is less Ben’s shock itself than the fact that he arrives too late to the emotional reality of the scene because he is still moving within the temporality of the deal. Framed more closely in a medium shot, he stands still with his hands in his pockets, briefly losing the momentum that had organized his power moments before. His silence and inaction create a subtle non-event as the news of Laura’s death interrupts the business sequence, but Ben does not turn that interruption into a sustained response. The scene therefore establishes a clear contrast between Ben’s ability to hold events within business continuity and his inability to respond when he confronts a loss that cannot be converted into the next step of negotiation.

Family and Failed Attunement

Following this limit is Ben's relation to his family. It shows how quickly family time is absorbed back into work. During the Horne dinner scene, that also takes place just across Ben's office in a similar room, the family sits far apart in prolonged silence, while Ben is again framed against the fireplace ("Zen, or the Skill to Catch a Killer" 00:01:31–00:04:27). On the level of discourse, the placement under the opening credits creates an expectation of eventfulness, but this expectation is first suspended by the prolonged silence around the table. Jerry Horne's (David Patrick Kelly) entrance therefore registers strongly as the interruption that finally produces movement. As soon as he enters, Ben's attention visibly shifts, and family time is displaced by business talk and outward movement. His brief farewell, "Always a pleasure," treats family presence like a social exchange to be closed before moving on to discuss more important matters with his business partner.

This pattern becomes more specific in Ben's relation to Audrey, which will be analyzed over the following two office scenes. The first is in "Traces to Nowhere," where the scene opens with a slow pan up Audrey's dancing body and the focal plane remains with her even when Ben interrupts the moment, granting her visual dominance (00:34:03–00:37:01). Although he occupies the doorway with an expansive gesture, neither his entrance nor his presence reorganizes the image around him. He stays in the background and out of focus while Audrey remains the focal point. While the camera acknowledges his movement, and his complaint about her music disturbing the guests nominally asserts authority, neither the staging nor Audrey's reaction confirms that claim. She does not stop, turn, or submit, but answers lightly and sarcastically. Even at the level of sequence, it is Audrey's disruption of the hotel environment that brings Ben into the room and initiates their interaction, which already places his paternal authority in a reactive and work-coded position. He enters as hotel manager rather than as her father.

Only once the conversation shifts to the departing Norwegians and therefore to the business deal that currently organizes Ben's attention more directly, does he move onto Audrey's spatial plane and into focus. This is the scene's central formal pattern. Audrey remains optically privileged as long as the interaction stays on the level of father and daughter, whereas Ben gains visual clarity once the issue becomes one of more direct economic damage. His anger is correspondingly framed through financial consequence rather than emotional concern. He does not engage Audrey's grief over Laura or the reasons for her intervention but immediately translates her action into monetary loss: "the kind of money that your little

performance just cost this family.” Even his final line, “I lost you years ago,” does not open an exchange in the present moment or towards their future relationship. Instead of responding to Audrey as she is now, he turns the relationship into something already decided, so that the line functions as a retrospective judgment that closes the interaction rather than continuing it. Ben’s fatherhood toward Audrey is therefore not structured through guidance or moral formation, but through intermittent attempts at control that become effective only when she can be translated into his managerial logic.

Their following interaction in “The One-Armed Man” does not overturn this pattern but shows the condition under which it can briefly soften (00:33:13–00:37:04). Ben is first shown exercising while speaking on the phone, and the stationary bike figures repetitive motion without relational movement. He remains active but locked inside his own rhythm. Audrey enters from behind, moves onto the same focal plane, and addresses him directly, yet her first questions receive only evasive answers. His statement that he would like to depend on her more, “especially during a trying time like this,” is double-edged: he appears to name a shared crisis but seems to mean the business deal. Only when Audrey insists on taking care of the family business does he stop pedalling and respond with real interest. This briefly opens the possibility of intimacy, culminating in Audrey’s plea to “be [his] daughter again,” but the phone interrupts almost at once and returns him to more important business communication.

Audrey can move away from the position of the “lost” daughter only once she aligns herself with Ben’s interests. The scene therefore organizes their relationship as a conditional sequence, from past exclusion toward the possibility of restored daughterhood. His marked repetition of “the future” is important here because Audrey briefly redirects his unscrupulous future-orientation toward family succession. The moment reaches him, as will become more relevant later in the analysis, but it still does not escape his managerial logic.

Ben’s relation to his son Johnny constructs a clear counterpicture as he is faced with a child who resists his teleological system altogether (“Rest in Pain” 00:24:43–00:26:03). From the outset, the scene is organized around distance and indirectness. Ben and his wife Sylvia Horne (Jan D’Arcy) are first heard off-screen from the hallway. In Ben’s complaint that Johnny “doesn’t even know what day it is” and that he’s been “waiting for 20 years for some sign of intelligent life,” Ben explicitly defines intelligibility in terms of chronological orientation and turns fatherhood into a frustrated expectation measured by prolonged duration as failed progress, similar to his statement of having lost Audrey years ago.

This is where his failure at relational time becomes most visible.¹² Although parents, son, and Dr. Jacoby (Russ Tamblyn) occupy the same room, the staging does not integrate Ben as father into his son's space. It is Dr. Jacoby who rocks with Johnny thus physically entering his temporal register by slowing down and synchronizing himself with him. Ben, by contrast, remains a voice in the background urging everyone to get in the car and move on. His response resembles the contract scenes in its impatience, since he again tries to impose external tempo and closure instead of dwelling within another person's rhythm. In this sense, Johnny functions as an interruption to the temporal logic on which Ben's authority depends, because he cannot be folded smoothly into progression or efficiency. The camera work reinforces this point by sharply restricting what becomes visible in the first place. The scene is mediated through Audrey's act of spying, so Ben and Sylvia are not shown directly but remain audible off-screen, while the image itself is confined to a view through the hole in the wall. As a result, Ben's relation to both Johnny and his wife appears as something markedly outside the sphere in which he is otherwise shown to operate.

Loss of Temporal Control

A decisive shift in Ben's authority is seen in "Arbitrary Law," where he is no longer in his office but in a jail cell and his business-related forward movement is interrupted. Especially revealing is the scene with Tojamura/Catherine (Piper Laurie) because it shows him waiting in confinement until Catherine chooses the moment of disclosure and sets the terms of surrender (00:15:07–00:18:57). The spatial setup already makes this loss of agency visible. Ben is framed from outside the cell, positioned behind the vertical bars that divide the image and fix him in place, so that he appears contained and visually subordinated. He is now immobilized and dependent on the timing set by the visitor. Even so, Ben still attempts to preserve authority through language. Rather than entering a reciprocal exchange, he delivers a sustained monologic account. Strikingly, his regulating discursive habit survives even after the power that once accompanied it has collapsed. Smiling, he describes his imprisonment as "a momentary inconvenience," which frames his situation as a temporary interruption and projects attention toward a business-related, presumably favorable outcome that will arrive in no time.

After Tojamura reveals herself as Catherine, however, the scene produces its decisive event. The revelation retrospectively reframes the exchange and stages a rapid reconfiguration of authority through blocking and gesture. Ben drops to his knees, kisses her foot and explicitly

¹² "Relational" is used here in the sense of being "of, relating to, or characterized by human relationships." It refers to whether paternal timing responds to others or merely imposes its own order.

offers submission: “Do you want me to beg? Because I’ll beg.” The former dealmaker is thus repositioned as a supplicant, both spatially and functionally. Yet even here, his response remains structured by transactional logic. He immediately offers to sign over Ghostwood and the mill, translating total loss into one last act of exchange. The signing itself reinforces the inversion. Instead of taking place in a business space, it happens against the bars of the cell, with Ben still on his knees, passing the papers outward through the very boundary that confines him. The formula “signed, sealed, and delivered” is spoken, but the phrase no longer marks procedural closure on his terms. It marks the completion of his surrender. What remains, then, is not power itself, but the residual comfort of a managerial ritual that lets him perform authority after he has lost control.

The Civil War Plot

This performance of control becomes the basis of Ben’s next crucial moment in the series, which opens already in “Masked Ball” when Ben is watching old footage of his family, specifically in the context of the Great Northern’s founding history (00:29:39–00:31:21). The scene opens with a prolonged shot of the projector before cutting to the projected image, while melancholic piano music provides the scene with an explicitly nostalgic charge. As an analeptic insert, the footage brings an earlier time of business origin into Ben’s present. This formally stressed image of the past is not any past, however, but the founding scene of his inherited authority: Ben’s father and then himself shovel earth at the opening of the hotel, linking family memory to landownership and institutional beginning.

After the collapse of his business authority, the scene places Ben in an unusually softened state as he cries and plays with the projector light, detached from work negotiations. Importantly, however, this does not uncover a different authentic self beneath the businessman. As Ben cites *Richard III* while surrounded by projected images, his authority remains tied to projection in both senses: the literal image and a staged identity sustained through speech and performance (Shakespeare I, i, 1–2).¹³ Also, instead of turning to his wife and children, Ben withdraws from the present and isolates himself with images of the past. In Genette’s terms, the footage functions as an analeptic insert that brings an earlier time into the present, but unlike conventional flashbacks that clarify cause or motivation, this one suspends forward movement rather than advancing it. The projector scene therefore marks a shift from instrumental futurity to retrospective stalling.

¹³ Ben’s reference to *Richard III* evokes a Shakespearean tradition in which family, inheritance, and political succession are closely linked. As Carroll notes, Shakespeare’s history cycle from *Richard II* to *Richard III* turns on the “succession consequences” of deposition and murder (175).

His full retreat into the past through the following Civil War reenactment emerges gradually across episodes 12 to 15. The analysis cannot account for every scene in this unusually rich subplot, but its basic structure is clear: after the collapse of his authority, Ben retreats into a historical scenario that can seemingly be restarted, repeated, and reorganized. One important marker and explicit beginning point of this restart comes when he declares “Gettysburg. Day one” while playing with toy soldiers (“The Black Widow” 00:25:07–00:25:17). Robert “Bobby” Briggs’s (Dana Ashbrook) confusion does not interrupt him, as Ben continues acting inside this new temporal order he has chosen. Later, his act expands into a full transformation of his office, where props, costumes, and role-playing replace business activity.

The climax of the Civil War reenactment multiple episodes later in “Slaves and Masters” is staged so insistently as theater that the scene cannot be read as simple delusion or fantasy (00:35:31–00:38:43). Instead, it presents Ben’s regained authority as dependent on scripted order and staged duration. The scene opens with a tracking movement through a pile of hay, visually leading the viewer into the staged battlefield. At the same time, the drum motif from “Ben’s Battle” is heard on the soundtrack, recalling the music that accompanied his earlier formally marked entry into Civil War mode in “The Black Widow.” In Genette’s terms of frequency, the same auditory cue is narrated more than once across different scenes, but its return does not record a repeated story event so much as mark Ben’s reenactment as a scripted, replayable sequence.

The artificiality is further signaled when the camera reveals Audrey in her costume and then frames her view of Ben through binoculars while he sits on a prop horse (00:35:40–00:35:54). Although they are in the same room, the image actively turns him into something staged for observation and helps frame the scene as spectacle on both story world and discourse level. Audrey’s slip of the tongue, when she says “horse” instead of “home,” further exposes the artificiality of the setup, as does Jerry’s failure to appear in frame when his cue word is spoken. More generally, the scene foregrounds delayed responses, missed cues, and repeated prompts in a way that makes the scene feel visibly constructed. Bobby announces the arrival of General Grant from the foreground, Dr. Jacoby checks his line on a piece of paper before delivering it, and when he fails to answer Ben’s question about the Mexican War, Ben repeats the question until the exchange can continue. Dialogue is thus no longer presented as spontaneous interaction, but as a given sequence that must be maintained.

When the Confederate flag drops between Ben and Dr. Jacoby, the exchange stops functioning as dialogue between two men in a room. Neither does Ben try to re-establish eye contact with Dr. Jacoby or repair the conversational line. Instead, he continues into a formal

speech, now framed against the flag as a full backdrop while the drum roll begins. His line, “All wars are nothing but madness,” is then staged as a high point of the performance, timed and scored as such. Once that speech is finished, Ben’s line “Enough of this fruitless conversation” moves the scene immediately into concrete procedure. In that shift, reflection is cut short in favor of procedural closure and the spotlight on Ben and Dr. Jacoby signing the articles reinforces the importance of that staged resolution.

Only after the deal is done does Ben collapse to the floor, ending the performance. The ordering of events in this scene remains crucial: arrival, short exchange, speech, articles, signing, handshake, collapse. This linear structure allows Ben’s authority to return to what Audrey calls “the real world” (“Slaves and Masters” 00:22:30–00:22:33), as will be seen in the following part of the analysis. The reenactment operates as a form of pseudo-repetition: Ben does not simply remember the Civil War but performs a scripted teleology with a predetermined endpoint. In this sense, the staged sequence substitutes borrowed historical closure for the real futurity he has lost, allowing his authority to continue only within a controlled and artificial temporal frame.

At the level of story time, the reenactment occupies a single bounded day; at the level of discourse time, it is staged through cues, repetitions, and audiovisual callbacks that mark it as a constructed sequence; and at the level of narration time, it accumulates meaning across several episodes, so that the Civil War plot becomes legible as an extended structural unit rather than a single scene.

Ethical Future and Failed Repair

In the following episode “The Condemned Woman,” Ben returns to his office under noticeably altered conditions (00:15:57–00:17:30). After the Civil War retreat into the past, he re-enters the present through a new future-oriented project. The scene opens in Ben’s office, where Bobby is registered first, along with the conspicuous detail of the celery on the table, before Ben fully emerges within the frame. He actively attempts to reframe himself by describing board meetings as usually “nothing more than a gathering of self-minded individuals” in which everyone tries to secure greater financial gain. This meeting, however, is “completely different.” Bobby’s and Audrey’s presence already makes the space feel less exclusively organized around Ben. More importantly, the scene’s temporality is marked by repetition and retrospective significance. Ben’s colorful windbreaker returns here after its earlier appearance in the office scene with Audrey, where her appeal to the family’s “future” had visibly reached him (“The One-Armed Man” 00:35:56–00:35:59). The costume repetition links these moments

across narrative time and reframes the earlier scene as a first sign of Ben's altered future-orientation. He also brings in a new character from his past, John Justice Wheeler (Billy Zane), whom he once helped with an investment.

During his subsequent speech in the meeting, he first acknowledges the bad position of his business, then "the human spirit" and "the future" as the company's remaining assets and introduces the pine weasel as the focus of a new environmental project (00:18:18–00:19:39). Where the future had previously functioned as an immediate extension of profit-driven action, as in burning the mill and collecting insurance money, it is now imagined as something to be preserved beyond present gain and sustained across an undefined duration. Such a future cannot be initiated, managed, or completed through Ben's earlier "signed, sealed, and delivered" logic.

Ben's arc can therefore be understood as a movement through three forms of futurity. Early in the series, he operates through short-range instrumental futurity, where events matter insofar as they can be converted into profit or strategic advantage. During the Civil War plot, he retreats into the past, but not into temporal stillness. Instead, he creates a scripted historical futurity inside the story world, a borrowed sequence with its own duration, roles, and endpoint. Finally, he turns to projected ethical futurity, in which the future extends beyond immediate profit and becomes linked to preservation. Across all three stages, Ben's authority depends on forward movement. What changes is the scale of the future and the degree to which it can still be controlled.

Interpretation: The Managerial Father

Ben Horne reverses the 1950s television father by making the economic basis of paternal authority impossible to ignore. Where that earlier model placed the father at the center of domestic life and kept his occupation off-screen, Ben is almost never shown outside work, and his family becomes legible to him only when it enters his temporal logic. Audrey is the clearest case as she can briefly occupy a paternal frame when she aligns herself with succession and the future of the family business, while Johnny, who resists that logic altogether, remains outside it. Ben does not reject the postwar paternal model so much as expose the economic structure it concealed. Kimmel's discussion of 1950s television fathers makes this contrast more concrete: figures such as Jim Anderson, Ward Cleaver, and Ozzie Nelson were defined less through visible work than through domestic presence, while their occupations remained vague or off-screen (247–48).

The projector scene is especially revealing here, because it stages paternal memory through business origin rather than the home. Importantly, the emotional center of the scene is

marked by projector images of institutional beginning, inherited business identity, and land possession. Because the scene connects the father to a softened image of respectable origin, it recalls the model through which paternal authority was culturally idealized in postwar television. At the same time, it redirects that idealization toward the economic structures that helped sustain it.

Kimbrell helps specify the exposed paternal authority as economic masculinity when he argues that American masculinity is defined through an ideology of performance in which what “men do best, [is] taking action” (142). His claim that “the businessman has been, and remains, America’s primary social icon” is particularly relevant here (87). Within this “‘masculine-mystique ethic,’ practices such as ‘[making] the deal,’ ‘getting the contract,’ and ‘bottom-line thinking’ are as American as apple pie” (89). Kimbrell links this to the wider postwar culture of consumption, in which the American Dream itself became tied to buying, using, replacing, and expanding at an increasing pace. Within this culture, the father’s role as the breadwinner became more tightly bound to work (106).

Ben’s economic masculinity also carries older American fantasies of authority through territorial possession and future command. More concretely, the Ghostwood Project translates an older myth of masculine land possession into development and speculation. Ben does not want land as a stable home or inheritance, but as an asset that can be converted into profit. In this sense, Kimmel’s account helps place masculine authority in a longer U.S. tradition that shifted from landownership and artisanal independence to market success and economic self-making. Here, manhood no longer rests on stable inheritance or autonomy, but must be continually proven through calculable success, which makes it both aspirational and deeply insecure (9).¹⁴ When this future-oriented model collapses, Ben’s Civil War retreat becomes legible as a turn toward an older script of masculine identity.

Accordingly, when Ben loses control over real sequences of action, his authority survives only as performance. Although he often seems indifferent to what others think of him, especially because he behaves with such open arrogance, his power still depends on controlled visibility. It is supported by external forms such as suits, office space, business ritual, and speeches. The Civil War plot makes this performative logic most explicit. The people around Ben therefore sustain the structure that allows him to appear authoritative again. Thus, only when the others “implement the Appomattox scenario,” the historical scene of Confederate

¹⁴ “The Self-Made Man of American mythology was born anxious and insecure, uncoupled from the more stable anchors of landownership or workplace autonomy” (Kimmel 9).

surrender that ended the American Civil War,¹⁵ can Ben be brought back to “the real world.”¹⁶ Here, a strong parallel to the postwar television context appears. Just as 1950s television helped restage paternal authority after the historical crisis by making the father appear central and stable again, Ben’s Civil War plot restores him through a performed version of postwar order. The point is not that the scene simply allegorizes the 1950s, but that both structures depend on the same temporal move: crisis is made manageable by giving it an ending through which paternal authority can return. After the collapse of his business power, Ben cannot restore actual control, but by inhabiting General Lee’s role, he can turn loss into a scripted scene of historical importance. The reenactment therefore gives him a way to experience defeat as a grand, formally ordered endpoint in which the opposite of the historical fact appears true.

The reenactment also closely resembles a play-within-the-play structure, since it inserts a staged performance into the ongoing narrative present. Through this, the scene also layers two temporal orders within the story world: the present of the characters watching and prompting him, and the historical script that Ben tries to inhabit. From this perspective, the reenactment is a metatheatrical interruption of linear narrative time that makes visible how Ben’s authority can now continue only as a role performed inside a borrowed script. Richardson’s account of circular and contradictory temporality helps clarify this structure as Ben’s reenactment neither moves forward into new time nor fully returns to the past, but loops within a closed historical script that can be restarted at will.

His later ethical turn does not simply break with this pattern, but it also cannot be reduced to more of the same. As he tries to become a better person, he does so by turning toward new projects and newly disclosed relations rather than by repairing the damaged family relations already in place. Thus, John newly appears whereas Sylvia and Johnny remain largely outside this process.

Ben’s final appearance in the second season brings this problem into a domestic space outside his usual sphere of control. He ends not in his office, but in the Haywards’ house, where his attempt to intervene in another family’s buried past leads to physical collapse (“Beyond Life and Death” 00:12:55–00:13:33). The fireplace is significant because it recalls the earlier office imagery through which his authority had been visually established. Yet here it no longer frames him as a figure of command. As he hits his head against it and is left unconscious, Ben’s

¹⁵Appomattox became one of the central “myths” through which Americans understood the Civil War. Although Grant and Lee really did sign the surrender terms, the meaning of that moment remained contested. For Grant, it pointed toward future “moral and material progress.” For Lee, it meant preserving Southern “honor and principles” and trying to “turn the clock back” (Varon 1–2).

¹⁶ Audrey’s statement in “Slaves and Masters” (00:22:30–00:22:38).

last image in the original series condenses the chapter's central logic. He moves toward domestic and ethical repair but still follows his newly adopted moral script and his old form of authority rather than responding to others with real attunement, as Eileen Hayward's (Mary Jo Deschanel) repeated and ignored rejection makes clear. He does not remain long enough in a shared present to register the timing or emotional reality of others. Instead, he follows his new future goal of moral repair without the care such repair would require. Ben therefore ends not with restored paternal power, but with its final interruption.

In conclusion, Ben's paternal authority is organized through managerial temporality and set against the tension between economic progression and lived relation. He appears powerful when he can turn people, property, and even morality into directed projects, but his authority fails whenever time demands attunement rather than control. This links him back to the 1950s television father by reversal. Where postwar television made paternal authority appear natural by placing the father securely at the center of family life, Ben exposes the work needed to produce that image.

Major Garland Briggs

As a counterpoint to Ben's fatherhood, the analysis now turns to Major Garland Briggs, the series' clearest military father. In this context, military masculinity is defined as a set of attributes through which authority can be claimed based on a relation to the military (Belkin 3). In his roles as Bobby's father as well as U.S. Air Force officer and "overseer of Listening Post Alpha, a top installation in northeastern Washington devoted to studying paranormal activity, both local and extraterrestrial," he is defined by discipline, calm guidance and the timing of what can be known ("Major Briggs"). For that reason, Briggs is framed through a distinct temporal logic. His authority first appears as guided development and ethical containment, then shifts into mediation of delayed and non-procedural knowledge before, finally, being increasingly overtaken by the Lodge-related temporality.

Moral Guidance

A good place to begin is Briggs's first shared dinner scene with Bobby ("Traces to Nowhere" 00:37:05–00:38:40). Briggs appears composed and uniformed, while Bobby sits in a loose, slouched position, a contrast that immediately stresses the father's military identity. His largely one-directional paternal address is filmed in shot/reverse shot, alternating between medium close-ups of father and son around the softly lit dinner table, which creates a sense of familial intimacy while keeping Bobby's disinterest visible as a quiet resistance to Briggs's ordered mode of speech.

The father ends his prayer and opens the conversation by proposing to talk about the “events of the past few days” as a way of working through them. He proceeds by reframing Bobby’s behavior in explicitly measured terms. “Rebellion,” he claims, is “a necessary fact of life” at Bobby’s age and even “a sign of strength.” Briggs explicitly states that he “respect[s] his rebellious nature.” At the same time, he defines fatherhood as the task of restraint, describing his obligation to “contain that fire of contrariness” within family life and society. He points to Bobby’s “reluctance to enter into a dialogue,” names the dynamic directly by reminding him “me, your father,” and turns the silence itself into something he can interpret and control, claiming that silence can signal intelligence and that “the quieter we become, the more we hear.”

His calm, reflective register is interrupted the moment Bobby puts a cigarette in his mouth. Briggs’s facial expression shifts before he acts, so the scene prepares the slap as a boundary that has been reached rather than a sudden loss of control. After he knocks the cigarette away, he immediately reasserts himself through language, stating, “I am a tolerant man. My patience has its limits.” He then returns to a higher, didactic register by quoting Joseph Conrad and framing the father-son relation as a joint project of direction and clarity: “Robert, you and I are going to work to make [your path] real clear,” which positions him as the one who can guide a “beclouded and tempestuous existence” (Conrad 86).¹⁷ The scene’s blocking and small material details underline the family dynamic and create a gendered contrast that supports the father’s authority. The cigarette lands in Betty Briggs’s (Charlotte Stewart) cake, and while she has remained silent up to this point, her response is brief, soft and supportive—“We’re here for you, Bobby”—which contrasts with Briggs’s combination of tolerance and enforcement. The scene therefore presents fatherhood as a model grounded in the insistence on guidance, with Briggs’s paternal authority emerging as an attempt to read and redirect Bobby on his own terms, in contrast to the more passive maternal reassurance.

Although a relational dimension is present, it is not open-ended but organized as linear development. For instance, when Briggs opens by proposing to discuss “the past few days,” he does not actually dwell on the past in any sustained way. Instead, he quickly transforms recent events into a broader moral framework. Bobby’s present behavior is placed in developmental time, his silence is folded back into interpretation, and the cigarette marks a limit at which Briggs physically intervenes. The slap thus functions as a controlled interruption because the escalation is stopped at a specific point and redirected. Finally, Briggs’s closing lines project

¹⁷ Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea*, sec. XXVII.

Bobby into the future and place the father in the role of the one who can guide that development. The scene therefore moves from recent events and present disorder to interpretation and containment, which is a progression that gives Briggs's fatherhood its specifically linear temporal form.

The following father-son scene takes place in the same room and repeats this forward-oriented paternal logic under slightly altered conditions. Through *mise-en-scène*, it is more strongly marked as a quasi-ritual moment that links Briggs to a higher moral order. Father and son face forward rather than directly toward each other, while the crucifix, candles, and palm fronds behind them visually support Briggs's role as an ethical speaker. As in the previous scene, Briggs quickly turns the moment into a moral speech about death, responsibility, and the greater good. He defines the terms of the conversation himself, names Bobby's resistance as a failure of "meaningful exchange," and even admits his desire to force wisdom upon his son.

Although Briggs remains controlled and principle-driven, the scene makes the limit of this paternal form more openly visible. Bobby's temporality is shaped by immediate, eruptive grief rather than calm reflection, so Briggs's repeated mode of address more clearly begins to register as imposed instruction that cannot reach its intended goal. Bobby's emotional explosion therefore works like an accumulated and delayed reaction to the earlier dinner scene. His remark that he "can't wait" for Laura to be in the ground remains unstable. Read literally, it suggests impatience with the funeral ritual. Read sarcastically, it turns against Briggs's controlled moral pacing and resists a father who directs him toward patience and responsibility instead of meeting his anger. Unlike in the earlier scene, Bobby now enters the exchange and has the last word, which further unsettles Briggs's attempt to secure paternal authority through controlled moral speech.

The Vision

As a counterpart to the exchanges at home, the diner scene in the following season reorganizes Briggs's fatherhood into a less directive temporal mode. What changes is not that Briggs stops structuring the interaction, but how he does so. In the two scenes at home, his authority worked through linear monologic correction and containment. Here, by contrast, it is built through a slower rhythm. Framed by pie, coffee, and the routine of the Double R Diner, the scene begins in a temporality of everyday repetition instead of direct confrontation through interruption ("May the Giant Be with You" 00:59:20–01:04:25). Briggs still takes the initiative, but he does so by opening a low-pressure exchange, so when he addresses Bobby and asks him to join, the question frames the interaction as more voluntary compared to the earlier father-son scenes.

At the level of blocking and framing, Briggs sits in a booth at the back of the diner, so the scene begins with physical and social distance. Bobby initially aims to sit at the counter by himself, but Briggs notices him, and that recognition is staged as instinctive rather than confrontational. Once Bobby joins him, he sinks into the booth below his father's eye line, withdrawn and only partly engaged. As the conversation continues, however, he gradually straightens, raises his gaze, and begins to hold eye contact. Also, father and son face each other more directly than in the earlier home scenes.

Equally significant is the way dialogue works here. Briggs does not abandon the controlled limits associated with him, something made explicit when Bobby asks, "What is it that you do exactly?" and Briggs answers, "That's classified," before turning back to his pie. Even in this more open exchange, he still controls what can and cannot be known. At the same time, the mirrored small-talk exchange—"How was school?" "School? Fine." "That's good." "How was work?" "Work? Work was good."—creates a low-stakes tempo in which both men engage without immediate conflict. That repeated pattern, together with Briggs's use of questions rather than monologue, loosens the stricter linearity of his earlier mode of address. Instead of driving the exchange forward through one uninterrupted line of interpretation, the questions briefly open space for response and make the interaction appear less predetermined.

The scene's decisive turn comes when Briggs asks, "Bobby, may I share something with you?" and explicitly names what follows as "a vision I had in my sleep last night." By calling it a vision, Briggs marks a clear temporal shift. What follows does not belong to the present of the diner. It was experienced in sleep, is recounted in the present, and carries a meaning that reaches beyond the immediate exchange without becoming a straightforward factual report or actionable clue. The vision therefore introduces a new temporal layer into the conversation and marks one of the strongest shifts in Briggs's paternal authority, because he now speaks from a mode of knowledge that exceeds linear sequence. The scene underlines that shift audiovisually as music enters slowly and quietly, the diner's everyday noise recedes, and the background activity becomes almost still. In this way, the framing holds father and son in a contained two-shot rhythm, so that although the moment takes place in a public diner, the exchange feels deeply private.

As the vision continues, Bobby's face changes step by step, so that the scene no longer presents Briggs's authority in an immediate, corrective mode. Its effect unfolds gradually. The decisive turn comes when Briggs says, "My son was standing there." Bobby then lifts his head in a way that reads as surprised recognition of being addressed rather than merely talked at. "That was my vision of you" lands as a direct relational claim, and the scene registers its force

first physically, in Bobby's posture and sustained attention, and then emotionally, in his visible relief. Through Bobby's intense emotional reaction, the viewer understands how rare such a shift in Briggs's approach is.

The ending then introduces a deliberate limit to that newly opened intimacy. After the vision, Briggs gets up and shakes Bobby's hand. The gesture is formal and restrained, and the close-up on their hands makes that formality unmistakable. The scene pointedly avoids the embrace Briggs had described in the vision. In this way, the diner scene modifies the temporality of Briggs's authority without abandoning its underlying structure.

Classified Timing

The same paternal logic that structures Briggs's relation to Bobby also governs his work-related authority. In both cases, he does not master events through direct intervention, but regulates how disorder or knowledge is received, interpreted, contained, and released. This part of the analysis therefore turns to Briggs as a state functionary and carrier of privileged knowledge. What makes him particularly important here is that he stands between institutional knowledge and the series' other register of knowledge, namely Lodge-related signals that cannot be processed through realist police procedure. The relevant scenes do not present him as a detective who actively pursues causes and effects. Instead, they stage him as a figure who receives, filters, and passes on information, while at the same time marking the limits of what can be known.

A key instance of this appears in "Coma," where Briggs becomes the relay point for knowledge entering the investigation from outside its established temporal and procedural channels (00:16:35–00:19:18). The scene first stages authority through contrast. Andy's (Harry Goaz) incompetence is foregrounded, and Briggs is shown noticing him from the counter. Without any overt gesture of superiority, Briggs's stillness and composure register as competence against Andy's failed handling of a simple task. The scene then frames Briggs beside Margaret Lanterman (Catherine E. Coulson) in a quiet two-shot. Briggs responds to the log as if it were a person, saying he does not think they have been introduced. Initially, the exchange leaves some ambiguity, since his manner could still be read as simple politeness toward Margaret rather than genuine openness to the log itself. The scene, however, quickly resolves that uncertainty. When she asks whether he understands the message from the log, he answers, "Yes ma'am, as a matter of fact I do," and shifts into a more reflective posture, folding his hands and directing his gaze forward as if in thought. Brief as it is, the exchange makes clear that Briggs is not merely being respectful but genuinely receptive to an alternative form

of knowledge seemingly outside of realist investigative logic that will be discussed more closely in the analysis of Dale Cooper.

His receptiveness to this type of knowledge then places him in a position to control when and how it enters further discourse. From that point on, his authority rests increasingly on the timing and management of revelation. That translation becomes narratively consequential when Briggs visits Cooper's room later in the episode and shares information that he had previously withheld ("Coma" 00:36:00–00:38:24). The encounter is staged as a meeting of two state agents. Cooper is in his pajamas, Briggs in uniform, and the contrast makes Briggs' military identity visually unavoidable. Only then does he disclose the content of his work, including "maintenance of deep-space monitors, aimed at galaxies beyond our own." At that moment, the soundscape shifts from atmospheric noise into music, which marks a movement into a more charged register before Briggs shows him the message. It is also significant that he holds the paper close to his body instead of putting it down on the table behind him. The gesture makes clear that the information is being guarded, but it also visually ties the paper to Briggs himself, as if he is carrying the message rather than only reading from it. Also, the paper is either shown from too far away to be legible or in an extreme close-up that isolates only the specific lines Briggs chooses to deliver, along with a small amount of surrounding text.

Taken together, these scenes place Briggs in relation to the series' antimimetic temporality as it is beginning to emerge for the viewer. By this point of the series, the log, Cooper's dream, his near-death experience, and the repeated cryptic signals already suggest a domain of knowledge marked by delay, obscurity, repetition, and uncertain progression. Briggs's authority therefore expands from linear moral guidance to temporally unclear mediation. Precisely because he is still framed as a high-ranking, respectable man guarding classified information, the alternative temporality associated with him gains particular significance.

Taken by Time

After Leland's death, when causal understanding begins to fail more clearly, the police officers and state agents meet outside for an exchange ("Arbitrary Law" 00:43:22–00:45:02). When Cooper, Truman (Michael Ontkean), and Albert (Miguel Ferrer) walk toward the woods and approach Briggs, he is framed already standing there, alone, still, and accompanied by a distorted sound. From the outset, the staging separates him from the investigative group on an audiovisual level. Once they gather in a loose circle by the trees, the conversation does not

move toward clarification. Faced with something they cannot explain, Briggs provides an aphoristic frame—"there's more in heaven and earth than is dreamt up in our philosophy."¹⁸ Before he speaks, the camera moves in on him with a zoom, follows his short approach, and frames him slightly from below, which gives his words added weight. Briggs's role here is not to produce a plan or a solution, but to authorize the sense that the event exceeds the available explanatory model. The scene therefore marks a suspended consequence. The encounter is treated as meaningful, but it does not turn into a next step. When Cooper insists that "it's our job to stop it," Briggs responds only with a brief "yeah" before quickly walking away, and the tone and abruptness of that reaction suggest that he does not share Cooper's confidence.

"Dispute Between Brothers" marks a clear break, because Briggs disappears in a way that cannot be reconstructed into a stable linear chain of action (00:44:53–00:46:20). Although it is loosely implied that something will happen to Cooper when he leaves, it is Briggs who disappears without a clear visual or causal bridge between his presence and absence. His return two episodes later in "The Black Widow" makes that fracture explicit not only at the level of narration, through his absence across multiple episodes, but also at the level of story world temporality itself (00:44:20–00:44:40). When Briggs suddenly reappears and asks, "How long have I been gone?", Betty answers, "Two days," and Briggs replies, "Strange, it seemed much shorter." At that point, the disturbance no longer belongs only to presentation. Briggs has lived through time differently. The scene therefore marks a real shift in his role as he is not solely the figure who mediates delayed or alternative knowledge from a position of restraint but is now physically caught inside the temporal disturbance itself. This change is reinforced visually, since he wears neither his uniform nor the clothes he wore when he disappeared in the woods. From here on, Briggs has become subject to the series' antimimetic temporality, and that remains true through the end of the season.

Broken Speech

In the final stretch of season 2, the temporal disturbance associated with Briggs overtakes his speech as well. In "The Path to the Black Lodge," Windom Earle (Kenneth Welsh) captures and sedates him in the woods, and under truth serum the man who had earlier controlled language with unusual care is exposed (00:32:46–00:35:27). Before that, however, Briggs repeatedly and explicitly states that he is "not at liberty to divulge that information" although suspended against an archery target, visually centered on the circular pattern behind him in his

¹⁸ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (I, v, 187–88).

uniform. Although his statement about “the possibility that love is not enough” reveals vulnerability without the protective structure that had previously defined his authority, it also does not help the narrative resolve open questions. Even though information is extracted by an antagonist, the scene still creates the expectation that Briggs may finally reveal something decisive after withholding knowledge for so long, which produces a tension between threat and disclosure. Yet when Briggs reveals information, it comes from his dreams and therefore from a source outside linear time and physical space. What emerges remains vague and cryptic rather than concretely useful, which further reinforces the elusive nature of the knowledge Briggs is connected to.

The break becomes even more explicit towards the end of the scene when he begins speaking backwards (00:35:18–00:35:27). At that point, language stops moving in the direction required for dialogue to function as clarification or guidance, since it must first be reversed to be understood at all. By episode 21 (“Miss Twin Peaks”), that damage has not passed when Briggs returns weakened, wrapped in a blanket, and unable to recover his earlier composure. His speech now arrives in short imperative fragments, which remain partly intelligible without displaying the shaping, timing, and controlled release that had once defined his authority. In Richardson’s terms, this moment approaches temporal contradiction because language stops moving in the direction required for communicative sequence, and the forward logic of guidance or disclosure is formally reversed. Briggs’s speech now operates within the same antimimetic register as the Lodge itself.

Thus, as long as the father figure remains structurally and visibly distanced from the antimimetic temporality of the Lodge, he can still direct events in a linear-teleological way. Once this entanglement begins, however, his established paternal authority breaks down.

Silent Recognition

By episode 22, Briggs is briefly returned to a relatively mimetically stable setting, sitting happily with his wife in the diner (“Beyond Life and Death”).¹⁹ Yet the season ends by showing that Lodge communication now moves directly through the bodies of people in town. Dr. Jacoby brings Sarah Palmer (Grace Zabriskie) in as a messenger, and the camera moves into tight close-ups that turn her face into a surface of transmission. The moment recalls the earlier scene with Margaret and the log, since Briggs once again gives a facial reaction that suggests recognition. At the same time, however, the scene exposes a limit in the kind of authority he

¹⁹ Another parallel is the fact that he is sitting in the same booth and position in the diner as in the earlier vision-recounting scene with Bobby, where he still appeared fully in control.

represents. Earlier, Briggs had been associated with a more openly moral and spiritual framework, but Windom Earle's description of the Black Lodge as a place into which "No prayers dare enter" and where spirits care nothing for "good deeds or priestly invocations" marks this realm as one that exceeds precisely such forms of orientation ("Variations on Relations" 00:03:40–00:04:04). Following this logic, the moment ends in silence. Briggs neither answers nor is shown acting on what he recognizes before the season ends. What remains is a reduced and altered version of his paternal authority in which he can still register rupture but ceases to respond to it or actively contain it. What remains is a form of recognition without consequence, resembling the structure of a non-event. The expected response to knowledge, whether action, speech, or intervention, is prepared but never arrives. Briggs's silence therefore marks the point at which his paternal authority, once defined by controlled disclosure, has been fully overtaken by a temporality he can register but fails to direct.

Overall, Briggs's arc moves from linear paternal guidance to temporal subjection. At first, his authority rests on the assumption that disorder can be turned into moral development as he reads Bobby's crisis, tries to contain it through speech, and projects it toward future responsibility. When he begins mediating classified as well as vision- and dream-based knowledge more openly, he still controls the timing and form of disclosure, so his form of authority remains partly intact. As the Lodge-related temporality comes to be increasingly identified with Briggs, the decisive change in his character logic occurs. His disappearance, his altered sense of duration, backwards speech, and final silence show that he is no longer the stable figure who gives disorder meaning.

Interpretation: The Good Father's Limit

As a secondary descriptor for Garland Briggs, he comes very close to what can be called the good father of the series. His authority rests on religious and spiritual knowledge, controlled speech, moral restraint, domestic presence, and calm discipline. His implied proximity to the White Lodge, though never fully explained, places him near an order that contrasts with the Black Lodge and strengthens his legibility as a benevolent paternal figure. If love opens one path and hate opens another, Briggs is clearly aligned with the former.

His uniform makes him legible as a figure of military authority before he even speaks. Unlike Ben, however, Briggs is repeatedly shown at home or in the forest rather than in any office. This recalls Kimmel's point that the occupations of 1950s television fathers often remained vague or off-screen (247–48), yet Briggs cannot be reduced to that model. He is

marked as a state agent whose professional role becomes increasingly visible and remains essential to both the story world and the plot.

Briggs's paternal authority is most productively read through the hard/soft tension that Cuordileone identifies as central to mid-century fatherhood (vii). He is visibly authorized by the military, but he is not presented as brutal or domineering. The "essential problem in mid-century fatherhood" was precisely how to balance paternal warmth with paternal leadership (154). Briggs comes unusually close to this balance. He sets limits, insists on responsibility, and speaks from a position of rank, but he also seeks conversation, adjusts his address to Bobby, and remains oriented toward his son's development rather than punishment or detachment. He embodies what Cuordileone describes as "forward looking and realistic," patient, self-restrained, and concerned with "the greater good" (153–54). Compared with his later entanglement in Lodge temporality, his fatherhood to Bobby still appears as a relatively stable form of paternal authority.

Yet Briggs also occupies a second role that complicates this domestic stability. His classified information, his openness to Margaret's log, his disappearance and altered return, and his recognition of Sarah as a medium all place him at the intersection of everyday paternal guidance and antimimetic temporality. Unlike Cooper's Red Room passages, which the series renders at length and from the inside, Briggs's disappearance and return remain strikingly opaque. He vanishes into other temporal dimensions, but the series gives almost no direct access to what he experienced. Even when Briggs is physically drawn into alternative temporality, he does not become its interpreter. He operates in closer proximity to alternative knowledge than most characters, and at moments he is altered by it, but he never masters or translates it.

This dual position is also shaped by the series' early-1990s context. Savran argues that one response to the social and political crises at the end of the Cold War was a turn to spirituality, often taking the form of secularized and eclectic religion rather than orthodox belief (294). Briggs's authority is not grounded only in Christianity, the military, or the family but combines all three with dreams, visions, paranormal signals, and a language of higher moral order. He therefore updates the older model of the disciplined paternal guide by placing it within a 1990s spiritual framework. His fatherhood remains ethical and future-oriented, but the source of that ethics is no longer purely domestic or institutional. It is attached to a wider, unstable field of spiritual knowledge that he can receive but not fully control.

His limit therefore matters precisely because the series does not simply replace one paternal mode with another. Instead, it shows how a father still oriented toward future guidance

becomes progressively less effective once time itself does not behave as something he can direct. When even Briggs can no longer guide or protect against the disorder linked to Lodge temporality, the point is not that bad fathers fail while good fathers succeed. Fatherhood itself emerges as a highly complex and ambiguous structure that first appears to follow a linear logic, only for the series to expose that logic as unstable.

Dale Cooper

Moving on to another essential father figure connected to alternative knowledge, the following part looks at FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper who is assigned to investigate the murder of Laura Palmer. Because Cooper is the only non-biological father figure discussed here, his paternal role requires a slightly different explanation. In fact, he shows that a character does not need to have a child in order to perform a paternal-authoritative role or to be supported by a linear-teleological structure. He enters Twin Peaks as the figure who seems to bring knowledge, speed, and investigative direction to a town that lacks these forms of control. Later in the interpretation section, his authority is also read more specifically through his procedural role as a law-enforcement figure.

Break the Code, Solve the Crime

Cooper's investigative paternal authority initially depends on a structure in which time remains legible as sequence, so that observation can become interpretation and interpretation can become action. In the car scene of "Northwest Passage," Cooper is introduced as a figure who immediately organizes time, information, and perception into coherent forward movement (00:36:00–00:37:32). While driving toward Twin Peaks and recording a message to Diane, he moves seamlessly between numerical and geographical facts and personal observation, naming distances, prices, and locations before shifting just as smoothly to his appreciation of a good cup of coffee and cherry pie. The scene also anchors the here and now through temporal markers such as "11:30 a.m." and "February 24th." What matters is that these different points do not compete with one another. Cooper refers to ground already covered, situates himself in the present through exact coordinates, and projects forward toward the next stages of the investigation, all without interruption. The result is that events already seem to fall into order under his narration. At the same time, he is not framed as a purely factual or detached FBI agent. His enthusiasm for simple things gives his authority warmth and makes him immediately more relatable and trustworthy.

This sense of order is reinforced by the form of the scene. Cooper's appearance is as controlled as his speech. His hair is slicked back and he wears a suit, while his voice remains

clear, measured, and directed toward an absent listener who cannot respond. Since Diane is, for now, only a name without a voice or visible presence, the exchange remains one-directional, so that the scene is organized almost entirely through Cooper's own speech. The camera supports this by holding a stable position beside him, as if the viewer were a passenger in the car. Cooper's narrated perception thus becomes the first point of visual access too, creating the sense of being carried into *Twin Peaks* by an authoritative figure who arrives to restore order. The steady movement of the vehicle, the absence of cuts, and the regular rhythm of the instrumental music ("Dance of the Dream Man") all strengthen the impression of forward progression. The scene thus establishes a clear relation between perception, speech, and motion. What Cooper observes, he immediately names. Through this transparent narration, both Diane within the story world and the viewer are guided toward understanding. His authority therefore emerges in a seemingly natural and uninterrupted way without the need to be forcefully asserted.

This configuration carries over into his arrival in town. In his first interaction with Sheriff Truman, Cooper establishes authority again within moments ("Northwest Passage" 00:37:33–00:38:52). He repeats details he has already stated in the car: Louis Fork, Highway 2, the Lamplighter Inn, cherry pie—a repetition that briefly slows the story only to stabilize it. As he enters a new interaction, the scene resets key coordinates and lets Cooper reassert orientation. He abruptly stops Truman in the hallway and openly states that he is in charge, a claim that is immediately accepted. His authority is therefore not only institutionally granted but socially accommodated from the outset. As he speaks with Truman, he moves easily between retrospective reference and prospective orientation, referring to what has already happened in Laura's case, assessing the available information in the present, and pointing toward the next steps of the investigation before switching the topic to trees. Again, these shifts do not burden the exchange. Instead, they make him appear highly present and as though he has already arranged events into a manageable sequence. The camera supports this through a receding tracking two-shot folded into a walk-and-talk, giving the interaction steady forward drive and placing the viewer inside that movement.

First Disturbances

The next episode, "Traces to Nowhere," preserves this basic configuration but introduces the first slight mismatch between Cooper's controlled authority and the temporal logic through which that authority had operated (00:01:37–00:03:28). The episode opens with a long take that pans across Cooper's hotel room before revealing him hanging upside down. The shot

already introduces a mild visual disorientation. Its continuity and slow camera movement still create spatial coherence, yet the pan also reverses the more conventional left-to-right directional logic established in the car scene, moving instead across a room marked by mounted dead animals and ending on Cooper's inverted body. The *mise-en-scène* is therefore both controlled and strange. Before he is visually revealed, Cooper is already speaking ("Diane..."), so that his one-directional speech begins to organize the scene before his body does, recalling the organizing mode established in the car sequence.

What becomes newly relevant here is a slight mismatch between temporal expectation and formal continuation. Cooper still provides orientation and continuity by remaining strikingly controlled, and the camera emphasizes this control through small visual details. The pan draws attention to the fully secured inverted body—metal supports fixed to the pole, sock-holders, arms crossed, posture composed—producing a slight visual excess of control. Yet the scene quietly loosens that control at the level of temporal form. When Cooper tells Diane that he will report back on the quality of the coffee in half an hour, the line prepares a pause in the report, as if the recording will stop and resume later. It also creates the formal expectation of an interruption, such as a cut or temporal jump. Instead, he swings down and continues speaking without any such break. The anticipated interruption never arrives, which produces a small non-event at the level of form, since the scene briefly prepares a temporal break and a return to the murder case only to bypass it.

At the same time, the content also begins to drift. Rather than returning directly to anything related to the town or case, Cooper moves into reflections on Marilyn Monroe and the Kennedys, and he frames these not as secure facts but as open questions that are never followed up on again. The point is not the topic itself, but the way it interrupts teleological procedure. A question is introduced, but it does not lead into clarification or action. In this sense, Cooper still appears to possess temporal agency, since he controls his body, speech, and the rhythm of the scene, but that agency is no longer perfectly aligned with the expected investigative progress.

Dream Temporality

"Zen, or the Skill to Catch a Killer" introduces a more decisive rupture in Cooper's earlier presentation (00:40:03–00:46:43). As he prepares for sleep, the scene begins to move away from the model of authority and temporality that had structured him so far. Even before the Red Room appears, the transition is marked by small signs of instability. Cooper turns off the light and leans back into the pillow. He is no longer upright as in the car or hallway, but not yet

fully surrendered either, remaining in a controlled in-between position. Only after the fade cut does he appear fully horizontal, flattened into the bed in a way that marks a clearer loss of agency and turns him into a receptive body onto which the following can arrive. Importantly, the transition is not framed as a clean threshold between waking reality and a separate dream-space. The sharp change in light seems to occur in Cooper's bedroom, before any distinct dream setting has been established, and its source remains unclear. At the same time, the camera moves toward him quickly rather than easing into the dream through a calm visual transition. The result is an unstable threshold through which the series moves to a temporality that stops guaranteeing a clearly mimetic sequence.

What follows therefore cannot simply be treated as a sealed-off dream episode. The scene links Cooper sleeping, MIKE (Al Strobel) and BOB (Frank Silva) speaking, and the Red Room itself in one continuous chain rather than presenting them as neatly separated layers. This matters because the disturbance affects the status of time itself. Thus, the scene moves between an objective and subjective anachrony. At the same time, it begins to resemble achrony, because the dream cannot be placed securely within a clear chronological relation (Bal, *Narratology* 97). Inside the Red Room, Cooper appears as an older version of himself while Laura is still young, which makes the encounter difficult to locate in time. Another especially clear sign of temporal disruption appears in the image of twelve candles arranged in a circle. The composition resembles a clock face and therefore invokes the schema of ordered, measurable time, yet it withholds what would make that order operative. No hand indicates a present moment, no directional movement is established, and the candles are visibly blown out. The image thus presents clock-time only to strip it of progression and duration. The line about gum coming "back in style" reinforces the same shift, since it points toward return.

Speech and movement in the Red Room intensify this problem further. They are produced through several layers of mediation: the actors perform backwards, the footage is technically manipulated, and meaning is then made accessible through subtitles. Language therefore remains present but reaches both Cooper and the viewer only in delayed and indirect form. Although Cooper himself does not speak backwards or move in reverse, he no longer stabilizes the scene through speech as he did earlier. He speaks very little, and when he does try to identify Laura Palmer, he hesitates instead of confirming perception with certainty. This loss of authority becomes even clearer after he wakes. Laura has apparently whispered crucial information to him, yet he cannot retain it and thus actively stalls the resolution of the mystery. The whisper is marked as essential, but it does not yet become narratively usable. The dream

therefore introduces a pattern of delayed eventfulness in which further meaning remains suspended until it can later be activated.²⁰

Accordingly, episode 3 places the forward-moving investigative agent inside a backward and temporally unstable world that is neither clearly subjective nor clearly objective. Cooper still appears closer to linearity than the figures around him, but he is not organizing the scene. He sits still, confined to the chair, while another figure (Michael J. Anderson) dances to the soundtrack previously associated with his arrival in town (“Dance of the Dream Man”). As time stops functioning as the reliable medium through which Cooper can transform perception into knowledge and knowledge into action, the scene decisively weakens the conditions that had sustained his authority up to this point.

Stalled Agency

The next important change in Cooper’s character logic arrives at the end of season 1 and the opening of season 2, when he is shot and left on the floor bleeding (“The Last Evening” 00:45:37–00:45:46; “May the Giant Be with You” 00:03:08–00:10:54). This is a major event, but one whose consequences are immediately stretched across a temporal gap in narration. The cliffhanger splits the event across the season break, and the opening of season 2 refuses to resolve that split quickly. What makes the scene analytically important is therefore not only the shock of the shooting, but the way it reorganizes time and agency. Cooper’s established forward logic breaks down because he can no longer pursue or intervene. Instead of cutting away and returning once help has arrived, the episode stays with him and makes the interval itself central. The result is a scene in which something decisive has happened, but the expected consequences of that event—help, movement, recovery, renewed investigation—are postponed. As an additional sign of this limitation, Cooper forgets the note Audrey left in his room until much later. The shooting is thus eventful in one sense and stalled in another. Compared to the Red Room scene, this disruption more openly takes hold within the present action of the story world itself. Also, the cliffhanger splits the event across all three of Mittell’s levels. In story time, the shooting takes seconds and the entire moment possibly minutes; in discourse time, it is stretched through the waiter’s stalling and the Giant’s interruption; in narration time, the season break extends the interval further and turns delay into a structural feature of the viewing experience.

²⁰ A small but telling details occurs when Cooper calls Truman in the middle of the night to announce that he knows who killed Laura but still postpones the revelation until the next day. The scene humorously underscores Cooper’s control over the timing of knowledge, since the urgency of the call is immediately contained by his insistence that the answer can wait.

That stalling most clearly takes shape through the old waiter (Hank Worden). The expectation is immediate and almost automatic: he should call for help. Instead, he hangs up the phone while Andy is still on the line, refuses to call a doctor, and repeatedly returns to Cooper's body to continue the same gestures. At the same time, Cooper does not break that rhythm. Rather than being able to force action, he submits to it and even signs the bill. The non-event therefore becomes concrete at two levels: help is actively blocked, and Cooper does not interrupt the stalling to demand it. The staging of the room reinforces this further. As the waiter exits and returns, he is framed between room 315 on the left and 314 on the right, so that the image moves visually from the higher to the lower number and introduces a slight sense of reversal. The waiter's repeated movement in and out of this space intensifies the effect, producing delay and backward pull rather than progression.

Once the Giant appears as the lighting shifts, the scene moves from practical obstruction to riddling authority. Unlike the old waiter, the Giant introduces important but not directly useable knowledge. His speech is in riddles: "The question is where have you gone?" does not function as a clue Cooper can operationalize in the moment. It redirects the scene away from immediate response and toward enigmatic interpretation, even while Cooper is still lying on the floor and no help is being called. Cooper tries to respond in the way that had defined him earlier, by asking follow-up questions. But questions do not lead to answers, and answers do not lead to action. Thus, the Giant's appearance is highly eventful, but not yet consequential in a practical way. The ticking clock at the end seals this logic. It reintroduces measurable time, but it does not restart movement or resolution. Instead, it only makes the stalled present more audible as Cooper remains on the floor before the scene finally ends.

Taken together, the old waiter and the Giant do different work against the same horizontal body. The waiter keeps the scene within a recognizable service situation and therefore sustains the expectation that practical intervention should still come. The Giant, by contrast, shifts the scene into interpretive suspension and makes meaning hover without clear consequence.²¹ What had once been Cooper's strength—his ability to move from observation to interpretation to action—breaks apart here.

Antimimetic Collapse

In the Lodge finale, the temporal conditions that had once sustained Cooper's authority do not in any stable way. Before and after, cause and effect, action and result do not follow one another in an ordered sequence. The FBI agent ventures into the "waiting room" between worlds, the

²¹ "The action of putting off to a later time; deferring, postponement" ("Suspension").

confusing, red-draped space with zigzagged floor that he had seemingly visited in his dream in the third episode (Weinstock 1). Even the entrance into this place is unstable (“Beyond Life and Death” 00:17:47–00:20:46). At first, the curtains seem to offer a threshold, yet this threshold is not spatially reliable, since they appear suddenly in the forest and disappear again. Because Truman witnesses their appearance and reacts to them, they cannot be dismissed as Cooper’s subjective vision. They belong, however strangely, to the story world. What is important is that the disturbance is most clearly not confined to dream-space; the threshold is materially present and violates mimetic spatial logic from the outset.

Once Cooper enters, the problem is no longer delayed progression, but the collapse of reconstructable sequence itself as inside this place, stable spatial and temporal orientation are withheld more radically. The space does not present one continuous visual field in which all figures share the same immediate now. In an early moment of his entrance, for instance, the cutting between the singer (Jimmy Scott) and Cooper openly shows this point. In the shot of the singer, the flickering light stops, so the image briefly suggests that the room has settled into visual stability. But when the camera cuts back to Cooper, the flicker continues. Although both shots are linked by continuous sound (“Sycamore Trees”) and are presented as belonging to the same space, they do not behave as if they occupy the same temporal state. The result is a small but important temporal irreconcilability between the shots. Similarly, when Cooper tries to leave, the scene does not offer a readable path toward an exit. He passes through a curtain and appears again in a space that looks nearly identical to the one before, with any differences either minor or difficult to register. Cooper appears to move forward, yet each movement folds him back into a similar arrangement. Motion therefore loses its earlier function as it does not allow progression through before and after.

This collapse also affects causality and chronology more directly (00:39:23–00:40:47). When Cooper follows the blood trail, the trace does not remain behind him as the mark of a past action. Instead, it appears ahead of him and leads into the space he is approaching, before disappearing from his body and reappearing on the body of another Cooper lying on the floor in front of him. Cause and effect are thus not securely aligned. Something similar happens with Caroline Earle (Brenda E. Mathers) and Annie Blackburn (Heather Graham). One figure seems to replace the other without the scene establishing where one time ends and the next begins. Caroline belongs to Cooper’s past, before the series’ main story time, whereas Annie belongs to his present and unresolved future. The substitution of Caroline by Annie approaches achrony in Bal’s sense as the temporal positions cannot be securely placed in chronological relation, since past and unresolved future occupy the same image without a recoverable order. The

problem is not simply that the order is hard to recover, but that the distinctions required for recovery are themselves withheld. In this sense, the Red Room approaches what Richardson would describe as a condition in which no securely reconstructable story order remains available (112) as it unsettles not only the *sjuzhet*, where the order of presentation becomes unreliable, but the *fabula* itself, since the story world no longer guarantees that events occupy stable positions in a recoverable chronology.

This breakdown reaches its limit once Cooper is pursued by his Doppelgänger and he can stop functioning as the investigative center of perception the series had earlier established (00:45:45–00:46:15). This split is not only psychological or symbolic, but highly structural because the figure who finally leaves the Lodge is not the Cooper whose authority the series has built, but his evil double.

By the end, the series appears to restore mimetic time when the final bathroom scene initially places Cooper within a familiar routine as he brushes his teeth (00:48:08–00:49:30). Yet this is already a false return, because it is the double who occupies that routine while Cooper remains in the other place. The routine immediately detaches from function when he keeps squeezing toothpaste into the sink with a strange expression of satisfaction. Action thus continues but stops serving its purpose. Also, where a mirror would usually stabilize the present by confirming the identity of the person standing before it, here it does the opposite by revealing BOB. Cooper faces the mirror and almost looks directly into the camera, briefly approaching a pseudo-direct address, as if his gaze were about to cross from the fictional space toward the viewer, before violently smashing his head into the mirror. Finally, he repeats “How’s Annie?” while laughing hysterically so the line becomes an unanswered loop. The major point here is that action now produces an unforeseeable and undesirable result, while cause and effect no longer align, and the goodness formerly attached to Cooper’s appearance has disappeared. The series thus restores Cooper’s external form without restoring the temporal form on which his authority had depended. He remains inside the antimimetic world and non-teleological order of the Red Room and the Lodges.

Interpretation: The Investigative Father

Cooper’s character can be read against several overlapping traditions of crime and detective storytelling. At the most basic level, *Twin Peaks* begins from a mystery structure, since Laura’s death creates hidden information that must be brought to light. More specifically, the series initially takes the shape of a whodunit, organized around the question of who killed her. Cooper

enters this structure through the televisual field of police drama and, more narrowly, through the police procedural, where detection is linked to institutional procedure.

Bordwell's account of mystery-based storytelling helps clarify this structure. For him, mystery is not defined only by a criminal story world, but by a structural relation to hidden information. The narrative makes the viewer aware that "something important is unknown" and the plot is organized around bringing that concealed story to light (19). This is relevant to Cooper because he is not only solving a crime, but trying to organize a world built around missing knowledge. The mystery form therefore helps explain why his authority appears from the outset as interpretive and ordering.

Within this field, police drama provides the broadest televisual frame for Cooper's authority. As Nichols-Pethick argues, police series do not simply tell stories about crime, but project wider conflicts over law, power, and community through the figure of the cop (2, 11). Drawing on C. Wilson, he shows that the police officer often appears as a figure of "distanced and paternal authority" (Nichols-Pethick 13), while also claiming a special, "nearly mystical" (C. Wilson 215) knowledge of how disorder works and how it should be managed. This is not yet supernatural knowledge, but a culturally familiar aura of police authority in which the officer is imagined as someone who can read danger and restore order from a position unavailable to ordinary citizens.

Sabin helps place this model within a longer television history by showing that police drama has occupied a notably durable place in the U.S., from its early rise with *Dragnet* to later renewed prominence (3). Importantly, the police drama offered a public and institutional counterpart to the domestic father of 1950s television. Figures such as *Dragnet*'s Sergeant Friday translated order, masculine control, and public responsibility into police authority. Calhoun's account of *Dragnet* sharpens this point further. As one of the defining postwar police procedurals, its importance lay not only in solving crime, but in making the process itself authoritative. As she puts it, "the process, the procedure, was as critical as the outcome" (5). Cooper's tape-recorder messages to Diane are a good example of such documentation that can be followed step by step. Accordingly, Cooper's early authority strongly depends on a recognizable crime-genre promise that knowledge and disorder can be organized and made legible.

Bauer's account of *Twin Peaks* helps clarify Cooper's hybrid position. He enters the narrative as a recognizable detective figure whose attention to clues and codes recalls classical models of detection, yet this rational authority is immediately complicated by his enthusiasm for sensory impressions, intuition, dreams, and spiritual signs (242). The detective figure is

therefore not dismissed, but becomes, as Bauer puts it, “metonymisch für die Aushöhlung von Genre-Elementen” (244). This is central to the present framework because Cooper brings the classical promise of detection into the series, while *Twin Peaks* gradually links that promise to forms of knowledge and temporality it cannot fully control.

This hybridity also becomes visible in Cooper’s methods of detection, since he moves between what Jenner calls “rational-scientific” and “irrational-subjective detection” (11). The latter recalls the hard-boiled tradition, in which detection depends less on detached certainty than on instinct, immersion, and provisional knowledge (14). On the one hand, Cooper relies on factual detail, anchoring himself through precise data and linear temporal logic. On the other hand, he is increasingly tied to forms of detection that Jenner associates with instinct (15), as in the Tibetan method or his openness to dreams.²² This combination is central to Cooper’s appeal. He is neither coldly bureaucratic nor simply irrational. Rather, his openness to non-deductive knowledge does not cancel his commitment to actionable knowledge.

A good example of this mixed method appears in Cooper’s previously mentioned exchange with Briggs. When Briggs invokes Hamlet’s claim during their get-together Cooper reacts with “Amen,” but still insists that it is their job to stop evil (“Arbitrary Law” 00:43:22–00:45:02). The scene confronts him with knowledge that exceeds empirical explanation, yet he still tries to translate it into investigative action. Cooper’s mixed method therefore works because the series initially still gives him a recognizable investigative frame in which intuition, dream knowledge, and procedural action remain compatible.

In this context, Jenner notes that the familiar whodunit structure can help stabilize the narrative frame of formally unusual detective series (6). *Twin Peaks* is a useful example of this, since the question of who killed Laura Palmer first provides the series with a recognizable point of orientation. Cooper gives this frame its operative form by turning Laura’s murder into an ongoing process of inquiry. Yet this stability does not remain intact. As the analysis has shown, the investigative logic that promises order gradually encounters disruptions it cannot organize. In this sense, the Red Room, the Giant, the Lodges, and the Doppelgänger are an essential part of the series and alter the conditions of detection itself.

Specifically, Laura’s whisper first appears as a clue Cooper cannot yet use, the Giant’s riddles mark knowledge as significant without making it actionable, and Cooper’s final entrapment turns a major event into the series’ largest stalled interval. Delay is, of course, not

²² In “Zen, or the Skill to Catch a Killer,” Cooper tells his team about his devotion to Tibet, spirituality, dream logic, and a deductive technique involving mind, body, and intuition before throwing rocks at a glass bottle to advance the murder investigation.

foreign to detective fiction or police procedurals. What is unusual here is that delay no longer clearly serves investigation. In a more conventional structure, withheld information or postponed response sustains suspense while still pointing toward later clarification. In Cooper's shooting scene and his final moments of season 2, however, delay becomes a blockage between event and consequence.

The series therefore keeps the detective structure visible while weakening the temporal assumptions that usually support it, including sequence, causality, progress, and closure. Cooper's arc thus also intersects with Jenner's account of postmodern detective forms, which unsettle the assumptions that the world can be fully ordered, that truth can be reached from a neutral position, and that the investigator remains a coherent and stable subject (30–32).

This pressure becomes clear in the placement and form of Laura's murder reveal. Cooper does identify the killer. In that sense, he remains the figure who solves the crime that initially appears to organize the narrative. Yet the timing of this solution changes the status of the murder mystery itself. Because Laura's murder is solved long before the series ends, it becomes clear that "Who killed Laura Palmer?" was never the only or final problem the series had been building toward. Instead, the investigation opens onto a larger structure of recurrence, possession, and Lodge temporality that cannot be contained by the whodunit model. Cooper's achievement is therefore real but limited. The procedural promise is fulfilled only to be exceeded, since solving the central crime does not restore coherence to the world the crime has exposed. Although the killer is revealed, this discovery is immediately destabilized, and the world of the series becomes less settled rather than more resolved. These points will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Finally, when the agent who should return from the alternative place with answers remains trapped in its antimimetic temporality, while his double enters the world in his place, the uncertainty that had structured the investigation is finally turned back onto the investigator himself. This displacement also has a specifically serial and televisual form. Cooper's earlier promise can be reduced to a procedural logic in which hidden signs are decoded, and crime is brought into resolution. By the finale, however, the code has expanded beyond the crime itself. In story time, Cooper remains trapped while his double exits. In discourse time, this split is shaped through recurring rooms and unstable transitions, while the original Cooper is left unseen. In narration time, the season ends with a major cliffhanger. *Twin Peaks* thus keeps the detective visible while detaching him from the authority that once made him legible. Cooper is no longer only the main figure who pursues the mystery. He has become one of its unresolved objects.

Leland Palmer

Having discussed investigation and crime, work and the home, it is now necessary to turn to one of the series' most central father figures, if not its most central one: Leland Palmer. As he presents a distinct type of father figure in the series, he requires a different analytical approach than Ben, Briggs, or Cooper. Although he stands at the center of the plot as Laura's killer, he does not appear within the story world as a father who openly directs events through command, expertise, or institutional authority. Instead, he remains legible for a long time as a normative suburban father figure, and he does so within scenes that initially preserve a largely coherent temporal order. Thus, his authority is tied to family respectability and paternal care. What makes Leland central to this thesis is that his paternal authority is not shattered at once but repeatedly maintained after it has already begun to fail. The series does not simply hide him until the reveal. Rather, it marks him as strange, unstable, excessive, or out of sync, while delaying the moment at which those signs can become consequential. His authority is first protected by temporal delay, then absorbed by ritual and social space, then displaced into visible mismatch, and only very late forced into legibility through belated recognition and confinement. Thus, Leland's concealment is not only a matter of mystery plotting, but also a way for *Twin Peaks* to examine how paternal authority can remain socially and narratively readable even when the signs that should disturb it are already present.

Provisional Coherence

The pilot introduces Leland within a largely linear sequence that gives him his initial temporal coherence ("Northwest Passage" 00:12:32–00:15:20). He first appears at work, participating in a meeting as Ben's attorney, and is immediately framed as a socially legible and respectable professional. When a phone call interrupts him, he excuses himself and the camera follows his movement in a steady long take as he leaves the meeting room, crosses into the lobby, and sits down to continue the call. The scene therefore marks him through spatial continuity and controlled progression. At the same time, the phone conversation links him to Sarah, who calls from home because she is worried about Laura's absence. The contrast is clear as Sarah is framed within a tighter domestic composition, while Leland appears in a more open professional setting. Her brown-toned clothing blends into the brown interior of the Palmer home, whereas he is placed against the brighter background of the office windows. Through shot/reverse-shot, the scene keeps the two spaces clearly separate while also binding them together through dialogue.

The crucial shift occurs when a police car pulls up in the background and Sheriff Truman approaches the building. This staging lets decisive information enter the frame visually before it reaches Leland. While he remains absorbed in the foreground conversation, the viewer already sees, approaching from behind, official confirmation of Sarah's fear. The effect is suspenseful anticipation through delay. Leland seemingly continues to speak within a present that has not yet caught up with the catastrophe that the viewer knows, and Sarah already fears. When the camera cuts to Truman at the counter asking for Leland, his line of sight is directed back toward the area in which Leland has just been framed, so the cut clearly establishes the relation between the two men and remains spatially coherent. When Leland finally sees him, his expression changes and he slowly lowers the phone. Through his words, "Sheriff Truman," Sarah understands what has happened, and her cries continue through the receiver. In this way, domestic catastrophe becomes audible in the public setting before it is fully verbalized there. Leland is thus positioned between Sarah's anxiety and Truman's official authority, a framing that underlines his ability to operate between the two spaces and, in turn, supports his legibility as a father figure of the private as well as the public space.

From this point onward, the scene still largely follows a causal progression. Leland rises, meets Truman at eye level, drops the phone, clutches Truman's jacket, and begins to cry. Visually, the two men are briefly aligned. They occupy a similar position in the frame, stand at nearly the same height, and are linked by the muted palette of browns, blacks, and beige. Without overstating the point, this visual similarity places Leland momentarily close to Truman's official authority rather than simply opposite it. Yet the scene also introduces a small but significant disturbance. The viewer never hears Truman officially tell Leland what happened. Instead, when Ben arrives and asks what is wrong, Leland says, "My daughter's dead." Him making the conclusion still fits the immediate logic of paternal intuition and shock, but it also places a slight strain on the sequence of information, since inferred knowledge appears to run ahead of what has been explicitly told. The father is briefly positioned as the one authorized to name the loss, even before official knowledge has been fully delivered.

The scene in the "Northwest Passage" therefore does two things at once. On the one hand, it introduces Leland within an ordered and largely linear structure in which shock, grief, and recognition remain legible. On the other hand, it already contains a small temporal disturbance. Information appears to move step by step from Sarah's worry to Truman's arrival, to Leland's recognition, and finally to his verbal naming of Laura's death, yet that sequence is not entirely seamless. Thus, the pilot still protects him as a normative father. His reaction is

framed as coherent grief, and the slight irregularity in the information flow is absorbed rather than pursued.

Absorbed Interruption

A more overt form of this temporal disturbance appears in the funeral scene. The burial ceremony is a ritual designed to move mourning forward, however, it becomes stuck (“Rest in Pain” 00:26:18–00:30:53). At first, the scene offers a clear visual and social order. The coffin is centered, the mourners are arranged on either side, and the ceremony proceeds in a steady rhythm. In this way, the scene establishes a template of ritual coherence in which death is meant to be processed collectively and given a shared progression. That order is first disturbed when Bobby’s outburst introduces visible and audible chaos, crowding the frame and destabilizing the ceremony. What matters more however, is that the cut to Leland does not show him reacting to this disruption at all. Instead, he remains fixed in a separate rhythm while the crowd continues to move behind him.

When Leland throws himself onto the coffin, the scene shifts from disruption to stalling. The shot cuts closer and compresses him and the casket into a tight frame. After Bobby has already broken the ritual’s surface order, Leland’s collapse produces a second and more structurally revealing disturbance from within the ceremony itself. As the men try to pull him away, the image remains tight and the movement becomes repetitive, with Leland and the coffin moving up and down in a stuck rhythm. A cut exposes Sarah standing above him from a low angle, with other mourners behind her also looking downward, so that several lines of sight converge on the same point. This isolates Leland visually as the scene’s central source of disruption. The contrast with Bobby’s eruption is telling as Bobby is restrained quickly and forcefully, whereas the men pulling at Leland appear hesitant and ineffective. Sarah’s line, “don’t ruin this too,” gives verbal form to the disruption and suggests that she understands his behavior as part of a larger pattern. Yet the line is not pursued any further and its implication remains suspended. What finally ends the scene is not social intervention, but the coffin’s own downward movement, which carries Leland out of the frame as the image fades to black.

Thus, the funeral should provide a ritual in which mourning is contained and moved forward one step at a time, especially for Laura’s parents. When Leland interrupts that ritual, the result is stalling in a highly charged emotional state of the father. His disruption is fully visible, public, and highly physical, but it does not become accountable.

Temporal Displacement

This pattern of interruption also shapes Leland's first scene in the second season, where he brings cheerfulness into a house marked by stillness and mourning (00:22:15–00:24:00). Sarah and Maddy (Sheryl Lee) sit in the living room, and the scene initially moves at a slow domestic pace. Maddy's lowered gaze suggests inward withdrawal, while the repetition in Sarah's question further slows the dialogue and extends the sense of suspended movement. Against this, Leland's intrusion is first registered through sound. He is heard singing before he is seen, and Sarah's immediate annoyance confirms that his entrance does not match the temporal rhythm already established in the room. When he appears, the contrast becomes even sharper. Sarah and Maddy are dressed in their pajamas, whereas Leland enters in a business suit, as if moving in a different temporal and social order altogether. His appearance suggests work and forward movement, not grief or domestic stillness.

Further, his suddenly white hair intensifies this disturbance by making him appear as though an unshown stretch of time has already passed through him. Thus, the scene hovers between subjective and objective anachrony as Leland's altered body suggests that time has passed differently for him, but the narration provides no external chronology against which to confirm whether the change is internal or actual. For the viewer, and to some extent for Sarah and Maddy as well, his altered appearance arrives as a sudden break that has not been narratively worked through. The corresponding temporal progression is not shown but replaced by an ellipsis that becomes visible in the body. The effect is therefore still essentially mimetic, but it pushes the scene toward instability by making regular progression feel absent. Leland does not simply enter the room changed; he enters as if time has moved differently for him than for everyone else present.

The song intensifies this problem in a very precise way. What matters here is not the interpretation of the song, but the temporal and auditory structure of the performance. At first, the lyrics are accelerated to the point that the words blur together, so Leland enters not only loudly, but partly unreadably: "Mairzy doats and dozy doats and liddle lamzy divey." For a moment, the scene seems to offer clarification when he explains the lyrics himself—"Mares eat oats and does eat oats and little lambs eat ivy" (Drake, Hoffman, and Livingston). Yet this intelligibility does not hold. He immediately slips back into the same quick, blurred rhythm and carries on. In other words, the scene briefly produces readability only to withdraw it again. Sarah tries to interrupt him, but her intervention neither stops nor changes his tempo as she runs after him.

The episode then repeats this structure in Ben's office, which makes the pattern very deliberate (00:24:27–00:25:25). Again, Leland is heard singing before he is seen, and again the same song carries over into a new setting. The editing gives the impression that the singing continues across spaces, so it does not register as an isolated outburst but as an ongoing rhythm that follows him from the domestic interior into the workplace. Yet the temporal logic of the second space is different. Ben's office is already organized around progression and performance. Within that logic, Leland's white hair and buoyant tempo no longer register primarily as disturbance. Ben and Jerry snap, dance along, and immediately reclassify him as entertainment. The framing further supports this shift. In the house, Sarah and Maddy remain seated while Leland stands above and between them, making his body appear as a dominant intrusion. In the office, by contrast, the camera places him within Ben's hierarchy, already oriented away from domesticity and emotional intimacy and toward continuation.

Taken together, the two singing scenes form a case of pseudo-frequency as the same performance returns in a different setting with only slight variation, so that what looks like one continuous outburst is in fact two separate events that resist clean placement in sequence. Also, the scenes show the same temporal disturbance receiving two different kinds of non-accountability, comparable to a non-event, since an expected response is prepared but never arrives. At home, Leland interrupts the scene's established tempo, but the audio-visual mismatch is not successfully acted on. In the office, the same altered tempo is not treated as a problem at all. Thus, Leland is not made to explain his changed appearance or behavior either because he simply escapes it or because his disturbance can be folded into the space's own forward-moving logic.

Belated Recognition and Forced Legibility

Shortly before Leland is revealed as the killer of Laura and Maddy, the series presents the point at which delayed signs begin to become readable ("Arbitrary Law" 00:26:55–00:32:08). By now, Cooper appears to consider him one of the possible suspects, yet he does not expose him through direct procedural means such as asking for an alibi or confronting him with evidence. Instead, he openly states that he has tried many investigative methods and will now turn to what he calls "magic." This shift toward a more intuitive and ritualized mode of detection is reinforced formally by the staging of the Roadhouse. The tables have been moved aside, the figures are distributed across the room without a single clear organizing pattern, and the editing withholds a stable overview of the space by cutting through a series of medium shots and close-ups from shifting angles. The room is not arranged like a procedural scene of identification in

which truth is progressively clarified through questioning and open evidence, as it might be with other characters at the police station. Rather, it feels suspended, as if recognition will have to emerge from fragments already in circulation rather than from a straightforward evidentiary sequence. The red curtains and flickering light also recall the temporality associated with the Red Room. Time is made unusually explicit when Cooper checks his watch and the camera cuts to the wall clock showing 3 p.m. In this context, the emphasis on time suggests that what has long been deferred is beginning to catch up with Leland.

The exchange about “that gum you like” “coming back in style” returns and crucially, works on two temporal levels at once. On the level of the sentence, it describes return by linking past, present, and future. On the level of discourse, the phrase functions as an analeptic reactivation as it returns from Cooper’s earlier dream and Briggs’s backwards statement under the truth serum, so that suspended material from the past becomes newly legible in the present. The truth is therefore not disclosed through straightforward progression, but arrives in reverse, delayed and non-linearly, as something that must be temporally rearranged before it can be understood. At the same time, the scene’s temporality is double: its forward procedural movement is stalled, while the longer delay that has protected Leland begins to close. Instead of allowing the moment to unfold in a continuous line, the subsequent editing isolates faces in a rapid succession of close shots, creating a stalling effect that interrupts the scene’s smooth forward progression. What returns here is not new information, but information that had already been present without yet being usable. The gum phrase, the music, and a cut to Laura’s earlier whispered message all reactivate suspended material from the dream and make it operative in the present.

The cell scene in the same episode then forces that belated legibility into a more concentrated and coercive form (00:33:00–00:35:24). As Leland is pushed inside, his movement becomes animal-like and immediate. Ben’s line, “That’s not Leland,” marks the collapse of the old social frame, even if it also offers one last way of displacing consequence by explaining him as someone else. Compared to the earlier scenes in which Leland’s strange behavior unfolded while others either absorbed it or moved past it, this is the first time he is made to sit still in front of the police and answer direct questions, which is a crucial shift. Leland is not a figure moving through scenes at his own tempo anymore, but an object of focused scrutiny. The camera reinforces this change through overhead shots that place him under observation and through tight medium close-ups that register rapid shifts across his face, from laughter to screaming, seriousness, aggression, and calm. What had previously circulated

across social and domestic space is now isolated and held in place. Instability is not absorbed by ritual, grief or performance of the normative father but converted into interrogation material.

At the same time, the cell does not simply deliver a clean triumph of truth. The harsh audiovisual field—flickering light, low angles, abrupt disruptions such as the sprinklers going off—makes the space coercive and unstable, not clarifying (00:38:40–00:43:22). Leland’s body is no longer carried along by social rhythm but pushed into exposure. This becomes striking when he repeatedly smashes his head against the door. The blows are not shown directly but heard from outside the shot, so the violence is unmistakable while its action remains partially eclipsed. The officers try to intervene, but the delay with the keys means that they reach him only after he has already collapsed. Even now when Leland is finally contained and made answerable, consequence still arrives too late. The scene therefore does not convert exposure into control but preserves the larger pattern of belatedness that has structured his arc from the beginning.

Once Leland begins to confess, the scene turns him inward and backward, into memory, emotion, and delayed recognition, as if he is only now confronting his actions and his past. That recognition is immediately bound up with BOB, which complicates the father’s guilt. On the one hand, BOB displaces responsibility by allowing Leland not to remain fully legible as the sole human source of rape and murder. On the other hand, this displacement weakens the expected logic of temporal and legal consequence. The confession does not lead into trial, punishment, or a stable “after.” Instead, Leland is moved almost directly from confession into death, with Cooper effectively escorting him out of the legal timeline and back to Laura, as Leland seems to see her in his final moments. Even after the series has finally exposed Leland, punishment is displaced into pathos, and the paternal myth survives in altered form.

Interpretation: The Normative Father

Leland’s paternal authority persists because the series repeatedly delays or displaces the moment at which his behavior can become consequential. The following interpretation therefore reads his paternal authority as a role actively sustained after it has already begun to fail. Signs of instability appear early in body, speech, and social behavior, yet they do not become meaningful when they first emerge. Instead, they are absorbed by grief, ritual, familiarity, and the formal logic of mystery narration, which withholds their connection to the hidden story. The chapter thus traces a movement from provisional coherence to absorbed disturbance, then to visible mismatch, and finally to belated recognition and forced legibility. In Leland’s case, his hiding in plain sight is not only a narrative trick, but a cultural mechanism.

The father is difficult to read as the perpetrator precisely because fatherhood itself provides a socially credible surface. When Leland/BOB says, “You’ve been a good vehicle ... but now [you’re] weak and full of holes” he effectively names Leland’s body as a vehicle for evil, and more specifically his white, male, and suburban body (“Arbitrary Law” 00:34:26–00:34:35).

As established in the theoretical framework, the normative father is culturally coded as a stable and legitimate figure within family life. Leland draws on this form, but *Twin Peaks* turns it inside out. Unlike the more active forms of paternal authority embodied by Ben, Briggs, and Cooper, Leland does not need to direct a business, guide a child, or reconstruct a crime to be granted authority. Of course, the authority of the other father figures also depends on social legibility, since Ben must be recognizable as businessman, Briggs as military father and guardian of classified knowledge, and Cooper as detective and lawman. What distinguishes Leland, however, is that recognition does more of the work on its own. His authority is not demonstrated through a forward-moving logic of exercising expertise or making money. It is granted through the familiar roles attached to him before his behavior is assessed. Accordingly, Leland functions as the normative father, whose authority rests on prior credibility.

What makes Leland central to this thesis is therefore that his paternal authority is repeatedly maintained when the series keeps showing that he does not fully fit the roles others assign to him, yet the story world keeps repairing this mismatch on his behalf. Narration, framing, bodily performance, music, and editing mark him as irregular, while the characters around him continue to place him back into recognizable categories: father, husband, mourner, professional, victim of BOB, suffering man. This creates an important split: On the level of discourse, the series signals that Leland’s role is unstable, but on the level of the story world, that instability is absorbed into no questions and familiar explanations. He is therefore not simply the opposite of the normative suburban father, but its negative image, since the same signs that make him recognizable as a father figure also make him difficult to read as a perpetrator.

If Leland’s paternal authority is not inherent but produced, the first episode shows that this production initially happens through contrast, above all through Sarah. Her strong intuition and immobilized grief within the domestic space make Leland appear, by comparison, as the “stronger” parent. Gilbert’s account of 1950s sitcom gender roles is useful here, since it describes a cultural model in which mothers remain tied to the home while fathers occupy the position of public and familial authority (140). *Twin Peaks* does not simply reproduce this model, yet the pilot briefly activates its familiar oppositions of domestic and public, emotional

and rational. In this way, Sarah's distress helps make Leland's initial authority appear natural and recognizable.

Signs around Leland may also be present without functioning as evidence because the visible story of public crime and bereaved fatherhood temporarily conceals the hidden story of violence within the paternal home. One way the instability of Leland's paternal role becomes visible is through failed uptake in speech. Leland offers verbal clues from his first moments on screen, yet his speech fails to produce accountability. In the pilot, he names Laura's death before Truman tells him directly. Sarah, by contrast, repeatedly asks to be told, as if she needs the fact to be verbalized before she can fully receive it. Leland does not require that same verbal confirmation, which creates an early disturbance in how knowledge passes through him. At the funeral, Sarah's line, "Don't ruin this too," produces a related effect. The word "too" implies an earlier history of damage, but that implication is not taken up by the people and specifically the officers around them. The "Mairzy Doats" scenes develop this problem even more explicitly. The song is built on homophones that sound meaningless until they are translated, so that intelligibility appears only briefly and then slips away again, which can be formally relevant to Leland's analysis more broadly.

The same pattern is not limited to language but also emerges through the body. Leland's body repeatedly registers disturbance before language or social interpretation catches up. In the pilot, he reacts physically before Laura's death is verbalized. At the funeral, his collapse onto the coffin reverses the earlier contrast with Sarah, as she becomes the figure trying to contain the ritual while his body disrupts it. Later, his sudden white hair and accelerated singing make his presence difficult to place within the situation around him. Finally, the cell scene gathers these earlier disturbances into a hostile visual field of abrupt emotional shifts and self-inflicted violence. The blows against the wall are not shown directly, but their sound makes the damage unmistakable. Across these scenes, Leland's body becomes a formal carrier of knowledge. It marks what the story world refuses, delays, or fails to process. The problem is therefore not simple concealment. His body makes the disturbance visible before the other characters can interpret it correctly, and by the time that disturbance becomes legible, it is already too late.

After Laura's death, another pattern becomes clear at the level of story world interpretation. Leland is no longer legible only as a respectable professional, husband, and father. He is also legible as a grieving father, and that role expands what others are willing to tolerate. The failure is therefore not only investigative, but very social as the community gives Leland room to suffer, yet this room also prevents his behavior from becoming evidence. He is not protected because people fail to notice his strange behavior. They do notice it. He is

protected because what they see already has a credible social explanation, and that explanation is the normative father who is not revised even when his behavior and appearance become conspicuously irregular. Although his white hair can be linked to the killing of Jacques Renault (Walter Olkewicz), this reinforces the same point, since Leland is not made accountable for that murder either. His act is absorbed by the explanation of the vengeful, mourning father. Grief then turns disturbance or unexplained interruption into something emotionally meaningful rather than causally meaningful, and the humane response of the community has an interpretive cost.

Bobby's outburst at the funeral makes this social dimension explicit on the level of discourse. His overly repeated "You're dead" and his accusation that all of them killed Laura shift the scene away from private family mourning toward collective responsibility. This does not remove Leland's responsibility for Laura's death. Rather, it places his violence within a community structure that helped keep Laura unread and Leland credible. The scene stresses this point formally by giving Bobby's accusation significant visual and vocal force in the same scene in which Leland throws himself onto the coffin. First, Bobby's accusation and screaming turn Laura's death into a shared social problem. Then Leland's jump redirects the visual focus, making the father the scene's central image.

This prepares the funeral's central visual contradiction. In the story world, Leland is still read as the grieving father whose collapse expresses unbearable loss. The image, however, tells a different story. By throwing himself onto Laura's coffin, Leland attaches himself physically to the daughter whose death has already broken his paternal relation. As the coffin descends, the image briefly suggests that he is being lowered into the ground with the bond he has destroyed. Yet that collapse is not allowed to become final. He returns afterward and remains socially readable as the bereaved father. The paternal role therefore survives even after the relation that should ground it has been annihilated.

Maddy extends this same logic by allowing the broken father-daughter relation to return in substituted form. Since she is played by the same actress as Laura and is also marked within the story world by their strong resemblance, she functions not simply as a cousin or secondary victim, but as a replacement figure through whom the earlier paternal relation reappears. Her death therefore sharpens the gap between what the series has long been formally marking and what the characters are able to process. This has direct consequences for the paternal myth itself. If fatherhood is culturally tied to protection, continuity, and the securing of the child's future, Leland reverses that function.

Once Leland is finally forced into legibility, the series immediately complicates what that legibility means. In the split between Leland and BOB, it is openly BOB who carries horror, violence, and monstrosity, while Leland is increasingly framed through suffering, confession, memory, and remorse. This separation is available both to the characters and to the viewer, but it remains unstable. On the one hand, it explains how Leland can be recognized without being left as the sole bearer of paternal violence. On the other hand, it protects part of him at the very moment when the series has finally made him readable. That is crucial because the discourse has long shown that his body, speech, and behavior were already carrying the signs of failed paternal authority. The split therefore does not erase what came before, but it weakens the force of consequence once recognition arrives.

Cooper's role at the end intensifies this effect as his dramatically staged care additionally frames the ending. In this sense, Leland receives repeated interpretive assistance. Grief explains his early behavior, BOB explains his violence, and the final scene gives his death a spiritual and emotional frame. The result is that fatherhood continues to cling to him even after the paternal bond has been destroyed by his own acts. By killing Laura (and Maddy), Leland annihilates what made him a father in the first place, yet the series does not strip the role away from him. His paternal authority is finally made legible as failed, but it is never allowed to collapse.

Having traced how each father figure's authority is shaped and destabilized through temporal form, the synthesis now asks what their shared failure reveals about the broader relation between *Twin Peaks*, television temporality, and the myths of continuity on which both depend.

Synthesis

Read together, the four analyses describe a single structural movement under different surface conditions. Each father figure is introduced through a temporal mode that initially appears to organize his world—Ben's instrumental futurity, Briggs's controlled disclosure, Cooper's procedural sequence, Leland's socially accepted continuity—and each loses authority at the point where that mode can no longer absorb what reaches it. What differs is not whether linear time fails, but how visibly it does so and how long the failure can be deferred. Ben converts collapse into staged historical performance, Briggs is drawn bodily into Lodge temporality, Cooper is split between an exiting double and a trapped original, and Leland is granted credibility long after his behavior has marked him as illegible. The series therefore does not

show four different crises of fatherhood, but four positions within the same crisis of paternal time.

The four figures can be compared across the same axes that organizes the individual chapters. In terms of temporal logic, Ben operates through compressed forward movement, Briggs through controlled release, Cooper through procedural sequence, and Leland through socially sustained continuity. Their sources of authority differ accordingly: Ben draws on economic command, Briggs on rank and classified knowledge, Cooper on investigative competence, Leland on prior credibility as a respectable father. Their modes of failure also diverge—Ben loses control over real outcomes, Briggs loses bodily continuity, Cooper loses interpretive coherence, Leland loses the protective gap between behavior and recognition. In relation to the 1950s television father, Ben exposes the economic underside the model concealed, Briggs comes closest to its idealized balance before being overtaken, Cooper translates its paternal calm into procedural authority, and Leland inhabits its respectable surface so fully that its violence remains unreadable for almost the entire series.

If, as Ryan insists, narrative sequence remains a basically linear phenomenon (176), then *Twin Peaks* derives much of its critical force from refusing to let that baseline operate as a guarantee.

Repetition and Return

Repetition is one of the main temporal forms through which *Twin Peaks* works, and it does so on several levels at once: as narrative recurrence, as visual return, as televisual familiarity, and as cultural repetition of inherited paternal models. Through the series' repeated return to scenes, gestures, images, and roles that seem familiar, it keeps the past active as something to be looked at rather than left behind.

Brooks's account of repetition helps explain why return becomes central to the series' production of meaning. His question of repetition as "sameness or difference" applies directly to television as a form structured by return, since repetition "always includes the idea of variation in time, and may even be potentially a progressive act" (124). Repetition therefore does not simply bring back the same event or structure. It changes what returns by placing it in a new temporal position. Brooks's second point is equally important: repetition can act as a "reminder that we cannot really move ahead until we have understood that still enigmatic past, yet ever pushing us forward since revelation, tied to the past, belongs to the future" (125). Return therefore holds the narrative between belated understanding and future expectation,

keeping the past active not as something finished but as something whose meaning remains deferred.

Weinelt makes these ideas concrete at the level of the series' visual form. He argues that the repeatedly returning tableau of the Red Room becomes so familiar that even small changes, such as the ninety-degree rotation of the zigzag floor pattern in *Fire Walk with Me*, become immediately noticeable, although their meaning remains uncertain. This principle of difference inside recurrence extends beyond the Red Room and shapes individual plot elements, which may appear as repetition, homage, or correction (93).

This is clearest in the series' return to Laura. Her death produces the desire for explanation, but it does not become a past that can be mastered and left behind. Instead, Laura keeps returning through images, sounds, doubles, substitutions, and delayed recognitions. Maddy makes this structure visible by appearing as a second Laura, repeating parts of Laura's relational position in compressed form. Through her murder, the past returns as renewed vulnerability within the same structure. Laura is where all paternal temporalities fail as she cannot be protected, explained, restored, or left in the past but keeps returning as an unresolved figure pointing to a larger issue.

As established in the theoretical framework, chrononormativity helps explain why disrupting time at all affects paternal authority. It unsettles the norm through which father figures appear natural and socially necessary (Freeman 4–5). Bal's account of interruption then translates this social temporal norm back into aesthetic form. In "Activating Temporalities," she writes that art itself can be understood as interruption, since it disrupts the assumption that time simply flows naturally and makes the relation between before and after visible (*Activating Temporalities* 89). Interruption becomes a "motor of narrativity" because it brings the times before and after "to the stage" and foregrounds the artwork's intervention into the movement of life (89). Her claim that "art requires durational looking" (*Activating Temporalities* 101) further clarifies how this works in *Twin Peaks*: the series requires sustained attention to repeated images, gestures, sounds, and returns before deeper meaning can emerge. From Ben's Civil War fantasy and Briggs's disappearance into the Lodge to Cooper lying shot on the floor and Leland's repeated intrusions in social situations, these interruptions do not simply delay the plot. They make temporal order itself perceptible as something constructed, unstable, and unevenly experienced.

The paternal myth therefore appears more openly against a cultural background in which fatherhood functions as a temporal promise of uninterrupted forward movement, promising results and a stable future outcome. Bal's critique of chronology and its "assumed

evolutionism” is useful here, since the series refuses the idea that forward movement naturally means progress (90). Instead, time in *Twin Peaks* repeatedly returns and stalls, so that paternal authority loses the temporal ground on which its legitimacy depends. These disruptions can now be understood against the narratological baseline established earlier. Genette’s categories of order, duration, and frequency describe how mimetic narrative produces coherence through recoverable temporal relations. *Twin Peaks* repeatedly activates these expectations only to withhold their resolution, so that the father figures who depend on linear sequence lose the formal conditions that would make their authority legible.

Against this background, Margaret can be mentioned as one figure who makes an alternative perception of time visible. Unlike Briggs, whose openness to Lodge temporality still operates through institutional mediation, Margaret arrives with knowledge that is already charged, fragmentary, and resistant to evidentiary logic. Her relation to the log gives this knowledge a quasi-maternal form, connecting her physically and visually to the temporal order of the forest. Margaret therefore shows that the series does not replace paternal order with emptiness but opens forms of knowledge temporally misaligned with action, proof, and linear control.

Televisual Memory

This logic prepares the next dimension of the synthesis: the series’ self-reflexive relation to television form. Television depends on delay, recurrence, episodic and seasonal structure, and the viewer’s repeated return to a postponed outcome. Mystery plots intensify this structure through their promise of eventual explanation. *Twin Peaks* builds on this promise but refuses to let it fully stabilize narrative meaning, and it is here that the series exposes how television organizes expectation through time.

Having established the 1950s father as a televisual memory rather than a direct historical model, *Twin Peaks* can now be read as a series that works on this inherited image from within television itself. Recalling Ravizza’s claim that television functions as “the locale of memory,” the series does not simply return to the 1950s but to a version of the decade already shaped by television (16). Ben and Leland expose this memory from two sides. Ben redirects paternal nostalgia away from the domestic home and toward business. Leland, by contrast, inhabits the respectable suburban father image more directly, which is why his violence remains unreadable within the story world for so long. To make this contrast visible, Ben functions as a red herring whose apparent guilt redirects suspicion away from Leland. He is an obvious suspect because his economic corruption, sexual misconduct, and open abuse of power already

mark him as morally compromised. Recalling the 1950s model of “good guys” and “bad guys” (R. Wilson 23), *Twin Peaks* uses Ben and Leland to force contradiction and moral ambiguity back into a televisual image that had depended on their exclusion.

This contrast also clarifies why the series’ self-reflexivity belongs to its critique of paternal authority. Recalling Roche’s definition of meta as “an acceleration of reflexivity that serves as commentary on the nature of the fiction itself” (3), *Twin Peaks* performs precisely such a movement when it stages the forms through which fatherhood had become televisually recognizable. Ben’s Civil War reenactment turns paternal authority into overt performance. Briggs’s authority is repeatedly linked to transmission, foregrounding communication systems and signs instead of treating knowledge as direct or transparent. Cooper’s Red Room and Lodge scenes, with red curtains reminiscent of the theater, transform detection into a staged space where signs no longer function as reliable evidence.²³ Leland’s reveal depends on theatricalized spectatorship as well: his singing, dancing, and public breakdowns repeatedly turn him into a figure watched, while the Roadhouse scene prepares his exposure against the same red curtains. In each case, paternal authority does not appear as something simply possessed. It becomes visible as something actively framed and mediated.

Strank gives this point a more precise formal vocabulary. He describes *Twin Peaks* as a series already received as an innovative attempt to show and stretch “die Grenzen des Fernsehens” self-reflexively (355). The series negotiates self-reference across several levels, beginning with its engagement with television genres such as soap opera, whodunit crime series, and mystery (356). These are also the forms through which paternal authority becomes legible: the family world, the moral guide, the investigation, and the revelation of hidden violence. Strank’s discussion of represented media inside the series and his focus on staged performance situations, including the Roadhouse and the Red Room, where mise-en-scène, theatricality, and spectatorship become central further makes mediation visible (358–61). The stage links theatricality to television’s own constructedness, thus, staged spaces make visible the medium’s dependence on framing and controlled arrangement and therefore offer one of the clearest formal models for how the series presents authority as a construction.

²³ Shohet’s emphasis on theatre as a medium particularly suited to engaging temporality, because of its strong temporal component, supports this framework (3). His claim that temporality and form become mutually illuminating when read together also helps clarify why theatrical form matters for an analysis of time (7). Rabey similarly links theatrical meaning to intersubjective encounter, dynamic space, and the estrangement of linear time (13). His distinction between cyclical or seasonal time and the modern ideology of linear, man-made progress further frames temporal disruption as a challenge to authority and historical direction (29–30).

This self-reflexive staging also connects the series to the historical shift from older television forms to complex serial television. Mittell helps show how narrative complexity rejects “the need for plot closure within every episode” and instead foregrounds ongoing stories across genres (18). *Twin Peaks* uses this serial openness against the restorative habits associated with earlier television. It takes familiar forms that traditionally promised order, such as the family drama and the police investigation, but prevents them from producing stable closure. Weinstock’s reading sharpens this self-reflexive dimension through a specific example: after Leland’s death, Cooper, Truman, Albert, and Briggs offer “a kind of metacommentary on the series” as they share the same questions with which the viewer is left despite having seen BOB (5). The Leland reveal therefore exposes the risk built into television’s promise of revelation. Once the paternal criminal is made visible, the main story arc reaches a climax that Weinstock says “arguably broke the show” (7). This can be read as a problem of suspense, since the obvious central question has been answered. Yet another dimension is more important here. Closure is achieved, but it damages the serial desire that had sustained the program. Recalling Bal’s understanding of art as interruption and Brooks’s account of repetition, this also shows how strongly *Twin Peaks* depends on non-closure and non-linearity. Once the series is forced into revelation, the temporal logic that made it compelling is partly broken.²⁴

The larger point, then, is that *Twin Peaks* remembers and restages the promises of earlier American television to expose their instability as Ravizza shows that the 1950s are already a mediated image, Roche and Giannini help frame this as televisual reflexivity, Strank adds that that the show makes performance and mediation visible as formal principles, and finally, Weinstock shows how revelation itself becomes unstable within serial form.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has argued that *Twin Peaks* undermines paternal authority by disrupting the temporal logic that traditionally allows father figures to function as carriers of order in American television. Against the backdrop of 1950s sitcom fathers and the linear-teleological structure of the paternal myth, the selected father figures in *Twin Peaks* can be compared through the temporal forms that make their authority legible. When linearity weakens or fails, fatherhood no longer appears as a stable source of meaning. It becomes visible instead as a limited televisual role communicated through specific cultural-historical means.

²⁴ The reveal of Laura Palmer’s murderer is often discussed in relation to ABC’s pressure on Lynch and Frost to resolve the central mystery. The point here is not production history as such, but the formal consequence of that resolution.

Through a range of narratological concepts, the research subject is first approached for what it most basically is: a story told through the medium of television. After providing the necessary baseline for describing how temporal concepts shape narrative coherence, the paper moves beyond a purely reconstructive model to Alber and Richardson's account of unnatural temporality as an additional field "still being created and refined" (2). This is one direction that further research could examine more closely, asking how unnatural temporalities operate in audiovisual serial storytelling and complex TV through loops, incompatible timelines, reversed causality, impossible returns, denarrated events, and moments in which no stable fabula can be reconstructed.

The character analyses have shown how the paternal role moves across domestic, economic, institutional, and procedural forms of authority. The 1950s television father is shown to be a cultural fantasy that *Twin Peaks* places under pressure through its ambiguous father figures. On the surface, Leland is closest to this image because he appears as the suburban husband and father whose respectability remains socially credible through its normatively recognizable form. When *Twin Peaks* turns this image inside out, the suburban father is no longer the guarantor of safety but the central source of violence. The fact that this violence is structurally repeated and remains unreadable for so long shows how strongly the paternal role carries nostalgic credibility even after its ethical basis has collapsed. Ben, Briggs, and Cooper additionally expose what this specific image cannot contain: the economic underside of paternal provision detached from moral legitimacy in Ben's character, Briggs's moral goodness but clear incompleteness, and the gradual collapse of Cooper's initial promise to explain and save. Ben's Civil War plot is particularly rich for further analysis because it stages American historical myth-making as an explicit mechanism of paternal restoration, linking the father's authority directly to the performance of national narrative.

Although this paper has analyzed masculine figures, its aim has not been to shift attention away from feminist concerns. On the contrary, examining paternal authority helps clarify how patriarchy is made legible, sustained, and communicated through cultural and televisual forms. The nostalgic image of the 1950s father is not treated as a stable background model but as a structure that *Twin Peaks* repeats, stages, and exposes as fragile. At the same time, the scope of this thesis necessarily leaves several related areas only partially addressed. Lodge temporality, the series' self-reflexive elements, and the deeper background of the individual characters would each deserve fuller attention, and each of the father figures discussed here could sustain a separate study.

The argument could also be expanded from paternal authority to television seriality itself, especially in relation to changing viewing conditions and streaming, where a reception-oriented approach could ask how different forms of viewing shape the experience of narrative time as resistant to closure. A further extension would concern the series' generic hybridity, since *Twin Peaks* draws not only on mystery and police procedural forms but also on soap opera and horror, each of which produces different temporal expectations. A fuller genre-based study could ask how these competing expectations shape the father figures' relation to authority.

Finally, the figures outside the focus of this thesis would require a separate account. If paternal authority depends on temporal order, the question remains what kind of temporality is attached to maternal figures or female characters more broadly. Laura, Maddy, Sarah, and Margaret have appeared here where they clarify the failure of paternal time, but their own relations to memory, delay, and return remain an important direction for future research. Also, further research could examine how younger characters such as Bobby and Audrey relate to parental authority in comparison to the idealized family structures of 1950s television. Their resistance, distance, refusal or even inversion of paternal control may reveal another way in which *Twin Peaks* destabilizes inherited models of family continuity.

The larger franchise offers another productive direction. A similar structural approach could be applied to *Fire Walk with Me* and *The Return* as test cases for the present argument, asking whether they confirm, radicalize, or alter the connection between temporal disorder and weakened paternal authority. *Fire Walk with Me* would be especially important because it reverses the direction of the original series. Although it was released after the series, it moves before it and shifts attention from Cooper's investigation to Laura's lived time before death. In doing so, the film unsettles the hierarchy between detective knowledge and victim experience. Laura is no longer only the dead object around which the investigation is organized but becomes the subject whose perspective reshapes the story world. Leland's role could therefore be reconsidered through his more explicit domestic presence in the film, which would add another layer to his delayed unreadability in the original series.

The Return extends this problem even further. Its title appears to promise restoration, but the series actively withholds the return of known characters and narrative closure. Cooper's split into two opposed figures would be especially intriguing to analyze further. Mr. C preserves movement and effectiveness without Cooper's earlier ethical authority, while Dougie retains a benign presence but is almost completely stalled. Ben, too, seems slower and more reflective, although his non-domestic logic remains. Leland returns only as a Lodge-bound figure, while

Briggs becomes an even more complex paternal presence whose body crosses incompatible temporal dimensions.²⁵ These developments suggest that *The Return* prolongs the father figure's instability across a revived television form that itself refuses nostalgic recovery.²⁶

Twin Peaks suggests that paternal authority cannot be understood apart from the temporal structures that make it legible. It is time, finally, that allows these structures to appear as structures. And it is time, in another sense, to look at them closely and finally, move beyond them.

²⁵ Don S. Davis's death in 2008 necessarily shaped Briggs's limited bodily presence in *The Return*, but the series incorporates this absence into its broader logic of the series.

²⁶ On *The Return* as a metacommentary on revival television and serial expectation, see Moisich and Wierschem 154–55.

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