

Eternal Returns to a Peak Experience: Creating and Curating Play(ful) Tributes to Twin Peaks

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[Twin Peaks](#) [artistic tributes](#) [peak experience](#) [replaying](#) [toyification](#)

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This article documents the infinite allure of the cult series according to its own logic: In the spirit of play, what follows is a creative reflection of the author's personal exploration of Twin Peaks through fandom, artistry and curatorship that sets to traverse the boundaries of a traditional academic text. The autoethnographic, artistic compilation includes a retrospective and reflective documentation of the author's past experiences, exhibitions and events in relation to the Twin Peaks television series, seasons 1, 2 and 3; Twin Peaks: The Return, featuring a written introduction as well as ample visual and audiovisual material from the Peak Experience art exhibitions and related adventures. In the article, connections between the fictional series, its imaginative characters, and the actual geographic space of the pilot's (Season 1) filming locations are made to fan-art, as they are discussed as inspirational resources for fans and artists in the creation, crafting and curation of play(ful) tributes to Twin Peaks. As a scholarly contribution of a researcher of toys and play, the text references contemporary sources on play theory as well as source texts tying the reflection with analyses of Lynch's oeuvre. The discussion flows freely between the opus maximus that Twin Peaks is, and the innate playfulness and toyness of the artistic pieces produced for the ongoing exhibition series, as well as the author's own photoplay in reference to the activities as a fan of the television series. The collage of photographic and audiovisual 'playworks' and artworks, which function as research material for the analysis, are claimed to follow a 'lynchian aesthetic'—multiple and ambiguous in their identity – as proposed by Foster-Wallace (1997, 151), and represent the results of creation and curation of play(ful) tributes to Twin Peaks. By asking how 'the happening again' manifests in a loop of eternal returns, the author highlights the timeless gold of Twin Peaks as a source for artistry, fandom and play of creative adults.



Image 1. Curtain call: Meet the Peak Experience curator (self-portrait, 2017).

Beginning (1990–1992)

“I have no idea where this will lead us, but I have a definite feeling it will be a place both wonderful and strange”, David Lynch once said about *Twin Peaks* (Burns 2015, 15). It is on this very foundational idea I build on my analysis and discussion on the phenomenon that the fiction and fantasy of *Twin Peaks* is—filled with the ambiguity of simultaneous wonder and mesmerization so familiar to play.

People play because they enjoy perplexity (Henricks 2015, 383). For this reason, the quest for wonder and awe demand talent from those who strive to move us imaginatively and emotionally. Today’s creative talents, the artists, designers, authors and play makers of the world know that predictable playgrounds offer very little magic. In fact, it is unpredictability, rarity, novelty, beauty, color, secrecy, and incongruity, which all stretch the imagination and encourage flights of fantasy (Frost 2015, 430).

Players yearn to be wowed and play is said to sometimes yield peak experiences of particularly high personal quality (Kerr & Apter 1991, 112). For Brian Sutton-Smith (2004, xiii), play represents a peak experience, which manifests as self-actualization, as ‘flow of being in the zone’. “Play is of the mind,” states Sutton-Smith as documented by Dorothy Howard (in Darian-Smith & Factor 2006, 6). He believes that play, humor, true pretend, and dreams permit the mind to go anywhere.

“Engaging with any form of entertainment, particularly of a fictional nature, is a form of play” (Gray 2010, 205). Humans are also ‘playback machines’ (Gaines 1991) that record what they see, hear, and otherwise experience sensorially, and then play back those experiences, transforming them in the process (De Kosnik 2016, 7). With these ideas in mind, humans both return to and re-play what is familiar and memorable for them.



Image 2. What will be Twin Peaks to fans forever. (Snoqualmie Falls, 2009).

The starting point for my own playing back and reflections on *Twin Peaks*, are derived from play theory as well as my personal reminiscing around manifestations of Peak Experience, a series of artistic tributes to the hauntingly unforgettable masterpiece that the 1990s television

show is. By making my stance of a toy and play scholar and a fangirl transparent, it is easier to justify this uncritical, yet creative take on the subject.

In earlier research activities (Heljakka 2016), I have focused on the re-playing aspect of artistic fan engagements with *Twin Peaks*. In the study, one interviewee identified *Twin Peaks* as filled with ambiguities, using the terms “oppressing, decadent, mysterious, playful, enigmatic, sick, scary, cranky, fabled, surprising, erotic, weird and addictive” to describe the ambiance of the series. Indeed, Lynch’s work has been described to have an interest in forces, not identifiable as good or bad, but ambivalent forces with an impetus on environments and possibilities (Foster-Wallace 1997, 204).

The motivation for this think piece [\[1\]](#) is to play with potentiality of the (perhaps) perverse passion that *Twin Peaks* represents to me: To formulate an autoethnographic account and an artistic compilation, which includes a retrospective and reflective documentation of the past experiences, exhibitions and events related to the series, with a particular accentuation on Seasons 1 and 2. It features a presentation of playful theoretical threads, which have aided my own readings of *Twin Peaks*, as well as ample visual and audiovisual material from the Peak Experience art exhibitions. What adds on to the reflective and playful autoethnographic approach of the text (meaning both experimentation and eclecticism), are my personal adventures interested in investigations of *Twin Peaks* through fan travels, creations and curation of art.

The Timeless Gold of Twin Peaks

I consider Lynch a master of make-believe, just like George Lucas of Star Wars fame. His *oeuvre* begs to be approached as a paidic system, with childlike curiosity and enthusiasm. In contrast to ludic systems known from games, for Caillois’, paidic means open-endedness and more unstructured forms of play. Paidic systems are like sandboxes, which afford unlimited, unregulated space for creative play. Games have a steady foothold in *Twin Peaks* – just consider the gambling in One-Eye Jack’s casino, and later in Las Vegas, or more generally, the eternal game between the good and evil, black and white, pieces of chess played by Windom Earle against Dale Cooper. Without the rigidity the rules that these games imply, the childlikeness of paidic play communicates more whimsy, distortion and multiple ways of toying with possibility – being more malleable and plastic, asking to be tugged and towed to unexpected territories, even beyond the borders of the sandbox.

I believe David Lynch to possess a paidic mindset, interested in fantastic world-building according to his own aesthetic and rules – a logic forever reinvented. For this reason, he is a magician of play. But *Twin Peaks* despite its ‘paidic circle’ of play is not directed to children’s engagement or playful fantasizing. The series is very much a springboard for the adult imagination, as well as an invitation to many forms of play for the adult fan. It is no secret, then, that *Twin Peaks* has spawned playful tributes since its 90s beginnings thanks to Lynch’s originality, ingeniousness and vision. I consider it to resemble a ‘sandbox’ game, in which alterations and constellations are rather asked than afforded, or a construction toy kit, which provides more opportunities than limitations on building both material and imaginative layers on the flickering products of the mind – light and dark. As one of the Peak Experience artists, Jennifer Ramirez, writes: “This series is timeless gold that raises questions about our existence, about our most inner desires, our inner darkness our sadness, traumas and life force.” (Warm squirrel blog, November 8, 2018)

My own journey with *Twin Peaks* started decades ago: In the beginning of the 1990’s I was a teenager, who after videotaping episodes of *Twin Peaks* with her sister, watched the recordings in the daylight and used to press the pause button every time Killer BOB appeared on the screen. Oh the teenage anticipation teased out of those tapings – I can see clearly now the temptation of it—the horrendous pleasure derived from balancing between the beautiful and the bad-assed. What else could it have been about than licking the cherry sunken in a weird cocktail of innocence and damnation (Foster-Wallace 1997, 211), distinctly a part of who Miss Palmer was prior to her murder, maybe even post mortem.

The eerie atmosphere around the series lingered around long after its ending on Finnish television in the 1990s, but the video tapings were never played again. For a long time, the mystery remained unsolved. Curiously, Laura Palmer, filled with secrets, had stated in one of the last episodes: “I’ll see you again in 25 years.” As Telotte (1995, 171) observes, *Twin Peaks* left us hanging from the cliff unlike any other episodic series has done. The wait began. What a lengthy teaser.

“Although the play-world exists in actual space and time, it also creates its own space and time” (Russell & Ryall 2015, 155). As suggested here, adult engagement in play, or reminiscing of teenage experiences of a cultish television series is not only about nostalgia, or endless manipulation of the souvenirs in one’s mind. It is about finding the force, being energized by it and navigating one’s own ways of using it as a source of wonder and

possibility all over again. After having been a fan of the series for decades, I have during the past five years explored *Twin Peaks* both as a toy and play scholar and as a visual artist and curator. It is the adult cultures of toy play that inspired what would become a seemingly endless, “lynchian” playground for my own creativity, self-expression and exploration.

Invitation to Play(fulness)

Play scholar Henricks envisions how a society dominated by play principles would acknowledge the importance of openness, inclusivity, and aesthetic dimension of life (Henricks 2015, 116).

The most obvious modern manifestations of play as a consumable experience, however, include children’s toys, computer and video games, the attendance at artistic and sporting events of the young and the old-and the plethora of other and more specific entertainment available (Sutton-Smith, 2017, 233–234).

The aesthetic of play manifests in games, toys and playful environments. What is the link between contemporary television and toy play? Perhaps enjoyment and participation. The openness and inclusivity have indeed become part of what TV is today – inviting and interactive, just like many playthings of the present. Furthermore, media entertainment also provides possibilities for the flights of fantasies and escapism. Neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud defines play as fantasy woven around real objects that are or become toys, as contrasted with the pure fantasy of dreaming and daydreaming (Frappier, 1976, 104). The *wowness* of toys becomes tangible through the manipulation of them, the actual acts of interacting with the plaything through fantastic scenarios and narratives. It is here the dimensions of immaterial imaginings and material artefacts merge. Toying with the fantasy-laden resources of the world, like media products, means that affects are triggered.

Media, TV, toys and the like inspire art and in playing, even the fan becomes an artist. Nina Lieberman views the artist as a practitioner of playfulness (Lieberman 1977, 10). In the spirit of play, what follows is a spontaneously crafted and creative reflection of the author’s personal exploration of *Twin Peaks* through artistry and curatorship, which sets to traverse boundaries of a traditional academic text. This think piece documents the infinite allure of a cult series according to its own logic.

After having seen Raisa Kettunen's astounding re-playing of iconic *Twin Peaks* scenes with her Blythe doll (Blythe as Laura, Blythe as the Log Lady, see Image 5), I dreamed up the idea of an art exhibition, which would invite contemporary Finnish artists and fans to participate in a group exhibition as *Twin Peaks* players and creatives. Instead of a 'peak subjective experience' (Sutton-Smith 2004, 45), the series of exhibitions celebrates *Twin Peaks* as a co-created, collective Peak Experience: Consequently, a dream team and an artist collective emerged, including Columbian and Russian talent.

The invitation to play with *Twin Peaks* has generated multiple pieces for the Peak Experience exhibitions; paintings, sculptures, mixed-method pieces, installations, toy-art, graphics, photographs and photogenic environments. Between 2016–2018 the collective has organized four exhibitions including setting up experiential spaces and performative events including various artworks installed both indoors and outdoors at galleries in Pori and Helsinki and the Superwood Festival. The collective has grown by each exhibition including artists and fans of different ages, gender, even nationalities.



Image 3. Welcome to Twin Peaks (2009). The author photographed by Tommi Vuorenmaa.

Revisiting (2009)

Tourism has been frequently compared to play. Heynders and van Nuenen (2014) recognize the fan tourist as a player of “cult geographies” (Geraghty 2014). In 2009, I made a road trip to Snoqualmie and North Bend with a friend. Fandom impacts the tourist experience in peculiar ways: While driving towards the mountains, Angelo Badalamenti’s original soundtrack was not playing in the car, but in the back of my head. Strange how the familiar tunes stick with one forever despite the fact that I was long beyond my teenage years and the first encounter with *Twin Peaks*. With my travel companion, we chased the location for the ‘Welcome to *Twin Peaks*’ sign, based on mere guesses as proper online homework had not been done, finally begging us to give up as the night darkened.^[2] Of course, we were chasing a dream, an object and place that (no longer) exists in the real world and came to the intersection, in which reality, imagination, and the media that are at the heart of film tourism, meet (Waysdorf 2020, 284). Interestingly, we were probably not too far from the site.^[3]

We decided not to splurge on the ‘Great Northern’ hotel, in reality Salish Lodge. However, after seeing the lobby, I realized I would need to revisit and accommodate properly some day. We chose a cheap motel instead. But the atmosphere was undoubtedly there – from the parking lot, you could see the traffic light, hanging on top of the street, giving that eerie, squeaky sound. The night landed swiftly on the mountainous landscape, almost like a blanket.

A fangirl forever, I am, and absolutely, needed to visit the Double R Diner, in reality, Twede’s Café in North Bend. This worn-out diner tucked in a street corner with slow traffic has an iconic spot for photoplay in its backyard. Snapshots they were, those quickly taken photographs I would now call ‘assisted selfies’ (Image 3), but most of the material aimed to capture the atmosphere (Image 4).



Images 4. The way to Twin Peaks, Twede's Café and a slice of pie. Photographs by the author (2009).

In a transmedia sense, toys embody fictions. There were no *Twin Peaks*-related industrially-produced toys around at the moment, not even available in Snoqualmie or North Bend at the time, so no toy tourism (see e.g. Heljakka & Ihamäki 2020) with playthings with a direct fit to the setting of 'real' *Twin Peaks* could take place. I remember traveling with an Uglydoll plush ('Deer Ugly') at the time, but it was not taken out to roam the matter-of-fact Lynchian landscape on this occasion. Later on, in 2018 to be precise, however, I would travel here with a bag-full of character toys to indulge in photoplay (or, toy photography, see Heljakka 2012) in these particular and strangely enigmatic geographies of fan play, linking the imaginative with the realness of the landscape.

"Really experiencing" a place needs to be done in a multisensory fashion (Waysdorf 2020, 285), and this involves consumption conducted with all senses: "what is most important in any imaginative experience is that the fan is having the experience in their own body" (Ibid., 288)—even *on* their body (for *Twin Peaks* fandom expressed in nail fashion and wearable art, see Images 9 and 11). What was available were the oral pleasures: The visit called for take-out pie, neatly unboxed and eaten and washed down with a heap of filtered coffee at a

lookout spot in miserably foggy Seattle. The city was quickly scouted through the windows of a rental car, before escaping to some nearby national park's hiking trails, a must if you have a thing for the firs and entering the woods, when driving out of *Twin Peaks* (see Image 4).



Image 5. Raisa Kettunen's artwork *In the Waiting Room* (2014).

Re-playing (2015–2016)

Whenever adults imagine and create, they are to some degree playing (Gray 2015, 126). Years 2015–2016 mark the *anni mirabilis* period in the author's co-existence with *Twin Peaks*. In May 2015, I joined the conference "I'll See You Again in 25 Years: The Return of *Twin Peaks* and Generations of Cult TV", at the School of Art and Media, University of Salford. For myself, this event set many *Twin Peaks* related activities in motion.

In my presentation focusing on the fan play around *Twin Peaks*, I noted how existing *Twin Peaks*-related toys and playthings found on the Internet by the time, were the products of fan creativity, not industrial productions. I uttered my confident prediction that toy maker Funko would surely produce a series of toyified *Twin Peaks* Images, with plump heads and bodies, with that oh-so-familiar aesthetic known by contemporary storyworlds. Probably in one year,

the sketches had already been presented to the decision makers of the toy company. In three years, I brought my own *Twin Peaks* Funko Vinyl Pops to Snoqualmie and North Bend.

To admit the toyetic^[4] quality of *Twin Peaks* is to recognize its transmedia potentiality, but to realize its capacity to influence entire worlds of (adult) fan play, would be far more accurate. In 2016, 25 years had passed since the first broadcasting of *Twin Peaks* Season 1. It was time to start re-playing—to retreat to artistic amusings inspired by Lynch’s beautiful, yet dark and mysterious world. Inspired by Raisa Kettunen’s work, I invited artists to join the Peak Experience collective as both a curator and creator. A creator creates ‘stuff’ and services, but what does a curator do in a profoundly digitalizing age?

Wolff and Mulholland (2013) note that with the advent of improved web infrastructure and storage, users can select, collect, annotate, tailor, organize and present content of multiple media types. This process is similar to the one of museum curators, who research, select, interpret, organize and narrate exhibitions.

A curated exhibition is based on the knowledge and research of one or more experts in the field. This research informs both the selection and organization of the objects. Importantly, the curator offers an interpretation of how the objects relate to one another. Essentially, they tell a story (Wolff and Mulholland 2013, n.p.).

The grand narrative behind the series of the Peak Experience exhibitions are artists’ and fans’ responses to the multidimensional storytelling related to *Twin Peaks*. My role as a Peak curator entailed first, a selection of artists with a connection to the series as devoted fans or commentators of Lynch and Frost’s mesmerizing storyworld. Second, a collection based on artworks was created, some of them tailor-made for the exhibition, some channeling a recognizable aura of ‘lynchian aesthetic’ (meaning ambiguity resorted between the nodes of wonderful/strange), and therefore, qualified for the exhibition. Foster-Wallace explicates the meanings of ‘lynchian’ as follows:

An academic definition of Lynchian might be that the term “refers to a particular kind of irony where the very macabre and the very mundane combine in such a way as to reveal the former’s perpetual containment within the latter.” But like postmodern or pornographic, Lynchian is one of those [...] words that’s definable only ostensibly—i.e. we know it when we see it. (Foster-Wallace 1997, 161).



Image 6. Gallery exhibition poster art by Carina Laine; P-galleria, Creat Space, and Superwood/Ivana Helsinki House (2016–2018).

The name of our exhibition refers, besides *Twin Peaks*, to peak experiences theorized by psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–1970). A peak experience stands for a moment of happiness and fulfilment, which has meaning to both wellbeing and mental development. Maslow placed the human desire for self-expression on the top of his hierarchy and by doing so, ensured a valuable position of play among the hierarchy of needs.

Play by large, is a self-expressive activity. According to Henricks, we do not play to refine what we already know; we play to discover what we do not yet know (Henricks 2017, 11). Play may focus on imaginary matters (Henricks 2015, 5) just as it often circles around physical matters. Again, “Imaginative play may underlie creativity, innovation, and new ways of operating within the physical, organic, and social worlds in which all creatures are embedded” (Burghardt 2015, 35). In fact, imaginative play is a celebration of our personal originality (Sutton-Smith 2008) as well as in artistic tributes, in which imagination as a mediated practice is built on the idea of re-creation and mimesis.

When playing, a person may have a peak experience related to the use of imagination and limitless self-expression. Contemporary forms of play are often inspired by popular culture and the re-imagining of and toying with story worlds connected to transmedia phenomena have become emergent in both fandoms and in the context of art. Mimetic forms of play and multifaceted intertextual references to iconic popular productions are present in fan art and tributes of various kinds. The selected artworks of the Peak Experience exhibitions each link to the series in their unique ways – some recapturing unforgettable scenes, some reinterpreting its memorable characters:

Our Peak Experience art exhibition plays with artworks and spatial atmospheres created with different techniques. It is an artistic tribute to the magic story world created by David Lynch and Mark Frost. In our exhibition minimalism meets maximalism, plastic meets organic materials and beauty is juxtaposed with terror. At the same time, humor, mischievousness and mystery are present. Further, visitors may photograph themselves in a staged environment reminiscent of Agent Dale Cooper's dream world/the Black and White Lodge. (Press release for Peak Experience at P-galleria, 2016)

The first Peak Experience exhibition was organized at P-galleria in Pori in October, 2016. Displaying of the pieces was a product of the curator's vision of how to distribute the works in the three rooms of the gallery; The first space, a seductive introduction, inviting visitors in a small mountain town, so familiar for many, the second space a walk through the fire-infested, eerie woods with the innate owls, a giant portrait of the Log Lady, and the third space [\[5\]](#), the quintessential Black/White Lodge.

Instead of aggression and the violent aspects of *Twin Peaks*, the Peak Experience exhibitions have sought to bring to the fore affective reactions and responses to it. Besides its 'lynchian vibe', the art created aims towards a certain aesthetic interest in toyification: to cutify and craft the mysteries into the form of visual, material and spatial objects, so that they become playable in the sense of both object play and play of the mind.



Image 7. Welcome to Twin Peaks (2016). A painting by Katja Tukiainen.

Welcome to the Playground

The notion of space is essential to play, may it mean roaming in terrains of the physical, virtual or imaginative. Lynch contributed greatly to the localization of the imagination by filming the pilot in the North-West. The forests and mountains of the mysterious lands, marks for a North-European person very much the spiritual ground of native Americans, a natural landscape surrounded by ancient traditions and respectful co-existence between nature, animal and human. My wish was, when designing the exhibition space, to bring some of this magic to the art and how it is ‘dis-played’.

The idea behind the physical organization of the Peak Experience exhibitions was to function as experimental spaces and immersive environments—as the Black and White Lodge with its zigzag black-and-white pattern was recreated and the red velvet curtains hanged to achieve that special atmosphere in the three exhibitions. In the exhibition at P-galleria, a participatory invitation to play was also thrown to the general public, first to join in the game by posting photographs depicting landscapes from their hometown, which remind them of *Twin Peaks*

by using hashtags #ihakotvinpiiksis #precissomitwinpeaks #justlikeintwinpeaks and #peakexperience. The challenge resulted in a photographic artwork being included in the exhibition (see Image 8).[\[6\]](#)



Image 8. On the left a photograph by Rauno Korhonen at P-galleria, photographed by the author (2016). On the right, Black and White Lodge, a painting by Katja Tukiainen (2016).

My baby girl, merely 6 months during the first exhibition in October 2016, placed on the chair in that space mimicking the Black and White Lodge, reminded me how different the affordances for play appreciated by the very young and those “I’ve seen it all” adults are. Somehow, when joining me for the displaying day, she had grasped a branch of the fake Douglas “fir” I’ve salvaged at the furniture rental, and happily occupied herself by chewing it, while I was giving the exhibition its finishing touches. Then again, a quick conversation between the artists at the opening party revealed their spontaneous desire to roll around on the zigzag floor, just like the mischievous little maidens in Peak Experience artist Katja Tukiainen’s oil painting “Black and White Lodge” (Image 8). This illustrated how the paidic pleasures of play may not be so different for children and adults.[\[7\]](#)

Toys are the most known ‘paidic’ objects to cater for play in the contemporary world. Toys gain meaning and a glow (Heljakka, 2013) once manipulated as objects of play. Their materiality and design longs for human touch. In art, toys are used both as raw material and inspiration (Heljakka 2016). When remodeled into sculptures and installations, the artist casts an additional glow on the toys, just like any player. Worn out toys channel the message that

they have been cared for, at best dearly loved. It is because of this that toys that are only allowed to live in the collector's glass cabinet carry an aura of melancholy around them. In all these manifestations, play is about the consequences of self-expression (Henricks 2017, 11).

One example of toyified and playable art is “The owls are what they seem” (protecting its wearer from the evils of Ghostwood) my own wearable art piece with 52 plush owls, hand-sewn into the fabric base (Image 9). This toyified piece is heavy, wearing it feels like walking in a harness, dressed in the toyetic essence of *Twin Peaks*. Later on, this protective jacket – because plush owls would not be there to scare you, just to cover you – has been worn for Toy Fair in New York and by a TV show host for Finnish Broadcaster [Yle's morning show on *Twin Peaks*](#).



Image 9. Come, follow the owls. Peak Experience at P-galleria (2016). An assisted selfie of the author photographed by Merja Heljakka.

Returning (2017–2018)

The second Peak Experience exhibition opened at Creat Space Helsinki on the 5th of January 2017. The exhibition received good media coverage: The curator joined fellow Peak artists Katja Tukiainen and Mari Kasurinen in radio interviews conducted with Radio Helsinki and Yle, and multiple blogs published posts and photographs of the exhibition. *Twin Peaks: The Return* aired on HBO Nordic on May 22 in 2017. The saga of the original cult television series that still attracts new audiences continued in 2017, when the third season created by Mark Frost and David Lynch, and directed by Lynch saw the daylight. Bob returned, but so did Laura.

What happened before this was that I received an invitation to play the part of a *Twin Peaks* connoisseur on national broadcaster Yle's morning show. Due to a hectic schedule at the time, I was destined to be in Tel Aviv for a toy design conference on the very same day that the live show was to be aired on Finnish TV. Arrangements were made and flights rescheduled so that I could be present. The protective owl jacket and some of my Funkos were sent to the studio in advance, so that I would reconnect with them when returning from Israel. Through a catastrophic series of delayed flights on the way home, I got stuck in Berlin and joined the TV show through a fast-organized tele-presence. Clothed in my Ivana Helsinki owl-themed top at the airport, I managed to participate from a distance from the airport lounge. The interview went well, but to my misfortune, someone stole Bob from Yle's studio in Finland. In fury, I mitigated the feelings of loss by ordering a replacement from Amazon on the same day. The unfortunate event also prompted some photoplay, inspired by artefacts from the original series. I replayed a poster with the drawn face of Bob, asking "Have you seen this man?" replacing the question with "Have you seen this toy?" (Image 10). Later on, I was interviewed by a local radio station about the first episode on the same day it became available. This time, in-person participation was possible. This time the toys followed—none of them escaped.



Image 10. Have You Seen This Toy? A screenshot of an Instagram post made by the author (2017).

Repurposing Legos and the Log

Many returns followed. In 2018 the Peak Experience collective functioned as the main (visual) art partner of the Superwood Festival organized at Hotel Rantapuisto in Helsinki. Paola Suhonen, the designer of Ivana Helsinki, creator and curator of the festival and a filmmaker herself, has often referenced *Twin Peaks* in her work.^[8] The Superwood ‘boutique festival’ is said to resemble a sleepover with a *Twin Peaks*-atmosphere: ”Art installations around the hotel milieu set the mood with quirky *Twin Peaks* atmosphere” ([Superwood Festival website](#)).

At Superwood, the Peak Experience collective grew into a significantly larger group of artists, who displayed works around and outside the hotel from the corridors to a specific gallery room. Some of the pieces were installed outdoors. In the gallery, visual artist and musician Sasha Kretova installed an ambient sound piece, and as an auditive experience, a completely new addition to the exhibition.

In playing, anything becomes possible—the strange disappearances of *Twin Peaks* treasures did not stop: For the occasion, I thought of making a neck-piece for myself of my daughter's Lego shovel by giving it a gilded touch inspired by the tools seen in *The Return*. I rummaged her toy box and snatched the perfect piece suitable for this intention. Mysteriously, when it was time to paint the part for the impromptu necklace, the toy had vanished from the hotel room. I'm still looking for a replacement and wondering about the mystery. Please do not tell her.

For the Superwood exhibition, the artists were invited to create their individual interpretation of the Log. Game scholar Ian Bogost notes, how a stick doesn't come with a manual. but it has *properties*. Length and woodenness, strength and breakability, a status as detritus inviting its absconding and repurposing, sharpness and length etc. “The stick's delight owes a greater debt to the thing itself than it does to the child who would put it in use—even if that child's invention of new uses for the stick's material properties also contributes to its function as a plaything” (Bogost 2016, 166–167). The stick, the ultimate found-object-as-toy is “very open-ended, all-natural, the perfect price,” Strong curator of collections Christopher Bensch has said (Bogost 2016, 161). A stick comes close to the Log. But whereas the stick is an improvised, tactile plaything, organic and akin to a chunkier wizard's wand, the log is shaped by human hands, leaving a texture of labor on it. It is rather wood than ‘wooden’ like some industrial toys, but it's naturalness has been affected by the cut. Philosopher, sociologist and art critic Walter Benjamin (1935) liked wooden toys because according to him, their aura was sustained in the raw-material.

The Log in possession of the Log Lady in *Twin Peaks* is anthropomorphized like any toy character, highly personal and therefore psychologically powerful. Not everything is what it seems, and even dead wood may possess magic capacities. Held in one's arms, the Log is a very universal toyfriend, just like the stick. Being more robust, the weight of the Log resembles that of a child—needy and demanding, it requires attention and nurturing. It has something to say, but like a doll, cannot speak for itself. Despite the fact that most (non-technological) dolls have mouths, they need players to articulate their inner lives. The Log, even, like Eero Aarnio's famous Puppy furniture-characters, does not have a face at all. But what counts is its capacity to let the player imagine and thereafter, project a face on them. In this way, any appropriately modelled object, shaped either by nature or a designer, may become a toy and parasocial^[9] companion if the player so demands. In the Superwood

exhibition the Log reappeared in many manifestations of artistic play, in both subtle and subversive interpretations (Image 11).



Image 11. Super(iority of) wood and some characters. Peak Experience artworks (clockwise from lower left corner) by Mari Kasurinen, Henna Kallionkieli, Sampo Marjomaa, and Jasmin Anoschkin at Ivana Helsinki House photographed by Johanna Lehtinen (2018).

Toyification of *Twin Peaks*

Toys are prompts that trigger and persuade people to play with others. The Peak Experience has featured toys from its beginning – in the form of raw material, inspiration and actual toy-art. In Caillois' (1964) definition, mimicry is a way for players to escape themselves by becoming someone or something else. As demonstrated, once superimposed with capacities of the human imagination, (toylike) things have the same potential.

In play, more than anywhere else, apart from madness, the player can escape the usual orthodox links between signs and their referents. In play, the significance of what is going on may come as much out of the minds of the players as out of the objects in their hands or the world to which those objects refer. (Sutton-Smith 1986)

Toyification communicates the idea of an entity (physical, digital or hybrid) being intentionally reinforced with toyish elements or dimensions; an object, a structure, an application, a character or a technology acquiring a toyish appearance, form or function (Thibault & Heljakka 2018). Many transmedia creations are toyified at some point, unless they are toys from the start. As noted in earlier research (Heljakka 2016) ‘toyish’ interpretations of *Twin Peaks* were long produced as part of the activities of fans only, and not as industrially made playthings. Nevertheless, like many media productions, even *Twin Peaks* was destined to become toyified. This happened through fan play and art long before the launch of Funkos, but happened again, as the Vinyl Pops entered the market.

Funko Vinyl Pop characters come with eyes, just like Hello Kitty (see Image 12). They are mouthless, but not mute. Like character toys in general, they come with eyes, and eyes are a gateway to the soul: “When you see the nose, eyes, forehead and when you are able to describe them, you relate to the other as if it is an object. The face is meaning [...] The face talks” (Levinas 1996, 73–74). Despite their obvious amiability and cuteness, the magic of Funkos lies in how recognizability to the original referents remains, although the toys come with rounded edges, large heads, tiny noses and hands, channeling Lorenz’ kindchenschema (orig. 1943, see Lange et al., 2017).

My personal peak experiences in association with *Twin Peaks* have demonstrated how toyification, once at the level of imagination, on the one hand lets the simplest wood chunks become toys. On the other hand, industrial toys as precise objects for play, are meant to set the imagination in motion by offering more clues for play.

Fantasy of the mind travels beyond semiotics, even if to be toyified in one’s imagination, and when the object calls out a certain weight and aesthetic. Therefore, we can see that the Log can be a toy in more ways than the saw that cut it never could. Nevertheless, what makes the Log more human than Funko, is its vulnerability. The Log may die once burned the way plastic never could. The materiality of toys therefore regulates their life cycles as human companions. The eerie foreverness of plastic toy figurines make them appear powerful, even

threatening. Frank Silva might be long gone as an actor, but the image of Bob lives on in the form of Funko (see Image 13). As a toy, Bob always seems to lurk in the shadows of the glass cabinet of collectables, looking for opportunities to crawl behind a sofa and scare any other player, toy—or human. This, unless of course, Bob becomes stolen, evaporates or decides to leave to some other place, more beautiful and strange.



Image 12. The Log Lady and Dale Cooper joined me for a damn fine cup of joe at the ‘Double-R’ Diner, a.k.a. Twede’s. Photographed by Carina Laine (2018).

Toy tourism in *Twin Peaks*

In 2018, I returned to Snoqualmie and North Bend with fellow Peak artist Carina Laine. This time with my nails painted exactly like Diane’s, or her Tulpa (Image 12). This time dressed for the part with a tartan-patterned skirt, a homage to the visual style of the series that had such a huge impact in my teens. This time with toys. The ones that I predicted in my essay (Heljakka 2016), would be later launched by Funko. And they were (see Image 13).



Images 13. Dale Cooper and Bob as Funko Pop Vinyl toy characters, photoplayed by the author (2018).

Therefore, it is interesting to note, how traveling with toys to locations of film and television *toyrism* follow ideas presented in reference to being a fan, for “Fandom, both in terms of the community and other fans and the experience of being a fan, is not an isolated moment. It is something that the fan brings with them to the location they visit and something they carry with them once they leave”, writes Waysdorf (2020, 290). Engaging in toy tourism, when visiting Twin Peaks, then, is to let the plaything make fandom tactile—tangible and playable, and perhaps most of all, to be photoplayed, once again captured on camera being behind the screen just like on television.

The phenomenon of travelling toys refers to activities, in which toys travel in the name of toy tourism, either as a part of amateur practices as their owners’ companions (see Images 13), single-handedly within hosting programs or professionally organized toy travel agency services (Heljakka 2013, 289), or within the game of geocaching (Heljakka & Ihamäki 2020). Previous research observes how toy tourism—or *toyrism*—is a hybrid of value dimensions, playful artifacts, and touristic playscapes in destinations and social media (Heljakka & Rääkkönen 2021).

My friend and fellow Peak artist and I stayed at the “Great Northern”, a.k.a. Salish Lodge, this time the only possible choice. What echoed the visual attributes of *Twin Peaks* were surprisingly few in the hotel. Of course, we lit up the quintessential (electric) fireplace and prepared our cups of joe with the local roast. What is the highlight of this accommodation is its vicinity to the Snoqualmie waterfall and it’s beyond words scenic vistas offering amazing possibilities for photoplay with human companions and toyfriends (see Image 2). Perfect occasions and locations for tributes of fandom.

After breakfast at Twede’s, we strolled to North Bend making use of every photo opportunity that arose in the picturesque village. During the daytime the place seemed welcoming and harmless. An Uber driver navigated the way to Ronette’s bridge solely based on our assumptions that it would be located adjacent to a railroad. Upon arrival, I made myself into a toy, triumphantly swiveling in my long skirt of the sheer euphoria of being there. We found it like a treasure, without having that map (Image 14).[\[10\]](#)

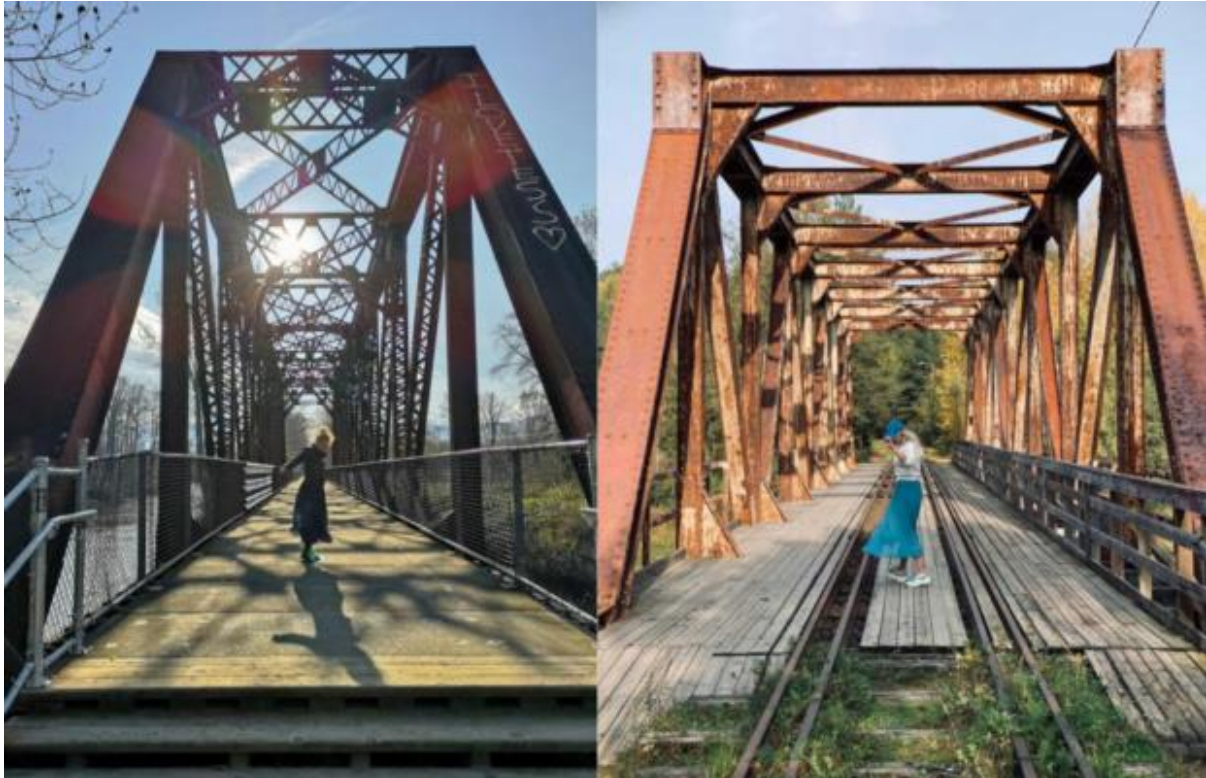


Image 14. Assisted selfie on Ronette’s Bridge, on the left (North Bend, 2018) and Noormarkku, Finland, on the right (2020). Photographed by Carina Laine.

I asked for a number of ‘assisted selfies’ by my friend (for example, see Images 14 and 15) and found limitless joy in photoplaying with all the toyfriends that traveled with me this time. This time photographing needed not be rushed or restricted to a few shots only like during my first visit in 2009. My smartphone has a brilliant camera and plenty of storage, which encourages delving into play and a thorough state of flow, including concentration, contemplation and the ultimate freedom for self-expression, making this 2018 visit far more fruitful in terms of productive play than the visit of 2009 had been. Thanks to rapidly evolving technologies, contemporary play becomes enriched with extended possibilities.



Image 15. Welcome to Twin Peaks, again (2018). Photographed by Carina Laine.

There is no end (to imagination): The concept of eternal returns

The symbol for eternity, to infinity and beyond has become perceivable in some media creations, like toys. In my own art (*This is Play*, 2011) I have asked, “Are there toys in heaven?” To some, the thought of life as an endless state of play would be intolerable, the epitome of regression at worst, but for some the utmost and desirable precondition, in which the playing human (or any fan) may survive.

Essentially, play is progress through communication, and if there is no possibility for dialogue between players, one is limited to her own inner world and to the silent dialogues. A world without art and entertainment would mean a situation, in which we had more limited possibilities to toy with in terms of our imaginings. This would have severe outcomes for our creativity and problem-solving skills, even relationships. The idea of eternity intimidates, because it has cosmic proportions and transforms us humans into the toys of God as philosophized by Plato.^[11] Lynch is a Buddhist and his spiritual worldview comes across in *Twin Peaks* in many ways. The concept of eternal return is therefore not distant from analyses

on the cult series and nor can they be so in the reflections of a researcher, or a curator of ‘peak experiences.’

Sutton-Smith (2017, 225) writes how “we assume that the peak experiential states within play must be about happiness”. Despite the concept of eternal returns, it is not the cyclic movement that results in happiness, nor an end-state of ‘static’ afterlife. Play is far too messy to generate happiness only, and consequently more akin to the roughness and realness of creative chaos that succumbs to the hunger of novelty, and the quest for weirdness and wondering. It is the variations that are made during each cycle that make us content.

Essentially, contemporary play just like the world of Lynch, draws its awe from mystery and the unanswered. It is probably better not to know if there are toys in heaven, or whether we transform into cosmic dust in space in passing. Playing is about molding and extending the imagination—and nurturing the imaginations of others by adding endless narrative layers answering the what if’s that set it in motion. It is the glimmer in the creative beast’s mind, persistently chasing to feed on the unexpected, the unheard, the unseen. This asks for mental plasticity of a curious mind—the famous out of the box way of thinking. Finding oneself out of the box seems to have been an innate quality of Lynch, who paradoxically, by creating *Twin Peaks* with fellow producer Mark Frost got ‘inside the box’ that the TV of it’s time was. Clearly, a media that needed some serious toying with its conventions—some stirring and shaking in terms of defining what TV could be. Lynch returned by repeating the trick with *Twin Peaks: The Return*, with the hallucinatory episode 8 (*Gotta Light?*) in particular, but again, with a historical(ly) twist(ed angle).

According to Henricks, people play to discover expanded versions of self (2015, 11). Paul Frappier, a researcher of adult play states: In playing we recuperate unused parts of ourselves (1976, 195). I would add to this: people play because they want to test the limits of their (own and others’) tolerance and capacities. What is most rewarding is to stretch and by doing so, titillate the imagination, keeping the peak experience at reach of the fingertips, but never completely in one’s hands.

“By adopting, inventing, constructing, and reconfiguring the material and conceptual limits around us, we can fashion novelty from anything at all.” (Bogost, 2016, 223). In the end—or rather—at the dusk of a new beginning, what seems to keep fans and artists going, just like the creativity of Lynch, is looking for the rabbit holes in which, repeatedly let oneself fall in

and bring oneself again, and again to those familiar vistas, that waterfall, that coffee mug, those cherries rolling inside our mouths, eternally teasing ourselves if the knot can be made or not. That is the secret of wrapping—to let it be intact, leave it be, unboxed and never opened and at the same time, to play with the concept of the endless potentiality of possibility. Like the fantasy of catching unicorns, or rather, white horses or the idea of forces of time, nature, and destiny, constantly affecting our environments and existence. Just look what happened to Laura—filled with secrets, but even though unwrapped, never emptied of her mysteries, really.

It is happening again (2019–2021)

Long-term play often gives the most gratification. The plan was to take Peak Experience to Tokyo in fall of 2019 with Ivana Helsinki. We planned a miniature exhibition including an AR element featuring the easily transportable log collection traveling in one suitcase and possibly, a mobile app. But time was not on our side and the event was postponed. Then, the world was hit by the pandemic with serious outcomes, limiting travel and movement for a duration, still by large, unknown.

Social distancing has had an effect on how we play, but not *why* we play. In play, we seek solidarity and companionship. We are socioemotional beings and remain playful even in times of crises. For many, pandemic play has produced a temporary, positive refuge from the never-ending flood of pessimistic news. Because play is escapism as much as it is interaction with the actual world. As Waysdorf notes, physical place may be even more significant in a digital and transmedial age (2020, 294). In the pandemic of loneliness and isolation, the desire to project sceneries from familiar and ‘fannish’ media locations, popularized by film or television on nearby landscapes, may represent forms of playful escapism to many. We seek the fantastic in the familiar, and are ready to believe in the make-believe superimposed even on everyday environments.

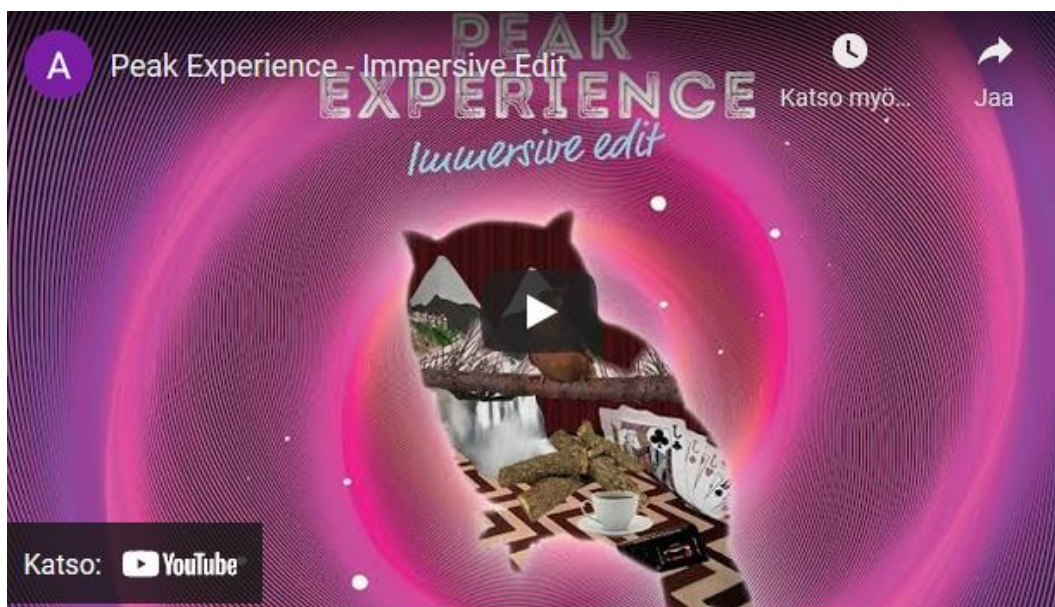
As the curator, I started scouting for a new exhibition location in my hometown, the city of Pori, where it all began, years ago. How I continued the quest for peak experiences in my own ‘hoods’ and woods, was by seeking the scenes in my own everyday environment. A familiar fact was that the town I live in has many neighborhoods that so obviously channel a ‘*Twin Peaks* vibe’—multiple railroad bridges resembling that of Ronette’s, a couple of historical saw mills and those somewhat disturbing forest-areas, which seem so similar to

Twin Peaks that one would not dare to step into them in the dark hours. Perfect locations for filming the next Peak Experience—an immersive and completely digitized edition of our exhibition (for reference, see Addendum). So, there I am, once again, in *Twin Peaks*, on that bridge, swiveling around in a pleated skirt, feeling alive and ready to play (see Image 14).

Ultimately, peak experiential states are sustained through imagination, the key element of play. Peak experiences happen, because of creativity of artists, fans and players, not through fulfilment by happiness and having it all. To be kept alive, play asks for reruns and returns. Play requires reminiscing, so that it can prepare us to become curious again, for what comes next and what differs from what has been seen and done before. Through the playful artistic tributes, the Legacy of the Log lives on. Eternal returns mean that by playing (back), I'll see You again, and again. And I'll play (with) You again.

Addendum

The dream was to create an immersive, virtual exhibition of Peak Experience (*Peak Experience: Immersive Edit*) that can be accessed as a bonus feature below this reflective think piece. This multidimensional documentation exemplifies the many tributes to the TV series that were created and curated during the journey. Let us demonstrate how the magic of *Twin Peaks* lingers around. Welcome to our Peak Experience, virtually.



Video source: <https://youtu.be/q6V84RV2q9k>.

Acknowledgments

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All links verified 30.5.2021

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Notes

- [1] According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, a think piece is “a piece of writing meant to be thought-provoking and speculative that consists chiefly of background material and personal opinion and analysis”, see <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/think%20piece>.
- [2] For a similar experience, see Tuomi in this Special Issue.
- [3] For reference, please compare the landscapes of Figure 3. and Figure 4.
- [4] *Toyetic* is a term coined by Berbie Loomis, who worked at Kenner Toys. For reference, see [Gooney Bird](#) (2011).

[5] Third space also refers to the theorizing of E. Soja (1996), who proposes a different way of thinking about space and spatiality. “First and second spaces are two different, and possibly conflicting, spatial groupings where people interact physically and socially: such as home (everyday knowledge) and school (academic knowledge). Third spaces are the in-between, or hybrid, spaces, where the first and second spaces work together to generate a new third space.” For reference, see ‘Third space theory’, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803103943995>. More fitting for this analysis is perhaps the following perspective on third space: The term Third Space is coined by the theorist Homi K. Bhabha. He describes the Third Space as a transition space, where post-colonial power relations and norms are subverted by political, aesthetic or everyday practices. A Third Space is not a physical place, it’s much more a space where hybrid identifications are possible and where cultural transformations can happen. Third Spaces enable cultural hybridity, that is to say identities and practices, which perform difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. In reference to the ‘narrative space’ of *Twin Peaks*, we could consider the forest as a third space, shared by the presence of forces, and allowing shapeshifting and hybridizing of identities to take place. For this definition, see <https://thirdspace-webseries.com/>.

[6] *Twin Peaks* is a popular reference in association with descriptions of small and secluded townscapes and communities. At the time of writing, the author notices how *Twin Peaks* was brought up in reference to Mariehamn, Åland in Finnish travel magazine *Mondo*, where artist Nayab Kram compared her hometown to Twin Peaks by saying “Mariehamn can also be like *Twin Peaks*, mystic, uncanny, with secrets beneath the surface”. See Roviomaa, Johannes (2021) Onnellisten saari, *Mondo* 4/2021, 36–45.

[7] In fact, *paidia* refers to children in Greek language. For reference, see Alemany Oliver (2015).

[8] In a runway show in New York, Paola Suhonen chose to play Julee Cruise’s song *Into the Night* (1989) as the models walked the show for the Velvet Lake 2011/2012 collection. During cocktails after the fashion show I asked the designer if I had heard right, and she confirmed.

[9] Parasociality refers to “a term coined by Horton and Wohl in 1956 to refer to a kind of psychological relationship experienced by members of an audience in their mediated encounters with certain performers in the mass media, particularly on television. Regular viewers come to feel that they know familiar television personalities almost as friends.” See ‘parasocial interaction’ in Oxford reference <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100305809>.

[10] In this Special Issue, a detailed map of these territories is provided by Pauliina Tuomi. For reference, see Tuomi, Pauliina (2021) ”Pöllöt eivät ole sitä, miltä näyttävät, mutta ovat löydettävissä: matkapäiväkirja ja vinkit *Twin Peaks* -kierrokselle”.

[11] For reference, see Plato, *Laws* (English) book 7, section 803c: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0166:book=7:section=803c&highlight=plaything>.