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**Sci-Fi TV in the Great White North:
The Development of Vancouver as a Science Fiction Media Capital**

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Abstract

Sci-Fi TV in the Great White North: The Development of Vancouver as a Science Fiction Media Capital

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Over the past three decades, Vancouver has emerged as a favorable destination for Hollywood television productions. Many academics have noted this trend as a result of industrial shifts within Hollywood, favorable economic conditions in Canadian locales, and a cultural proximity between the United States and Canada. Concurrently, Vancouver has also become a destination for many of Hollywood's science fiction television productions. This thesis explores how the multi-channel transition of the Hollywood television industry cultivated a high-demand for content production and ultimately led to a wave of science fiction, horror, and supernatural productions in Vancouver. Through historical accounts of the television industry and discourse analysis of the industry's trade press, this study tracks major industrial milestones that led to the rise of science fiction television production in the 1990s and early 2000s. Due to the strategies employed by three key distribution outlets—Fox, The WB, and Sci Fi—and the studios partnered with them, the rise in production of science fiction television in Vancouver points to the industrial significance in Hollywood's development of the Canadian city into a genre-inflected media capital.

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Introduction

In the 2011 *Supernatural* episode “The French Mistake” (The CW, Feb. 25, 2011), Sam and Dean Winchester (Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles, respectively) are sent to an alternate reality by their angelic ally, Balthazar (Sebastian Roché), in order to escape fellow angel, Raphael (Lanette Ware), who is on the hunt for the brotherly pair. In this alternate reality, the Winchesters find themselves on the set of *Supernatural*, a television production within the episode’s narrative. This meta-humor-driven episode, full of “actual” actors (such as Misha Collins playing Misha Collins) and self-referential jokes (including a jab at Ackles’ past as a soap actor), includes a brief scene that is pertinent to the study that follows. As the Winchesters are driven from the set to their apartment, they respond with surprise as they pass by signs indicating that they are in Vancouver, British Columbia rather than in the United States.

Supernatural’s (The WB, 2005-06; The CW, 2006-present) production home base in Vancouver is just one of many examples of contemporary sci-fi and fantasy television being filmed north of the border. Starting in the 1980s, many Hollywood film and television productions moved north to take advantage of British Columbia’s tax incentives as well as the favorable exchange rate against the Canadian dollar. Many of these, in particular, were sci-fi and fantasy television productions. In particular, the worldwide success of the Vancouver-based production of *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002, 2016-present) fueled Vancouver’s growing importance in a variety of industry sectors, including the development of a visual effects sector and select below-the-line crew roles.¹ Although Vancouver began as a site for runaway productions, there was a hope that Canadians would eventually be able to finance and produce

¹ *The X-Files* filmed in Vancouver between 1993-98 and in Los Angeles between 1998-02. Production returned to Vancouver in 2016 with the show’s revival.

their own locally-based programs. Indeed, while Vancouver was mainly a runaway site for Hollywood productions attempting to operate on slimmer budgets, over time, “Canadians went from staffing the American productions to creating their own.”²

Over the past twenty-five years, what Catherine Johnson calls “telefantasy” programs, such as *Supernatural* and *The X-Files*, have gained traction in popular culture conversation and in media studies scholarship. “[U]sed as a broad generic category to describe a wide range of fantasy, science fiction, and horror television,” telefantasy programs can provide unique insights into the operations of the television industry, particularly in relation to the production and distribution of niche programming.³

This thesis project interrogates three major developments within the medium of television. The first involves the shift in television distribution in the 1990s and early 2000s with the development of an early wave of original cable programming as well as the launch and expansion of new broadcast networks (Fox, The WB, UPN, and subsequently, The CW). The second involves the expansion of Vancouver as a site for production and specifically as a site for runaway productions and Hollywood co-productions. The third involves the role of the genre of science fiction as a site for production in Vancouver and a key source for lower-cost, niche-oriented programming for emergent distribution outlets. I assert that these three interrogations will find that Vancouver should not only be considered as a media capital known for runaway Hollywood productions, but also as a sci-fi media capital as well.

Primarily, I will engage a number of programs that could be labelled as telefantasy, particularly those filmed in Vancouver. Chronologically, this thesis begins with *The X-Files*, as executive producer Chris Carter’s decision to film in Vancouver, rather than in California, was

² Marsha Lederman, “How Canada is Becoming the Sci-Fi Nation,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 26, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/television/how-canada-is-becoming-the-sci-fi-nation/article11157191>.

³ Catherine Johnson, *Telefantasy* (London: BFI, 2005), 2.

unprecedented for a major Hollywood television program. This decision, made in 1993, spurred a rapid series of telefantasy productions in the Canadian city, especially as newer networks (specifically, Fox, The WB, UPN, and The CW) wanted to target younger audiences with telefantasy programming, but wanted to lessen the financial risk typically associated with the genre. The 1990s and early 2000s saw a dramatic increase in the number of television (and film) productions in the city, including some of the most popular fare in science fiction, fantasy, supernatural, and superhero television. These programs include *Stargate SG-1* (Showtime, 1997-2002; Sci Fi, 2002-07), *Smallville* (The WB, 2001-2006; The CW, 2006-2011), *Supernatural*, and *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci Fi, 2004-09). All of these Vancouver-filmed sci-fi programs are discussed in further detail throughout the thesis as they shed light on key moments of industrial transformation and programming shifts.

Additionally, scholars have analyzed the parameters of science fiction and fantasy genres of television in relation to the rise of quality popular television and the role of loyal fandoms since the early 1990s.⁴ While much has been written on the fan cultures that developed in relation to individual programs during this time period, less has been written on the industrial shifts that have allowed for such a peak moment in science fiction television. Although I have cited Catherine Johnson's use of the term telefantasy here, this terminology has not lingered in much of the critical discourse of science fiction television. Indeed, science fiction has been used more commonly as an all-inclusive label for the genre while telefantasy still remains relatively seldom used. The difficulty in unifying all critics and scholars to use the same terminology is indicative of the status of this genre itself; as Johnson notes, "the fantastic is a generically

⁴ See Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London and New York City: Routledge, 2002); Charlotte Howell, "Legitimizing Genre: The Discursive Turn to Quality in Early 1990s Science Fiction Television," *Critical Studies in Television* 12, no. 1 (2017); J.P. Telotte, *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008).

unstable category.”⁵ And as Tim Goodman recently implored of his readers, “for the sake of not having to constantly make amendments to the descriptor, let's just use ‘sci-fi’ as a catch-all phrase for true hard-core space series, fantasy, time-travel, altered history and paranormal series—which will save a lot of time.”⁶

Research Questions and Methodology

This thesis poses three main research questions. First, why was there a sudden increase in the number of sci-fi television productions in Vancouver during the 1990s and early 2000s? Second, what role did deregulation play in newer networks and cable outlets migrating productions to Canadian media capitals, particularly Vancouver? And third, and perhaps most important to ask, how did sci-fi and fantasy television shape and impact the Vancouver production industry?

To answer these questions, I engage in two forms of analysis—historical analysis and discourse analysis. I use the former to frame the thesis project within a particular time period (the 1990s and early 2000s) while also noting the events prior to this time period (including the relaxation of fin-syn) that directly influenced and impacted the state of the media industries during this aforementioned time periods. I use four major historical accounts to guide this thesis’ structure, contextualizing each chapter’s focus with historical information. These accounts include David Weinstein’s *The Forgotten Network: DuMont and the Birth of American Television*, Daniel M. Kimmel’s *The Fourth Network: How Fox Broke the Rules and Reinvented Television*, Susanne Daniels and Cynthia Littleton’s *Season Finale: The Unexpected Rise and*

⁵ Johnson, *Telefantasy*, 3.

⁶ Tim Goodman, “Critic's Notebook: 'Altered Carbon' and the Small-Screen Sci-Fi Renaissance,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/bastard-machine/tim-goodman-altered-carbon-small-screen-sci-fi-renaissance-1084268>.

Fall of the WB and UPN, and Barbara Selznick's "Branding the Future: Syfy in the Post-Network Era." Each chapter focuses on a major distribution outlet that has majorly engaged with sci-fi and fantasy programming as well as the major studios that produced the programs. The three chapters cover Fox and 20th Century Fox Television, The WB and Warner Bros. Television, and Sci Fi and MGM Television, respectively.

I also use discourse analysis by looking at reports from trade presses and journalistic outlets. These sources, which come from trade publications, such as *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and *Deadline Hollywood*, help fill in moments that are not covered in the primary historical accounts. Specifically, these reports and articles look at the conversations various industry firms (production studios, distribution units, networks, cable channels) and personnel (producers, network executives) are having with each other. On occasion, journalistic accounts also help build the narrative of how Vancouver became a sci-fi television capital.

I also employ the critical media industries approach developed by Timothy Havens, Amanda Lotz, and Serra Tinic, by attempting to practice what sociologist Robert Merton notes as "middle-range theory."⁷ By interrogating the role of industry professionals and executives, especially of the newer networks as they emerge between the late 1980s to mid-1990s, I align my research with a framework "that locates industry research on particular organizations, agents, and practices *within* what have become vast media conglomerates operating at a global level."⁸ Studies of executives (such as Jamie Kellner, former chairman and CEO of The WB), independent producers (such as Stephen J. Cannell), and executive producers (such as Brad Wright, co-creator and co-executive producer of the *Stargate SG-1*) are vital to understanding the

⁷ Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz, and Serra Tinic, "Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach," *Communication, Culture, and Critique* 2, no. 2 (2009): 243.

⁸ Havens, Lotz, and Tinic, "Critical Media Industry Studies," 236.

negotiations that occurred within these television organizations as they transitioned from the network era to the post-network era.

The case studies I have chosen are deliberate and begin with the aforementioned case of *The X-Files* and the Fox network. Although it was not the first breakout hit for the network, it was the first time that the network had seen mainstream levels of success with a sci-fi program. *The X-Files* was also a production of Twentieth Television, Fox's television production unit. Thus, Fox was positioned as an integrated studio-network production that could (and would) attempt riskier, niche productions, specifically in science fiction, fantasy, and the supernatural.⁹ Additionally, the first five years of *The X-Files* were filmed in Vancouver, setting the standard for a sci-fi television labor force in the city.

In 2001, Warner Bros. Television began production on *Smallville* in Vancouver at the same time The WB network had lost two of its highest-rated programs to UPN, *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (The WB, 1997-2001; UPN, 2001-03) and *Roswell* (The WB, 1999-2001; UPN, 2001-02). *Smallville* quickly became a success story for Warner Bros. and even survived the 2006 merger between The WB and UPN that created The CW network. By its final season, *Smallville* was the longest-running North American science fiction series and an important asset for the Warner Bros. television brand.¹⁰ *Smallville* represented the positive effect of Warner Bros.' vertical integration between production and distribution, while relying on runaway production in Vancouver to lessen financial risk for the studio.

⁹ *Millennium* (Fox, 1996-99), *Dark Angel* (Fox, 2000-02), *The Lone Gunman* (Fox, 2001), and *Tru Calling* (Fox, 2003-05) were among some of the Vancouver-filmed sci-fi programs that were produced by Twentieth Television (and the restructured Fox television production unit, 20th Century Fox Television).

¹⁰ Michael S. Duffy, "Sacrifice or Salvation? *Smallville*'s Heroic Survival Amid Changing Television Trends," in *The Smallville Chronicles: Critical Essays on the Television Series*, ed. Lincoln Geraghty (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 168-69n2.

Finally, analysis of the trade press was absolutely necessary to trace the complicated syndication and first-run cable routes for many sci-fi programs. Launched in 1992, Sci Fi (the U.S. cable channel) quickly became a hub for a variety of sci-fi productions, ranging from second-run and third-run programs (such as *Stargate SG-1*) syndicated reruns of cancelled broadcast productions (such as *Brimstone* [Fox, 1998-99]), and sci-fi imports from around the world (such as Canada's *First Wave* [Sci Fi, 1998-2001]). Sci Fi's decision to methodically continue two major franchises—the *Battlestar Galactica* franchise (1978-2012) and the *Stargate* franchise (1994-2018)—through numerous spin-off series and television movies during its formative years indicates the importance of these two franchises to the viability of the cable outlet in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Overall, my aim is to use existing press materials to retell the story of sci-fi television development through a different lens, one that specifically includes the industrial centrality of Vancouver during this time period. The British Columbian production industry continues to grow and expand today, with many streaming services replicating the model to film higher-end sci-fi productions in Vancouver for financial incentives, among other reasons. My aim with this thesis is to then highlight the growth of television production in Vancouver from Chris Carter's 1993 decision to film *The X-Files* in Vancouver to the multi-billion-dollar media capital that it is today.¹¹

Literature Review

Although there is not a particularly large body of literature discussing the production culture of sci-fi television in Vancouver, there are certainly many scholars who have written

¹¹ "B.C. Now Canada's Most Popular Province for Film, TV Production: Report," *Huffington Post Canada*, February 2, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2018/02/02/b-c-now-canadas-most-popular-province-for-film-tv-production-report_a_23351725/.

about the various elements individually. The literature that is being used in this thesis can be grouped together in three major subfields—television industry history, globalization and transnational television production, and television genre. This literature will help support my assertion that Vancouver is a genre-inflected media capital, a city whose production industry has been heavily influenced by the influx of science fiction productions over the past twenty-five years.

The first body of literature that I will discuss is the history of the television industry. Specifically, I concentrate on literature that begins with the desire of deregulation in the 1990s after several decades under the financial interests and syndication rules, otherwise known as fin-syn. Scholars, such as Amanda Lotz, Michele Hilmes, and Jennifer Holt discuss the industrial shifts that define much of the transition from the network era to the post-network era in American television.¹² Although these scholars provide a thorough framework to understand the television industry, I emphasize the need to look at the programming decisions made by newer players in the industry during the 1990s and early 2000s. Within this body of literature and time period, I assert that sci-fi television marks a moment in which niche programming began to be positioned for mainstream viability. It is important to note the ways in which newer networks identified key sci-fi and fantasy programs that could attract viewers who would potentially remain loyal to the program, and thus, the network itself.

The second body of literature that I will extend is the scholarship on the globalization of the television industries. I specifically concentrate on literature that identifies and discusses global media capitals (a term popularized by Michael Curtin) as well as scholarship on the trend

¹² See Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States*, 4th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014); Jennifer Holt, “Vertical Vision: Deregulation, Industrial Economy, and Prime-time Design,” in *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry, and Fans*, ed. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (London: BFI, 2003).

of runaway productions and co-productions in Canada. Positioned as a post-imperialist response to scholars of the 1970s who mainly argued within a “West versus the rest” framework, my work attempts to split Canada and the United States as a collective West and identify the particularities that position Canada’s role in the larger discourse of global television production in North America. It is important to note that work has been done by scholars of the past, specifically Chin-Chuan Lee, Marc Raboy, Ryan Edwardson, and Richard Collins, on the nationalist endeavors of the culture industries in Canada.¹³ However, my work specifically aims to focus on negotiations between Hollywood and Vancouver through the use of science fiction, a perspective that has been somewhat overlooked in more recent scholarship, although Serra Tinic has made some implied assertions about the role of sci-fi and supernatural programming in both Vancouver and Toronto, specifically noting the “Super Natural British Columbia” campaign developed by the provincial Ministry of Small Business, Tourism, and Culture as well as the negotiations of place specificity in *Orphan Black* (BBC America, 2013-17).¹⁴

The final body of literature that I will use is one of television genre, specifically science fiction as television transitions between network and post-network eras. Some scholars, such as Jason Mittell and Catherine Johnson, note the unique position of sci-fi as a genre and a cultural category, especially in relation to industrial practices and the audiences for these texts. Others, including Valerie Wee and Louisa Stein, encourage a more nuanced approach to the viewers of sci-fi texts, especially as producers attempted to court younger audiences through the hybrid

¹³ See Chin-Chuan Lee, “Canada: A Mouse Sleeping with an Elephant,” in *Media Imperialism Reconsidered* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979); Marc Raboy, *Missed Opportunities: The Story of Canada’s Broadcasting Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990); Ryan Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Richard Collins, *Culture, Communication, and National Identity: The Case of Canadian Television* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Serra Tinic, *On Location: Canada’s Television Industry in a Global Market* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 29; Serra Tinic, “Where in the World is *Orphan Black*? Change and Continuity in Global TV Production and Distribution,” *Media Industries Journal* 1, no. 3 (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0001.310>.

formations of sci-fi texts with elements of teenage drama and romance, among others. Although the scholars I cite discuss how television genre differs from traditional notions of genre (particularly from film and literature) as well as how sci-fi has long been considered a niche genre meant for a younger, fan-oriented audience (rather than a mainstream viewership), I note how sci-fi television was used as a branding vehicle in the 1990s to court viewers to newer distribution outlets and keep them engaged through these outlets' formative years. Further, due to the importance of industrial practices to specific televisual genres, the similarities of generic elements between space-based science fiction (*Stargate SG-1*), superhero (*Smallville*), and paranormal (*The X-Files*), among an array of other related genres, collectively assisted the development of Vancouver not only as a destination for science fiction television production but also a hub for similar genres to develop and prosper as well.

History of the Television Industry from the Multi-Channel Transition to Post-Network Era

Several media industries scholars, including Amanda Lotz, Michele Hilmes, and Jennifer Holt, have thoroughly discussed the infrastructural changes that led to the current shape of the contemporary television industry. Others, including Victoria Johnson and Barbara Selznick, have discussed the narrowcasting efforts of cable outlets (specifically, ESPN and Syfy, respectively) to distinguish themselves as hubs for niche programming and particular demographics as cable subscriptions rocketed in the 1990s. However, I highlight the need to focus on the production of science fiction television in Vancouver as an indicator of how transnational television production practices played a role during this same time period of the 1990s and early 2000s.

In her book, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, Amanda Lotz establishes three major periods of television history—the “network era” (from approximately 1952 through the mid-

1980s), the “multi-channel transition” (the period of the mid-1980s through the mid-2000s), and the “post-network era” (a period that begins to emerge in the early 2000s).¹⁵ Characteristics of the multi-channel transition that I use to frame this thesis include the end of the fin-syn rules (financial and syndication rules), the deregulation of the television industry, synergy and conglomeration of the studios and networks in the immediate deregulation period, and the proliferation of new networks and cable channel outlets. Although I situate my assertions within the frame of the 1990s, I argue that my focus on science fiction television begins during the multi-channel transition and extends into the post-network era. Programs, such as *The X-Files*, *Smallville*, *Supernatural*, and *Stargate SG-1*, perfectly exemplify what Lotz terms “prized content,” or “programming that *people seek out and specifically desire*.”¹⁶ In my various case studies throughout this thesis, it is clear that the sustainability of the aforementioned programs (and many more) depended on their desirability.

In the immediate period following the relaxation of fin-syn, studios and networks became vertically integrated once more. As Jennifer Holt notes in her chapter, “Vertical Vision: Deregulation, Industrial Economy, and Prime-time Design,” the mid-1990s was marked by “frenzied merger and acquisitions activity characterized by an unprecedented commitment to vertical integration and ‘synergy.’”¹⁷ Furthermore, Michele Hilmes notes that the term synergy can be used to describe “the efficiencies of scale that could be produced when cross-media holdings and combinations of production and distribution were used to cross-promote, create greater profits, and keep those profits in-house.”¹⁸ I add that the increase of Hollywood productions in Vancouver also helped boost relations between Hollywood firms and Vancouver

¹⁵ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 8.

¹⁶ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 12. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Holt, “Vertical Vision,” 11.

¹⁸ Hilmes, *Only Connect*, 325-26.

firms. Thus, not only did Hollywood firms boost their profits by keeping operations in-house, runaway productions in Vancouver boosted the local and provincial economies, supporting the increased migration of Hollywood into Vancouver. For example, as the Vancouver-produced *Smallville* grew in popularity on the Warner Bros. network (The WB), Warner Bros. Television expanded their operations in Vancouver with other productions that were also meant for distribution on The WB, such as *Supernatural*.

The multi-channel transition, particularly during the 1990s, also saw “increasingly developed programming that might be most satisfying to specific audience members.”¹⁹ The introduction of newer networks also saw an increase in counter-programming as a strategy. This strategy, which saw networks pushing certain programs to suit their particular audience’s taste, was employed by Fox during the late 1980s and early 1990s to court “a specific black viewership.”²⁰ While Zook notes Fox’s short-lived strategy to concentrate on urban audiences (Zook also argues that Fox’s attitude to black programs would turn “to seek white ‘legitimacy’” after Fox gained rights to air National Football League Sunday games beginning with the 1994 NFL season),²¹ I extend that sci-fi and fantasy programs were used similarly by networks like Fox to lure loyal genre viewers as they had done with sitcoms and black audiences only a few years beforehand. Indeed, Barbara Selznick offers support to this statement by noting that “[t]he splintered audience has diminished the possibility of any television show finding a mass audience ... [while] the goal of today’s television executives is to create programs that draw loyal viewers ... who follow texts across media while they spend money ... and attract

¹⁹ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 27.

²⁰ Kristal Brent Zook, *Color by Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

²¹ Zook, *Color by Fox*, 11.

advertisers to networks.”²² Selznick continues to assert that “audiences insist on high production values, but the fragmented audience does not yield high ratings and the associated high advertising rates to support production costs.”²³ I suggest that this assertion must consider the increased migration of sci-fi and other niche television productions to Vancouver to support the need to decrease the financial burden on networks who may not see high ratings for their niche-genre programs. As more distribution outlets became prominent throughout the 1990s and 2000s and as audiences were increasingly more targeted, production of sci-fi television in Vancouver made more economic sense as corporate firms decreased financial burdens and risks.

Vancouver as Media Capital for Hollywood’s Runaway Productions and Canadian Co-Productions

Within recent global media industries scholarship, scholars including Michael Curtin and Toby Miller, have reassessed the centrality of Hollywood as a place in relation to Hollywood as an industry. Curtin argues that several media capitals have emerged around the world, fostering multi-directional media flows that complicate the traditional dominance of the media imperialism discourse. In his “Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows,” Curtin uses a cultural geography framework to better understand the specificities of transnational media production and distribution. Rather than focusing on the nation-level as a default sphere of transnational production practices, Curtin uses Chicago, Hollywood, and Hong Kong to underscore the “increasing multi-directional flows of media imagery” as indicators of “particular cities that have become centers for the finance, production, and distribution of television

²² Barbara Selznick, “Branding the Future: Syfy in the Post-Network Era,” *Science Fiction Film and Television* 2, no. 2 (2009): 179, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/365349>.

²³ Selznick, “Branding the Future,” 179.

programs.”²⁴ As Curtin also argues, these developments have occurred as media firms have conglomerated and branched out beyond national borders. This type of growth has increased the range and variety of content types, which in turn has led to a shift in audience desire and demand. Thus, I extend that Curtin’s assertions about media capitals and multi-directional flows should also consider the impact of genre and format in television production and distribution. And further, I want to echo that Vancouver is not only a media capital known for runaway Hollywood productions, but has also become a sci-fi genre media capital as well.

Michele Hilmes’ “Transnational TV: What Do We Mean by ‘Coproduction’ Anymore?” tackles the terminology of co-production, which has become more complex as local industries have increased in size and scope. One of Hilmes’ key arguments is that transnational co-productions are not always about clear co-financing or joint distribution deals. She also argues that co-productions consider “differing audience tastes” to avoid potential cultural collisions.²⁵ Generally, I agree that audience tastes must be a consideration in the dynamic between Canada and the United States, especially in conversation about the proliferation of niche-market and specialty cable channels in the 1990s. However, I note that virtually all of the runaway Hollywood productions and many of the Hollywood/Canadian co-productions that film in Vancouver have erased markers of Canadianness. Even in partnership with Canadian production companies and studios, many co-productions (until very recently) have diverted away from the “boundary collisions inherent in transnational coproduction.”²⁶

²⁴ Michael Curtin, “Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 203, DOI: 10.1177/13678779030062004.

²⁵ Michele Hilmes, “Transnational TV: What Do We Mean by ‘Coproduction’ Anymore?” *Media Industries Journal* 1, no. 2 (2014), <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0001.203>.

²⁶ Hilmes, “Transnational TV.” See note 14b for Serra Tinic’s work on specificity of place in *Orphan Black*, one of the more recent examples of co-productions that contain instances of cultural collisions.

My thesis intends to continue an assertion that Canada exists as a “unique case” in the development of its broadcast and television industries and that the country exists as a “deviant” in the world of ‘media imperialism.’”²⁷ Echoing the sentiments of George Grant, Chin-Chuan Lee underscores the dilemma of Canadian broadcasting development: Canada, as a “major industrialized nation ... is torn between a search for self-identity and a yearning for larger-than-nation identity, between nationalism and Pan-Americanism, and between protectionism and liberalism.”²⁸ Even though Lee noted these observations in the 1970s, the role of Canada as a global media player has been further complicated by Vancouver’s variant strategy to cooperate with Hollywood, a direct implication from Canada’s centralization of the industries in the 1970s and 1980s in Ontario and Quebec. Vancouver’s geographic proximity and plentiful supply of locations, labor, and resources allowed the Hollywood industry to move productions north of the border while staying geographically (and culturally) proximate close to central operations in California. Thus, as I continue to argue throughout the thesis, Vancouver’s proximity to Hollywood enticed industry executives to migrate more expensive productions (particularly sci-fi, fantasy, and supernatural television) to the Canadian city for filming, and over time, developed Vancouver not only as a runaway media capital, but as a sci-fi oriented media capital as well.

Many early global media scholars, including Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Herbert Schiller, wrote about the dangers of the Western media industries becoming increasingly dominant globally. Others, including Joseph D. Straubhaar, reassessed the ways global media might be discussed “[a]s television industries around the world matured ... [and] audiences increasingly

²⁷ Lee, *Media Imperialism Reconsidered*, 113.

²⁸ Lee, *Media Imperialism Reconsidered*, 113.

showed a preference for national and regional productions.”²⁹ This thesis, as it relates to the rise of a Canadian city as a media capital, aims to revisit these conversations held by global media scholars. It adds nuance to prior media imperialism debates, taking into consideration some of the scholarship that emphasizes the need for a more complex discussion regarding American-international market relations. In particular, it assesses the oft-overlooked Canadian/American relationships in the media industries.

Joseph D. Straubhaar’s book, *World Television: From Global to Local*, examines many characteristics of global media flows and contextualizes such flows as culturally interdependent and operating at a variety of levels—global, regional, national, and local. His discussion of cultural proximity as one of the major theoretical approaches to cultural boundaries (cultural discount being the other) is especially useful in approaching Canadian/American media industry relations. One of the particular strengths for Hollywood firms filming in Vancouver was the ease of cultural transition paired with the local (and national) affinity for Hollywood content. In essence, Hollywood’s presence in Vancouver is desired by locals because the transnational end product is preferred over truly domestic content. Although framed by local and provincial officials as a sign of economic boost, Hollywood’s presence in Vancouver can easily be seen as exploitative, using resources, locations, and labor without cultural credit to the Canadianness of Vancouver. However, in part due to viewer affinity for American programming and in part due to the lack of national cohesion of the Canadian television industry, Canadian prime-time programming blocks continued to air a substantial amount of American programming between the 1960s to the early 2000s.³⁰

²⁹ Michael Curtin, “Thinking Globally: From Media Imperialism to Media Capital,” in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, eds. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 110.

³⁰ Joseph D. Straubhaar, *World Television: From Global to Local* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2007), 173, 261-62.

In addition, Straubhaar also proposes a new definition of the term asymmetrical interdependence as a way for understanding how various countries may be unequal to each other—possessing different levels of political, economic, technological, and cultural power.³¹ Straubhaar’s theory of cultural proximity highlights the key element connecting the industries of Vancouver and the U.S.-based operations of Hollywood: namely, Hollywood has cultivated a relationship with select Canadian media capitals (specifically Vancouver, and later, Toronto) in order to serve its own economic ends by continuing to serve American (and global) audiences with transnational production operations in Canada, while also retaining global distribution operations in the United States.

Jeremy Tunstall and David Machin’s *The Anglo-American Media Connection* builds on Tunstall’s previous work on what he terms the “Anglo-American enterprise,” consisting of a consortium of Anglophile nations (i.e, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland). Tunstall and Machin argue that the United States is the key player in the global media landscape, while the junior Anglophile players act in accordance to American desires of international market domination. While Tunstall and Machin use their work primarily to show the interdependent ways in which the U.K. is more successful in certain arenas (public service broadcasting, journalism, and popular music), with this thesis, I look at the ways Canada fits into Tunstall and Machin’s framework as a junior player attempting to find its own identity and political-economic position within a Hollywood-dominated global media industry.

Also important to my study is Serra Tinic’s seminal work on television production practices in Vancouver (and to a lesser extent, Toronto). Her book, *On Location: Canada’s Television Industry in a Global Market*, chronicles the history of Vancouver’s development in relation to Hollywood. She examines the connections between Vancouver and the rest of

³¹ Straubhaar, *World Television*, 21.

Canada and also addresses the interrelationship between Vancouver and Hollywood. In this project, I build on Tinic's assertions about Vancouver's inability to develop their culture industries apart from American influence. Again, Canada is considered a place of paradox and contradictions as "runaway American production does erase Vancouver as a *lived community* but simultaneously provides the necessary opportunities and infrastructure for domestic producers to develop independent local stories."³² However, Tinic's assertions do not fully connect the migration of sci-fi television production to Vancouver to the overall runaway production trend. It is my aim to highlight the importance of this genre within the conversation of Vancouver as a media production capital in the Hollywood transnational infrastructure.

Television Genre and Science Fiction Television in the Multi-Channel Era

As this project looks at multiple sci-fi television programs over the last twenty-five years, it will be important to draw from important genre theorists as well as scholars, such as Jason Mittell, Catherine Johnson, and Charlotte Howell, who connect generic to industrial shifts in television industry history. My addition to the work of television genre explicitly notes the role of Vancouver as a production site for North American science fiction. Specifically, as sci-fi programs were produced in Vancouver throughout the 1990s, the city itself has become known for this particular niche of productions by Vancouver residents and sci-fi fans alike.³³ Additionally, as this thesis focuses on Hollywood productions in Vancouver, notions of quality should be considered. In an industrial context, especially as many of these programs were filmed in Vancouver to lessen financial burden on Hollywood firms who had developed new

³² Tinic, *On Location*, 31-32.

³³ Alexandra Samuel, "Vancouver Residents Get a Taste of the Future," *Wall Street Journal*, April 16, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/vancouver-residents-get-a-taste-of-the-future-1492394642>.

distribution outlets for American audiences, I extend that these productions also aired a sense of higher quality, especially to lure loyal viewers to networks to increase overall potential viability.

In *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*, Mittell identifies genre as a cultural category that is “best understood as a process of categorization that is not found within media texts, but operates across the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics, and historical contexts.”³⁴ Mittell further argues that “[g]enres operate in an ongoing historical process of category formation—genres are constantly in flux, and thus their analysis must be historically situated.”³⁵ He also notes that by positioning genre formations within a televisual context, “[w]e can uncover the industry’s power to define genre as a production and distribution strategy and further particular cultural assumptions as linked to generic categories.”³⁶ Mittell’s work exemplifies the complexities in analyzing a grouping of television texts and reinforces the need to examine multiple industrial perspectives. As noted throughout the thesis, I remain steadfast that Vancouver sci-fi should be treated as a category within the larger genre of sci-fi television, rather like the way that Korean or Latin American drama and melodrama are quite distinct from those of the U.S. I argue that runaway Hollywood productions in Vancouver that emphasize narrative and thematic elements of science fiction in any capacity should be considered within its own cultural category and that there are key developments within this category that can and should be discovered through close analysis.

Catherine Johnson’s *Telefantasy* highlights the need to consider sci-fi television as significant within the larger discourses of television history. By highlighting the 1990s and early 2000s as a period of significant sci-fi television, Johnson uses case studies (including *The X-*

³⁴ Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), xii.

³⁵ Mittell, *Genre and Television*, xiv.

³⁶ Mittell, *Genre and Television*, xvi.

Files and *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*) to help readers understand the relationship between cult and quality discourses. As distribution outlets proliferated and niche outlets increased in American television (as well as in other markets around the world), Johnson asserts that “the television audience was increasingly conceived and addressed as a coalition of taste markets (rather than demographics).”³⁷ Her work not only illustrates the importance of researching science fiction television, generally, to understand this time period but also indicates how a focus on the production of science fiction sheds light on larger industrial developments. Johnson’s work also supports my claim that Vancouver-filmed science fiction television was developed with a particular audience in mind. Although newer networks struggled in balancing niche, marginalized, and mainstream audiences (as evident between sci-fi fans, African-American audiences, and general viewers, respectively), a heightened awareness that science fiction could be considered quality programming assisted newer distribution outlets to lure viewers toward their sci-fi and fantasy offerings.

Charlotte Howell’s “Legitimizing Genre: The Discursive Turn to Quality in Early 1990s Science Fiction Television” discusses the role of critics of popular culture in the early 1990s in determining the quality of sci-fi television, a genre that has long been considered juvenile, crude, and low in aesthetic and narrative qualities. Although Howell notes the fraught nature of markers of quality, she argues that “[f]or science fiction television, the hierarchy of quality is shaped by assumptions of lowness that must be overcome for the genre as a whole to gain access to discourses of quality.”³⁸ Extending Howell’s work on the hierarchies of sci-fi television, I note the ways in which newer, junior networks in American broadcasting positioned sci-fi texts as quality through the attraction of fans that increased the valuation and viability of a network.

³⁷ Johnson, *Telefantasy*, 99.

³⁸ Howell, “Legitimizing Genre,” 38.

Lastly, I connect this project to several scholars of sci-fi and cult television to indicate the important links between sci-fi television, television history, industrial practices, and American cultural histories. For example, Lincoln Geraghty connects the narrative trends in sci-fi television history to shifts in American society in regard to technology (the Space Race), government (9/11), and other producers of anxiety and tension in modern American history. M. Keith Booker historicizes the many sci-fi television programs in a chronological narrative to help television scholars understand the larger trajectory taken by science fiction over the last seventy-plus years of television. However, many of the programs that have aired over the past two decades are hybrids of science fiction, mixed with elements of other genres. In Valerie Wee's chapter, "Teen Television and the WB Television Network," and Louisa Stein's "'They Cavort, You Decide': Transgenericism, Queerness, and Fan Interpretation in Teen TV," younger audiences were targeted by producers to lure loyal viewers to networks such as The WB. This latter notion supports the need to examine these programs not by genre, but by Mittell's cultural categories. Programs such as *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed* (The WB, 1996-2006) exemplify texts with sci-fi and supernatural elements that court not only court fans of science fiction television, but also younger viewers who are attracted to elements of teenage drama. Collectively, these types of programs have been useful for newer networks who have used counterprogramming measures to attract certain audiences and have built brand identity through these transgeneric texts.

Historical Context and Overview of Chapters

During the 1980s and 1990s, American television experienced a significant expansion in distribution options, with the introduction of new broadcast networks UPN and The WB as well

as the proliferation of cable and satellite channels. Between 1980 and 2000, cable subscriptions climbed from 19.9 percent of American households to 68 percent.³⁹ The expansion of television channels led to the growth of niche-oriented and genre-oriented outlets in which science fiction and other genres were able to be economically viable, finding strong audiences and growing their fan bases. The introduction of Fox in 1986 and the simultaneous launch of UPN and The WB in 1995 also changed the dynamics of prime-time programming. It is in 1993, with Fox's move into higher-end hour-long programming, and in particular, its launch of *The X-Files*, that I begin with the first of three case studies that reveal the historical progression of science fiction television from the early 1990s to the current (post-network) era of television. Discussion of sci-fi television throughout the thesis will track many of the longer-running programs on newer distribution outlets while also analyzing particular business strategies employed by these outlets, including media franchising and audience targeting. Chapter 1 will focus on the first five years of *The X-Files*, filmed between 1993 and 1998 for the Fox network. Chapter 2 will discuss one of the longest-running superhero television programs, *Smallville*, airing on The WB between 2001 and 2006 and moving to The CW after the 2006 merger of UPN and The WB. Chapter 3 will analyze the industrial trajectory of *Stargate SG-1* between 1997 and 2007, a program that was expanded by MGM Television into a franchise for Sci Fi Channel (after Showtime's cancellation and Sci Fi's renewal of the series in 2002), a newer cable outlet dedicated to original sci-fi television content. It's imperative to note that much of the sci-fi television that was developed during this time period was filmed in Vancouver (including all of the aforementioned case studies), mostly due to the favorable currency exchange as well as provincial and federal financial incentives given to Hollywood firms to boost local economies.

³⁹ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 57.

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, Fox was still pushing to develop a hit hour-long series that would catapult the new network's visibility and viability. But in 1993, with the unexpected global success of *The X-Files*, the network was finally able to compete directly against the steadfast oligopoly of the "Big Three" networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS). Executive producer Chris Carter's series became an instant cult hit, allowing him to cultivate a growing franchise that included two spin-off series (*Millennium* [Fox, 1996-99], *The Lone Gunman* [Fox, 2001]), two feature films (*The X-Files* [1998], *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* [2008]), and a television revival nearly a decade after the second film's release in 2008. With the exception of four seasons of the original series, all of the franchise was filmed in Vancouver.⁴⁰ The motivation initially driving Carter to film in the Canadian city was the diversity of locations both inside and outside of the city limits.

As with Fox, the first few years for the newly launched WB and UPN were also a bit rocky. Initially, all three of these networks attempted to court the marginalized African-American audience, primarily with sitcoms. However, within a few years of each network's launch, Fox, The WB, and UPN shifted their strategies toward other genres and audiences. While UPN benefitted from airing *Star Trek: Voyager* (UPN, 1995-2001) due to the parent company owning the rights to the Star Trek franchise, The WB attempted to court younger viewers with family-friendly fare, such as *7th Heaven* and a slate of sitcoms. With *Star Trek: Voyager* and *The Sentinel* (UPN, 1996-99), UPN was more of a sci-fi destination than The WB. However, by the end of the decade, The WB shifted toward hour-long dramas featuring young leads, such as *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002), while many of them, including *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* (The WB, 1999-2004), and *Charmed*, were hybrid texts that included sci-fi, fantasy, and supernatural elements. It's important to note that while Warner Bros. Television was a major

⁴⁰ See note 1.

studio by this time, many of the hour-long shows on The WB, including all of the aforementioned programs, were not produced by the studio. Instead, it wasn't until the highly-publicized decision to move the Fox-produced *Buffy* from The WB to UPN that the former network decided to rely more on their sister studio's programming—a strategy of vertical integration increasingly used in subsequent years. *Smallville* exemplifies Time Warner's desire to coordinate efforts between their various divisions. Along with the aforementioned *Supernatural*, *Smallville* was also filmed in Vancouver. These two programs highlight a synergized effort from Warner Bros. to use Vancouver as a production site for sci-fi, supernatural, and superhero programming specifically for their Warner Bros. network (as well as The CW after the merger of The WB and UPN in 2006).

The story of how science fiction television appeared on different cable channels is a bit more complicated. Until the launch of Sci Fi in 1992, there had been no channel dedicated to offering the niche genres of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and the supernatural. Throughout the 1990s, the channel's ownership changed hands several times. It was in 2001, with Barry Diller's sale of Sci Fi to Vivendi Universal (soon to become NBCUniversal in 2004) that the channel really solidified its branding and expansion efforts.

A key moment for the cable channel's growth came after Sci-Fi Channel acquired the rights to multiple sci-fi programs in 1998. This included a \$150 million deal that gave Sci-Fi basic cable rights to *Stargate SG-1*, *The Outer Limits* (Showtime, 1995-2000; Sci Fi, 2001-02), and *Poltergeist: The Legacy* (Showtime, 1996-98; Sci Fi, 1999). The *Stargate* and *Battlestar Galactica* franchises (1994-2018 and 1978-2012, respectively), which consisted of various television series and feature-length films—most of which were shot in Vancouver—were some of the more significant titles aired on the channel during the late 1990s and early 2000s. It was

with these programs that Sci-Fi aggressively moved into distributing its own original content (as opposed to its formative strategy to air reruns of classic and recently-cancelled programs as well as science fiction films from Paramount Pictures and Universal Studios). This content could be produced less expensively by being shot in Vancouver, and by taking advantage of its incentive programs and exchange rate.

Chapter Overview

Focusing on the first five years of production for *The X-Files* in Vancouver, Chapter 1 begins in 1993, as Chris Carter, the creator and executive producer for *The X-Files*, decides to film his series in British Columbia in part because of the province's rich diversity in locations, but due to favorable economic conditions as well. Although not the first Hollywood producer to film in Vancouver, Carter's decision is notable for strengthening Vancouver's relationship with Hollywood, especially in accommodations for runaway Hollywood productions as well as Hollywood/Canadian television co-productions. Rare as it was for a Hollywood television production to move to Vancouver in 1993, by the decade's end, Vancouver was a full-fledged media capital for runaway Hollywood productions, many of which were sci-fi and fantasy television productions. Setting up Carter's initial work as a starting point for this study, I will look at how Vancouver's television industry adapted to a strong focus in science fiction and telefantasy productions and how the city developed not only as a runaway media capital but also a sci-fi television capital. Additionally, I will discuss how Fox marked the first attempt in over thirty years to launch a fourth network in the United States. In the particular strategies that Fox executives used to slowly develop a viable brand identity for the network, Fox was shaped as an alternative to the traditional fare of the Big Three networks. This included the initial blocking of

sitcoms aimed at black audiences as well as sci-fi and fantasy dramas (many of which were filmed in Vancouver) that would lure loyal audiences to the network. I end the chapter by noting the dichotomy between Fox's success story—a niche sci-fi program for the network that had quickly become one of the show's biggest hits, and thus, a mainstream cultural product—and Fox's repeated failures of replicating that same success story with other Vancouver-filmed sci-fi television programs.⁴¹ Even though *The X-Files* was not the first runaway production in Vancouver for Fox, it was one of the more influential in Fox's sustainability as a network. Finally, as Fox repeatedly attempted to produce sci-fi programming in the Canadian city, Vancouver shifted to become a more desirable production location for a number of independent and Hollywood television studios, including Warner Bros. Television, currently "Vancouver's biggest TV client."⁴² Vancouver became more important as studios sought to cut production costs in a highly competitive syndication market.

Beginning in 1995, Chapter 2 begins to discuss network television in the 1990s with a focus on the development of The WB and UPN networks. By the mid-2000s, these two networks merged to form The CW, currently the nation's fifth network. By historicizing this complicated moment for these upstart networks (and the studios behind their strategies), I look at how underserved, teenage and young adult demographic were served via counterprogramming strategies. By becoming a site for transgeneric texts (television shows relying on a number of inseparable generic components), The WB, and later, The CW, are interesting sites of analysis when looking at the sci-fi, fantasy, and superhero texts that become popular around the turn of the century. This chapter will focus solely on The WB; however, some of the programming migrated to The CW in 2006. The focus on vertical integration in this chapter is imperative as the

⁴¹ See note 9 for examples of short-lived sci-fi programs that aired on Fox during this time.

⁴² Vancouver Mayor's Office, "2015 a Record Year for Television and Film in Vancouver," February 19, 2016, <http://mayorofvancouver.ca/news/2015-record-year-television-and-film-vancouver>.

narrative of The WB's history peaks in 2001. This year was pivotal as the network lost two of its key programs—*Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and *Roswell*—weakening the relationship between The WB and 20th Century Fox Television, the latter of which produced both programs. In the same year, a more integrated strategy in developing a hit program for The WB was fruitful, with Warner Bros. Television producing *Smallville*, a commonly owned property through DC Entertainment.

Chapter 3 begins in 1998 and departs from the broadcast emphasis of the prior two chapters and instead focuses on the development of Vancouver-based sci-fi as a prominent genre and production locale in cable television. As broadcast networks began to shun sci-fi programs (particularly the Big Four networks) in favor of programs with wider (perceived) appeal, the Sci-Fi Channel became an increasingly viable option for fans of sci-fi programs. Syndicated sci-fi programs could find new life on cable, and original programming could thrive in this more niche-market outlet. In this chapter, I reintroduce the idea of franchising as a production logic and marketing strategy, highlighting Sci-Fi's continuation of the *Stargate* and *Battlestar Galactica* franchises in order to build brand identity as well as a loyal Sci-Fi audience from 1998 through the 2000s. By noting the high number of Vancouver-based sci-fi television productions, I discuss the increasing role that Canadians had on runaway productions by the turn of the century, while also noting the increased potential for Canadian writers and producers to develop their own fully-Canadian programs, often through science fiction content. Finally, I end by noting the current state of Vancouver's role as a sci-fi television capital. As streaming platforms, such as Netflix, have started to disrupt the models of distribution in North America and internationally, sci-fi material produced in Vancouver has also appeared on these platforms—

notably, *Altered Carbon* (Netflix, 2018-present) and *Lost in Space* (Netflix, 2018-present) were both filmed in the Canadian city.

Overall, I argue that Vancouver played a pivotal role during the “multi-channel transition” of television from the mid-1990s into what Lotz refers to as the post-network era. Specifically, as a media capital that became a central site for the production of sci-fi content, I also argue that the Vancouver production sector continues to thrive and evolve. The city has become a home for runaway productions, international co-productions, and domestic productions simultaneously, many of which are science fiction oriented. Due to the overwhelming growth of Vancouver-based productions and the co-dependent relationship between Hollywood and Vancouver, science fiction television production has thrived in Vancouver, a media capital known in the international marketplace for its ability to mask its place specificity in substitution for real and fictional settings alike.

Chapter 1: “The Truth Is Out There” ... in Canada:

Fox, *The X-Files*, and Sci-Fi Runaway Productions

By 1998, *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993-02; 2016-present) had peaked as a massively successful global television hit, averaging nearly twenty million viewers per episode during its fifth season.¹ However, this success was highly unanticipated at the start of show’s journey in 1993. According to Peter Roth, then the newly promoted President of Twentieth Television (the television production arm of Fox, Inc.), “... the people that were at the network at the time really weren’t interested in the idea [of *The X-Files*]. It was not a favorite in development. It almost didn’t get greenlit ... as a pilot. It almost didn’t get greenlit as a series. It was perceived to be too myopic and singular and not commercial.”² Even beyond the pilot’s debut, it took time for the series and its two relatively unknown leads (Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny) to find their groove in the 9 p.m. slot on Friday nights. Created and executive produced by Chris Carter, the program helped change the landscape for science fiction, enabling such programs to “secure mainstream appeal and last a considerable distance.”³ The other broadcast networks would attempt to replicate the success of this science fiction series over the next decade, yet few would find the success that *The X-Files* enjoyed.

In addition to then-unknown Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny, a surprise star of the program was the location in which the series was filmed. The first five seasons of *The X-Files* were filmed in Vancouver, British Columbia, rather than in Los Angeles. Although a handful of

¹ Rick Kissell, “Ratings: Fox’s ‘The X-Files’ Return Tops 20 Million in 3-Day Viewing Totals,” *Variety*, January 29, 2016, <http://variety.com/2016/tv/news/ratings-the-x-files-delayed-viewing-20-million-1201692086/>.

² Daniel M. Kimmel, *The Fourth Network: How Fox Broke the Rules and Reinvented Television* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 159.

³ Sue Short, *Cult Telefantasy Series: A Critical Analysis of The Prisoner, Twin Peaks, The X-Files, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Lost, Heroes, Doctor Who and Star Trek* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 58.

other productions (including *Stingray* [NBC, 1985-87] and *Wiseguy* [CBS, 1987-90]) had migrated to the Canadian city to avoid the higher costs associated with filming in California,⁴ Carter had notoriously exclaimed that “We couldn’t find a good forest!” when asked about his decision to film in the Canadian city.⁵ His desire to use a forest location led the crew to film much of the series in and around the Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve (LSCR; also known as Seymour Demonstration Forest), which served as a chameleon setting, representing the outdoors “everywhere from Puerto Rico to Siberia.”⁶ The appeal of British Columbia’s natural landscapes was not a new discovery of Carter’s, but rather the result of a marketing campaign of the provincial Ministry of Small Business, Tourism, and Culture. “Super, Natural British Columbia” was the official tourism motto that has been used from the 1980s. This motto originally promoted the area’s natural landscapes but soon became more closely associated with Vancouver as a production site for American supernatural television.⁷

Although much has been written on *The X-Files*,⁸ little has connected *The X-Files* to larger industrial factors, including the production of the series in Vancouver, the uptick in science fiction production in the 1990s, the decline of the financial interest and syndication rules (fin-syn), and the development of new networks (Fox in 1987 as well as 1995 freshmen UPN and

⁴ John Abbott, *Stephen J. Cannell Productions: A History of All Series and Pilots* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 223-25.

⁵ Frank Garcia and Mark Phillips, *Science Fiction Television Series, 1990-2004* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 370.

⁶ Eric Grundhauser and Ella Morton, “The Vancouver Forest That Has Been Every Wooded Location on ‘X-Files,’” *Atlas Obscura*, June 15, 2015, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-vancouver-forest-that-has-been-every-location-on-x-files>.

⁷ Serra Tinic, *On Location: Canada’s Television Industry in a Global Market* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 29. Shows that Tinic cites here include *The X-Files*, *Highlander*, *The Outer Limits*, *Poltergeist: The Legacy*, *Sliders*, *Strange Luck*, *Millennium*, *Stargate SG-1*, and *The Sentinel*.

⁸ See Jan Delasara, *PopLit, PopCult, and The X-Files* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000); Lincoln Geraghty, “Beyond Truth and Reason: Politics and Identity in Science Fiction,” in *American Science Fiction Film and Television*, (Oxford and New York City: Berg, 2009); Lacy Hodges, “Mainstreaming Marginality: Genre, Hybridity, and Postmodernism in *The X-Files*,” in *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader*, ed. J.P. Telotte (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008).

The WB).⁹ This chapter will take an in-depth look at how the runaway production of *The X-Files* in Vancouver not only accommodated Carter's wish for a diversity of locations, but also exploited Canada's incentives program and took place in tandem with a transformative period in TV production and distribution. This period, roughly overlapping with the five years in which *The X-Files* filmed in Vancouver (1993-98), saw the launch of two broadcast networks (UPN and The WB), a rise in the number of cable channels available to subscribing households, and the relaxation of the fin-syn rules, which in turn paved the way for networks to develop more in-house productions.¹⁰ In addition, as science fiction shows tend to cost more per episode than other genres while also having greater difficulty in securing a loyal, mainstream audience, this chapter also takes into consideration the role of science fiction television in primetime programming as the Big Three networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) adjusted during this chaotic period of the "multi-channel transition."

Additionally, while much has been written on the topic of science fiction television in general, as well as on specific science fiction programs, runaway productions in Vancouver, and the launches of Fox, UPN, and The WB, more specifically, relatively little has connected these different components to a larger industrial context of conglomeration and consolidation.¹¹ This chapter takes a look at the beginning of this transitional period, in which Fox's launch as the

⁹ The Financial Interest and Syndication Rules were imposed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the early 1970s in order to prevent the Big Three television networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC—from having a financial interest in programming that they aired during prime-time hours. These rules, which also extended to syndicated programming, were meant to give production studios more power and control in their negotiations with the Big Three networks. Inevitably, networks pressured the FCC to relax the rules, and by the mid-1990s, the rules had been fully relaxed. This latter shift in media regulation allowed studios and networks to align and mega-corporations (such as The Walt Disney Company and News Corporation) to create fully-integrated media empires.

¹⁰ Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 57. The percentage of U.S. households that subscribed to cable grew from 19.9 percent in 1980 to 56.4 percent in 1990 and reached 68 percent in 2000.

¹¹ For general scholarship on science fiction television, see M. Keith Booker, *Science Fiction Television* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Luke Hockley, "Science Fiction," in *The Television Genre Book*, ed. Glen Creeber, 2nd ed. (London: BFI, 2008); Mark Siegel, "Science Fiction and Fantasy TV," in *TV Genres: A Handbook and Reference Guide*, ed. Brian G. Rose (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985)

fourth network played a key role in disrupting a long, stable period of oligopoly in broadcast television. While over the last several decades, the Big Three had figured out how to reach out to more specific audiences through particular programs (e.g., CBS' efforts to reach socially-conscious audiences in the 1970s or ABC's efforts to reach the 18-35 demographic with "jiggle TV"), Fox's primary strategy of counterprogramming against established trends on television instigated some especially notable and longstanding developments in terms of genre-based and niche-oriented programs.

The focus of this chapter positions the key moments and events that led to the development of Fox as the fourth network with the catalysts that began development of Vancouver into a science fiction television capital. In this chapter, I will first document key factors contributing to the launch of Fox as the first fourth network in three decades. Second, I will discuss Fox's strategy of counterprogramming and its one-day-at-a-time strategy in building a primetime schedule at the same time it avoided receiving the legal classification as a network. Fox's expansion is mainly discussed in terms of its experimentation with genres, including science fiction, among others (including reality and children's programming). Third, I will look into the ways Fox and its competitors acquired programming at the time, noting the shift away from independent productions and toward in-house productions, a direct implication of vertical integration after the decline of fin-syn. Fourth, I explore the frequent attempts by Fox and other netlets to understand the audiences of science fiction, in particular highlighting the numerous attempts (as well as numerous critical and commercial failures) of networks trying to replicate the success of *The X-Files*. Finally, I will propose that while the majority of Vancouver-based, science fiction programming during the mid-1990s was the result of networks trying to cut costs, one result was that a new labor pool and production sector emerged in Vancouver—a pool that

would go on contributing to many subsequent science fiction programs along with contributing to domestic efforts across a range of genres. Thus, the major assertion of Vancouver as a science fiction media capital is reinforced through an industry strengthened primarily by runaway productions through the 1990s and early 2000s.

The Development of a Fourth Network ... Again

Between 1956 and 1986, broadcast television was largely dominated by the Big Three networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC). In the overall history of the television industry, there have been two major (and several minor) efforts to develop a fourth television network that could viably compete against these three. Throughout much of the late 1930s and early 1940s, many companies, including those behind the major radio networks of the time, were experimenting with the medium of television.¹² Of the four major radio networks, CBS and the two national NBC networks transitioned into television, while Mutual Broadcasting, which was in financial decline, did not.¹³ Although the efforts to commercialize television stalled during World War II, several companies (including NBC, DuMont, CBS, and ABC) were still interested in developing network television.¹⁴ NBC and CBS dominated much of television during the 1940s, while ABC (formerly NBC Blue) followed closely behind (mostly due to a crossover radio audience). DuMont perpetually struggled in ratings against the other three. The development of network television was highly manipulated by the FCC regulations, particularly in terms of the number of stations a network could own and the number of stations that could be operated within a single

¹² Cynthia B. Meyers, *A Word from our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio* (New York City: Fordham University Press, 2014), 267.

¹³ Christopher H. Sterling, "Mutual Broadcasting System," *Encyclopedia of Journalism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 924.

¹⁴ David Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network: DuMont and the Birth of American Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 17.

market. Because many markets were not able to sustain four or more stations (many of which were affiliates), DuMont struggled to establish primary affiliate in each market to develop as a truly national network.¹⁵

Between 1948 and 1952, the FCC froze station license authorizations while examining what could be done with the crowded VHF (very high frequency) band of the broadcast spectrum. A potential option of opening up a band of UHF (ultra high frequency) would have increased the number of stations in markets overall and led to a healthier environment between affiliate stations and the four major networks competing for their signals. However, as documented in the Sixth Report and Order on April 11, 1952, the FCC “maintained the existing VHF system, despite its limitations, as the primary tool for providing the country with television.”¹⁶ This was largely due to local stations (many of which were primarily affiliated with NBC and CBS) lobbying against the addition of UHF. DuMont suffered for the next three years until it ceased operations in 1955.

Perhaps one of DuMont’s most notable contributions to television was the program *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (1949-55). As the first science fiction series that appeared on American television sets, *Captain Video* originally targeted children (as many subsequent science fiction programs of the early 1950s did). The show was generally considered a crude production, “deficient in technical brilliance,” but, along with a handful of other programs, “created a space for the science fiction television series.”¹⁷ As Lincoln Geraghty argues, “many critics have dismissed so-called childish science fiction ... yet what these criticisms often forget is that science fiction of this type filled a specific need and had a particular role in the survival

¹⁵ Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network*, 19.

¹⁶ Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network*, 20.

¹⁷ Geraghty, *American Science Fiction Film and Television*, 27. Other early 1950s science fiction series include *Rocky Jones*, *Space Ranger* (1954); *Space Patrol* (1950-55); and *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* (1950-55).

and development of the science fiction genre on both the big and small screens.”¹⁸ Even throughout the chaotic development and collapse of the DuMont network, *Captain Video* remained one of the most consistently popular shows for the network. Although the series was estimated to have a national audience of around 3.5 million Americans in the early 1950s, the popularity of the star character was enough for other networks (and independent studios) to attempt to replicate the success of *Captain Video* and the “space opera” fad of the time.¹⁹

When DuMont went off the air in 1955, only two owned-and-operated (O&O) television stations remained in the company’s control, WABD (New York City) and WTTF (Washington, D.C.). Over the next decade, these stations (and a handful more) would eventually become a television station group (but not a network) known as Metropolitan Broadcasting Corporation in 1957 and subsequently Metromedia in 1961. After buying out Paramount Pictures’ controlling shares in 1958, John Kluge primarily oversaw the operations of the Metromedia group (which also included radio stations, live entertainment, magazines, and other cultural industries) as well as Metromedia Producers Corporation (MPC), the company’s television production and distribution division. Kluge owned between two and fourteen television stations at any given time between the late 1950s and early 1980s but was quoted as saying that he didn’t feel he could take the risk “to go on and develop a fourth network.”²⁰ Kluge sold MPC and the six remaining O&O stations in his portfolio to Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation on May 4, 1985 for \$3.5 billion. MPC would become the basis for Twentieth Century Fox Television (the television

¹⁸ Geraghty, *American Science Fiction Film and Television*, 49.

¹⁹ Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network*, 69-70.

²⁰ Shalini Dore, “Metromedia Entrepreneur,” *Daily Variety*, September 10, 2010, 2-28.

production division of Fox) while the six stations served as the foundation for the development of Fox Broadcasting Company, the company behind television's newest fourth network.²¹

One Day at a Time: A Generic Approach to Primetime Counterprogramming

On October 9, 1986, the Fox Broadcasting Company launched with its late-night program, *The Late Show* (1986-88), hosted by Joan Rivers. Programmed directly against NBC's *The Tonight Show* (then hosted by Johnny Carson),²² Fox's programming decisions were initially aggressive toward its closest competitors. After a few months of struggling to break through in the ratings, however, Fox appeared to primarily be using the late-night time slot and program to amplify its name as the fourth network rather than trying to use the program as a focal point for its programming. Six months later after the premiere of *The Late Show*, the network launched its first primetime programming. Although Fox's first years were shaky, there were several reasons why Fox didn't follow DuMont's trajectory, including its one-day-at-a-time programming strategy and its not-a-network identity. Additionally, as Fox was one of several media companies integrated into Rupert Murdoch's transnational empire, the network benefitted from the media conglomerate's multiple streams of revenue, cushioning the growing pains of its formative years.

Instead of launching several shows during its initial season, Fox experimented with premiering only a handful of shows, and only on the weekends. For the 1986-87 season (which, for Fox, only included the spring and summer of 1987), the network only had invested in one hour-long drama (the Vancouver-filmed *21 Jump Street* [1987-91]) to lure in a younger

²¹ In the 1970s, Paramount Chairman and CEO Barry Diller planned to launch a television network, entitled the Paramount Television Service. Diller planned to greenlight a Star Trek sequel series entitled *Star Trek: Phase II* as the flagship series for the network, but neither the series nor the network came into fruition. Diller would later launch the Fox network.

²² *The Tonight Show* has been on the air since 1954. Johnny Carson's role as host lasted thirty years, spanning from 1962 to 1992.

audience. *21 Jump Street* was one of several programs produced by Stephen J. Cannell's production company (including *Wiseguy*) filming in the Canadian city, mainly to avoid high production costs in Los Angeles. The decision for *21 Jump Street* to be filmed in Vancouver should be not understated, as it would directly influence many more television productions (notably, *The X-Files*) to migrate to the city in the years to come. Once notable for producing many action programs of the 1970s and 1980s, Cannell and his decision to film *21 Jump Street*, Fox's first hour-long program, in Vancouver directly influenced Chris Carter and his decision to film *The X-Files* in Vancouver less than a decade later. The rest of Fox's programming for several seasons included a revolving door of sitcoms, including *The Tracey Ullman Show* (1987-90), which in turn would lead to the same network developing *The Simpsons* (1989-present), arguably Fox's most well-known series (and the longest-running series for the network). *21 Jump Street* showed the network's first sign of a counterprogramming strategy that would be employed for several subsequent years as a means to compete against the Big Three networks. While the other networks aired family-friendly programming during the 7 p.m. hour on Sundays (e.g., ABC's *The Disney Sunday Movie* [1986-88], CBS' *60 Minutes* [1968-present], and NBC's *Our House* [1986-88]), Fox's *21 Jump Street* pulled in the younger demographic that no other program during the hour was doing. Not only did the series attract a younger demographic due to the young, fresh faces of the cast (including a then-unknown Johnny Depp), the series also tackled a number of controversial issues, including racism, date rape, interracial dating, incest, child prostitution, and homophobia. Co-creator Patrick Hasburgh noted how proud Fox was of the series, especially since the show was "the number-one show in the country for teenagers."²³

²³ Patricia Brennan, "'21 Jump Street': The Undercover Cop as Teen-Age Hero," *Washington Post*, December 13, 1987.

Fox's ultimate interest was the younger audience and they were invested in showing edgier content than the Big Three in order to draw them in.

The second manner in which Fox stayed afloat in these early years was through its distinctive cultivation of its identity as a broadcast network. During the first few seasons of Fox's primetime programming, the network gradually came close to airing fifteen hours of programming a week. According to the FCC, if a company exceeded fifteen hours of programming per week, it was legally defined as a network and subject to network regulation accordingly. However, without being legally a network in the eyes of the FCC, Fox was able to bypass the fin-syn rules, allowing Murdoch's company to operate as a vertically integrated operation. It functioned both as a network and as a studio involved in syndicating its own programming – something none of its competitors were able to do at this time.²⁴ One key way in which Fox neared the fifteen-hour rule—and thus became subject to FCC regulations—was through its expansion into daytime children's programming in the fall of 1990.²⁵ Over the next year, the FCC granted the network a one-year waiver, redefined a network as having more than fifteen hours of *primetime* programming a week, and grandfathered Fox around a number of adjusted fin-syn rules. Concurrently, by relaxing some of the elements of the fin-syn rules, the FCC was paving the way for soon-to-launch networks from Warner Brothers (The WB) and Paramount (UPN). By the fall of 1995, with the television industry dramatically shifting in numerous ways—including with the growth of cable, and an ever-more deregulatory attitude encouraging more competition in the form of new channel options – the fin-syn rules were

²⁴ Kimmel, *The Fourth Network*, 30-31.

²⁵ Kimmel, *The Fourth Network*, 87.

allowed to expire. Shortly thereafter, the Big Three began to focus on aggressively vertically integrating as well, following in the footsteps of upstart networks such as Fox.²⁶

Fox's venture into primetime programming in 1987 marked a transition for Twentieth Television. Beforehand, the production studio had mainly distributed programs to the Big Three networks, and many of those, including *Manimal* (NBC, 1983), *Automan* (ABC, 1983-84), and *The Wizard* (CBS, 1986-87), were ratings failures. Debuting in 1987, *21 Jump Street* was Fox's hour-long offering and was also filmed in Vancouver. For science fiction fare, only one sci-fi show preceded *The X-Files* on Fox, *Alien Nation* (1989-90). The series was a modest success, yet it was cancelled because it did not "provide that immediate big spike in the ratings."²⁷ However, the revolving door of executives and programming philosophies at Fox during the early 1990s enabled *Alien Nation* producer Kenneth Johnson to revive the project four years later (which had been left on a cliffhanger) and produce five television movies for Fox between 1994 and 1997.

Not allowing the cancellation of *Alien Nation* to dismay the network's attempt at a breakout hit in the genre, especially as the syndicated *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-94) and NBC's *Quantum Leap* (1989-93) were proving the genre's potential, a new team of executives at Fox bet on two particular sci-fi programs for the fall of 1993—*The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.* (1993-94) and *The X-Files*. Fox executives even greenlit full seasons of each series despite each premiering to low ratings. Although the network had more faith in the former program, which hailed from somewhat better-known, more established writers Jeffrey Boam and Carlton Cuse (*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* [1989, d. Steven Spielberg], *Lethal Weapon 2* [1989, d. Richard Donner], *Lethal Weapon 3* [1992, d. Richard Donner]), the latter program

²⁶ Jennifer Holt, "Vertical Vision: Deregulation, Industrial Economy, and Prime-time Design," in *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry, and Fans*, eds. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (London: BFI, 2003), 16.

²⁷ Kimmel, *The Fourth Network*, 78.

ended up far more successful over the long run.²⁸ Ultimately, *The X-Files* became Fox's most-watched hour-long offering until its ratings decline during the 1999-2000 season.²⁹

The Relaxation of Fin-Syn and the Growing Challenges Faced by Independent Producers

As the FCC showed signs of relaxing fin-syn rules to encourage market growth and competition, networks began to rely more on programming from commonly owned studios and less on independent studios. The vertical integration between studios and networks highlights a need to focus on certain production practices, such as the runaway productions of Hollywood studios to foreign locations, like Vancouver. At the time of the 1993 debut of *The X-Files*, the majority of Fox's programming was produced by the television production and syndication arms of other major production studios, including Touchstone Television, Warner Bros. Television, HBO Independent Productions, and Universal Television. However, Fox was not without their own television production and syndication arm, as the corporation's creation of Twentieth Television in 1989 was done in order to separate the motion picture and television units of Fox.³⁰ Yet, during the first nine years of Fox Broadcasting, the fin-syn rules were still technically in place and contributed to a chaotic time. During the time from 1986 to 1993, the broadcast networks anticipated the relaxation of fin-syn but couldn't fully integrate.³¹ Nonetheless, they began to increasingly integrate their network and studio arms. Additionally, as independent studios such as Aaron Spelling Productions and Stephen J. Cannell Productions had gained

²⁸ Jenelle Riley, "Q&A: 'Bates Motel' Showrunner Carlton Cuse Reflects on His Big Break," *Variety*, June 20, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/tv/people-news/my-first-time-in-variety-bates-motel-showrunner-carlton-cuse-1201223265/>.

²⁹ Paul Brownfield, "Exploring the Unknown: 'X-Files' Future," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1999, <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/aug/28/entertainment/ca-4355>.

³⁰ John Horn, "20th Century Fox Restructures Film, TV Units," *Associated Press*, July 12, 1989, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1989/20th-Century-Fox-Restructures-Film-Television-Units/id-c84852dbf431b84aa16465a1c851bdb3>.

³¹ Tino Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium* (London: BFI, 2013), 15.

ground during the height of fin-syn in the 1970s and 1980s, networks sought to balance their relationships with independent studios, syndication units from rival studios, and, in the case of Fox, form their own studio division.

Throughout the early years of the fourth network, Fox mainly acquired and produced a number of sitcoms and reality or docuseries (such as *COPS* [Fox, 1989-2013; Spike, 2013-17; Paramount, 2018-present] and *America's Most Wanted* [Fox, 1988-2011; Lifetime, 2011-13]). The network only greenlit a handful of hour-long scripted programs every year, in part because they were more expensive, and thus riskier, to produce. Further, as many productions aimed for syndication, networks found it easier to push half-hour sitcoms toward the goal rather than the riskier hour-long offerings. Even as sitcoms and reality programs proved to be less of a risk for networks to acquire, as their production budgets were much smaller than hour-long dramas, the networks perpetually attempted to find solid hour-long offerings that would keep audiences enticed for long periods of time. For more costly productions, networks attempted to find as many ways to minimize their risk. This included relying on innovative production practices such as runaway productions, as well as licensing to new markets (i.e., exploiting emerging distribution windows).³² As discussed later in this chapter, producers understood the financial ramifications of remaining in California, where cost of production remained high while emerging media capitals (such as Vancouver) incentivized migration of production through tax incentives. Thus, many productions were travelling (or “running away”) to different geographical areas, such as Vancouver (*21 Jump Street*), Toronto (*Knightwatch* [ABC, 1988-89]), and New York City (*Law and Order* [NBC, [1990-2010])). Although there were a few sci-fi and horror television programs that were co-produced by Canadian and Hollywood firms, notably *Friday the 13th: The*

³² Colin Hoskins, Adam Finn, and Stuart McFadyen. “The Environment in which Cultural Industries Operate and Some Implications,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 19, no. 3 (1994), <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/824/730>.

Series (1987-90) and *The War of the Worlds* (1988-90), neither of these were true runaway productions. Further, both programs were co-produced by Paramount Television, filmed in Toronto, and syndicated in the American market. Additionally, as new cable channels began to proliferate and needed additional programming to differentiate themselves from their competitors, the practice of distributing successful productions from networks to cable through second-run syndication became a viable means of making additional revenue to cover initial production costs. This practice is especially lucrative in media economics: “as long as the incremental revenue brought in is greater than the small increment to cost, sales to an additional market is worthwhile.”³³ Thus, networks aimed to increase their financial interest in programming in order to maximize profits from subsequent (emerging) distribution windows such as cable and a growing number of international markets.

As Fox entered into this broadcast environment in the late 1980s, science fiction had only recently been revived after being stagnant during the 1970s. With prior numerous attempts of sci-fi television failing (such as the promising *Planet of the Apes* [CBS, 1974], cancelled after only fourteen episodes), the only notable signs of success at this time was tied to the Star Trek franchise.³⁴ *Star Trek: The Next Generation* did exceptionally well as a first-run syndicated program during the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, while *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993-99) gained a following as a syndicated program as well. These two success stories, along with the multimedia success of the franchise, would eventually lead Paramount Pictures to develop another Star Trek property (*Voyager* [UPN, 1995-2001]) as the flagship program for its newly developed UPN network in 1995.

³³ Hoskins, Finn, and McFadyen, “The Environment in which Cultural Industries Operate.”

³⁴ Booker, *Science Fiction Television*, 67. Booker notes while *The Six Million Dollar Man* (ABC, 1974-78) and *The Bionic Woman* (ABC, 1976-77; NBC, 1977-78) were successful, they were only “vaguely science fictional.”

The mid-1980s also saw a time when both the major studios and independent producers encountered an increasingly expensive syndication market. The cost of production for hour-long shows increased substantially during this time period. Studios, who shared financial risk with networks through deficit financing models, “asked for more money from the networks as compensation.”³⁵ Networks, who declined to help studios with production costs, “turned to cheaper-to-produce sitcoms, newsmagazines, and reality-based programs” to fill prime-time schedules.³⁶ Although some programs were sold into syndication at the time, “the bottom fell out of the syndication business for hour-long shows.”³⁷ Sci-fi programming was less likely to be made in this context. Veteran television producers were tasked with rethinking what had worked in the late 1970s and early 1980s, striving to develop new shows on much smaller budgets. Additionally, producers employed a number of newer strategies to keep television programming innovative, including Glen Larson “simply and effectively transferring successful feature film concepts to television formats” (including *Alias Smith and Jones* [ABC, 1971-73], which was preceded by the 1970 made-for-television film, *The Young Country*) and Aaron Spelling’s repeated use of “dated conventions of old-time Hollywood murder and glamour.”³⁸ Another particularly notable television producer during this time was Stephen J. Cannell. After proving himself as a successful writer and producer at Universal Television with crime dramas such as *The Rockford Files* (NBC, 1974-80), Cannell would leave Universal and start his own production company, Stephen J. Cannell Productions, in 1979. By 1987, productions had become so costly—arguably due to the effects of the global economic recession during the early 1980s—that *Stingray* star Nick Mancuso (an Italian-born Canadian citizen) had suggested that executive

³⁵ Daniel Cerone, “Television: Action, Adventure, Aliens . . . Ratings?,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1992, http://articles.latimes.com/1992-11-01/entertainment/ca-1591_1_action-series.

³⁶ Cerone, “Television: Action, Adventure, Aliens.”

³⁷ Cerone, “Television: Action, Adventure, Aliens.”

³⁸ Abbott, *Stephen J. Cannell Television Productions*, 3.

producer Cannell move production of the series—which was currently in production—to Vancouver “where the series could be made for literally half the cost.”³⁹

That same year, 1987, Cannell was gearing up production on *21 Jump Street* for Fox, the same year the production of *Stingray* moved from California to Canada. Cannell suggested that the series be shot in Vancouver as well, lauding the variety of locations afforded to the crew in Vancouver. Several more of Cannell’s productions were shot in Vancouver, including *Wiseguy*, *Booker* (Fox, 1989-90), and *Top of the Hill* (CBS, 1989), and were some of the first of Hollywood television productions in the city. With provincial assistance in the form of a multi-million-dollar loan to Cannell Films of Canada, North Shore Studios completed construction in 1989, with *21 Jump Street*, *Wiseguy*, and *Stingray* already producing on-site. The facility, which was the largest of its kind at the time, included six sound stages, of which Cannell only used a few. The other stages were available for other studios, leading the way for figures such as Chris Carter to film *The X-Files* (as well as Carter’s future projects, *Millennium* [Fox, 1996-99] and *The Lone Gunmen* [Fox, 2001]) abroad for a significant reduction in production costs.⁴⁰

While *The X-Files* didn’t show up on the Fox broadcast network until the fall of 1993, it is important to note the people involved in the production from the start. Although showrunner Chris Carter had a vision for his series, it was the connection he had with Fox executive Peter Roth that helped get the series into production and distributed through Fox. While previously working for then-NBC President Brandon Tartikoff, Carter had developed a number of unproduced television pilots, including one called *Cool Culture*, which attracted Roth’s attention. Roth had worked as president of Stephen Cannell Productions until June 1992, when he was announced as the President of Production at Twentieth Television. (He would become the

³⁹ Abbott, *Stephen J. Cannell Productions*, 223. See note 4.

⁴⁰ Tinic, *On Location*, 36.

President of Fox Entertainment four years later and then move over to Warner Bros. Television before the end of the decade. As President of Twentieth Television, Roth recruited Carter to write scripts for Fox. Instead of tasking Carter with predetermined ideas, Roth simply asked, “What do you want to do?”⁴¹ Carter, who had been heavily influenced by the anthology drama series, *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* (ABC, 1974-75), insisted on penning a pilot for what would soon become Fox’s biggest hour-long dramatic success of the 1990s. Noting that influential programs from his childhood, including *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-64) and *The Outer Limits* (ABC, 1963-65), “were totally absent” from the landscape, Carter was given the opportunity to produce *The X-Files*, albeit on a very small budget.⁴² He chose to produce this innovative sci-fi program in Vancouver to help cut costs. Even though Carter had originally planned to shoot only the pilot of the series in Vancouver and return to California for series production, the diversity of locations in the area of Vancouver (the Lower Mainland) proved fruitful for crews wishing to shoot on-location for the variety of settings within the narrative of *The X-Files*. Five years later, production moved to Los Angeles, primarily due to the stars’ desire to relocate back to their homes (particularly on the part of David Duchovny, who had voiced his wish to be closer to his then-wife Téa Leoni).⁴³ However, the production of science fiction in Vancouver remained alive as a number of other sci-fi programs (including fellow Carter production, *Millennium*) were filming in the Canadian city.

⁴¹ Darren Mooney, *Opening the X-Files: A Critical History of the Original Series* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017), 23.

⁴² Kimmel, *The Fourth Network*, 159.

⁴³ Nancy Wride, “The X-Files’ Marks a Spot in Tustin,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1998, <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/mar/15/news/mn-29174>.

From Forest to Franchise

By 1998, the success of *The X-Files*, along with a handful of other shows (including *The Simpsons* and *Beverly Hills, 90210* [1990-2000]), had helped position Fox as a viable fourth network and was consistently rated a top-20 show.⁴⁴ Chris Carter subsequently had expanded his universe of television with the launch of *Millennium* in 1996. He then planned to shoot the first feature-length film for the X-Files franchise in Vancouver in 1998. Yet, Fox's strategy in using science fiction programs as vehicles for inspiring other creatives and attracting audiences was not very clear. For instance, while the writer-producers of *Space: Above and Beyond* (1995-96) were insistent that their pilot did well enough in ratings for the show to grab the Friday 8 p.m. slot (which would have been a nice lead-in to *The X-Files* at 9 p.m.), Fox programmed the sci-fi series during the Sunday 7 p.m. slot, against CBS' *60 Minutes*, and without "the promotion and scheduling it deserved."⁴⁵ Although some of Fox's programming decisions were peculiar, the network continued to experiment with new science fiction programming during this time, often with limited success.

The decision to position the Vancouver-shot *M.A.N.T.I.S.* (1994-95) and the California-shot *VR.5* (1995) as the 8 p.m. lead-in to *The X-Files* on Fridays showcased Fox's desire to brand an entire primetime block on Friday evenings for sci-fi and fantasy programs. Networks began scheduling beyond individual programs by grouping similar programs (typically by genre) in order to keep audiences engaged for an entire evening's worth of programming.⁴⁶ Although networks employed this strategy with sitcoms and family-friendly fare in the 1990s (as seen by

⁴⁴ "Final Ratings for '97-'98 TV Season," *SFGate*, May 25, 1998, <https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Final-Ratings-for-97-98-TV-Season-3006101.php>.

⁴⁵ Garcia and Phillips, *Science Fiction Television Series*, 242.

⁴⁶ Amanda Lotz, "Segregated Sitcoms: Institutional Causes of Disparity among Black and White Comedy Images and Audiences," in *The Sitcom Reader: America Viewed and Skewed*, eds. Mary L. Dalton and Laura R. Linder (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 146.

NBC's "Must See TV" Thursday night block and ABC's "TGIF" Friday night block, respectively), Fox doubled down on their counterprogramming measures by scheduling sci-fi and supernatural programming on Friday evenings. Further, many of Fox's sci-fi programs were filmed in Vancouver, leading to entire blocks of programming on American network television that was filmed in the Canadian city.

Although both of the aforementioned lead-ins (*M.A.N.T.I.S.* and *VR.5*) were cancelled before the fall of 1995, the success of the mid-season replacement, *Sliders* (1995-2000), gave Fox the ability to move *The X-Files* into a coveted Sunday primetime slot and provided Chris Carter with a second hour on Fox with *Millennium*.⁴⁷ After Fox's decision to cancel *Sliders* after its third season in May 1997, the 8 p.m. slot on Fridays became a revolving door of science fiction lead-ins once more, with programs such as the extraterrestrial thriller *The Visitor* (1997-98), the pseudo-fictional supernatural anthology *Beyond Belief: Fact or Fiction* (1997-02), and the religious-themed supernatural crime drama *Brimstone* (1998-99) all claiming the slot for short periods of time. By the 1999-2000 season, Fox seemed to be out of options for its Friday primetime sci-fi programming. The 8 p.m. slot, which was then home to crime drama *Ryan Caulfield: Year One* (1999), was vacated after only two weeks, while the 9 p.m. slot, which hosted Carter's third production with Fox, the science fiction *Harsh Realm* (1999), remained scheduled for only one week longer. By November 1999, due to its ongoing struggles with Friday nights, Fox had no choice but to play feature-length films on those evenings – at least until it could figure out another programming strategy.

Other broadcast networks and cable channels followed Fox and *The X-Files* in attempting to develop and schedule science fiction programming. For example, after a couple of attempts with sci-fi programming, including a sci-fi block on Sunday evenings during the 1994-95 season

⁴⁷ *Sliders* aired on Fox between 1995-97 and moved to Sci Fi in 1998.

with *Earth 2* (1994-95) and *seaQuest DSV* (1993-96), NBC dedicated their Saturday evenings to a slate of sci-fi programs starting in the 1996.⁴⁸ While *Dark Skies* (1996-97) didn't last long, *The Pretender* (1996-00) and *The Profiler* (1996-00), the latter of which was a considerable success for the network and the show's lead, Ally Walker, anchored Saturday nights until the 2000-01 season.⁴⁹ Additionally, the similarities between *The Profiler* and *Millennium* were so noticeable that Chris Carter's influence on the competing broadcast networks should be highlighted.

While NBC and ABC attempted to mimic Fox's effort to court younger demographics through sci-fi, CBS with its older demographic orientation mainly abstained from this strategy. The two newer, junior networks (The WB and UPN) also turned to sci-fi, capturing loyal viewers with shows such as *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (1997-03) and *Charmed* (1998-06). Science fiction played a vital role for networks attempting to court the underserved youth audience, while the serial narratives and mythologies of sci-fi programming swayed viewers to become loyal fans (as opposed to casual viewers). Additionally, the financial incentives of filming in Vancouver as well as the increased potential of syndicating programs from networks to commonly-operated cable outlets improved the potential of science fiction programs to remain viable and profitable for production studios. The ability for networks to depend more on their in-house production divisions led independent production companies to struggle with developing fictional primetime programming. Science fiction programming was seen as too risky for many independent operations that lacked the syndication and divisions of the studios (as well as the synergistic potential between studios, networks, and cable outlets that conglomerated studios had established by this time). Importantly, the broadcast networks were not only attempting to have one

⁴⁸ Kinney Littlefield, "Patrick Bauchau Adds Suave Elegance to NBC's Suspense Drama 'The Pretender,'" *The Orange County Register*, March 22, 1997.

⁴⁹ Jennifer Bowles, "Ally Walker Finds Biggest Role to Date as FBI Expert on 'Profiler,'" *The Columbian*, January 21, 1997.

successful show per genre; networks were trying to brand entire nights of programming by genre and format.⁵⁰ Especially for emerging networks such as Fox, with their different demographic orientations and business structure, such programming could be more narrowly defined in terms of genre and targeted audience. Additionally, networks (including Fox) increasingly wanted to achieve franchise status with their more notable programs, perhaps modelling the success of *The Mary Tyler Moore* (CBS, 1970-77) and its spin-off programs (*Rhoda* [CBS, 1974-78], *Phyllis* [CBS, 1975-77], and *Lou Grant* [CBS, 1977-82]) or the long-running Star Trek franchise, whose television productions had fared well in syndication throughout the 1970s and 1980s.⁵¹ The *X-Files* not only became one of Fox's biggest success stories during the 1990s, but also gave the network an opportunity to franchise.⁵² By the 1996-97 season (*The X-Files*' fourth season), Fox greenlit another Chris Carter science fiction production in Vancouver—*Millennium*.

Carter's decision to keep his multiple television productions in Vancouver can be seen as directly contributing to the development of Vancouver as a science fiction media capital overall. At the time of this writing, the franchise continues to evolve: Carter currently has filmed five seasons of the original run of *The X-Files* (1993-98), two feature-length films (1998's *The X-Files* [d. Rob Bowman] and 2008's *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* [d. Chris Carter]), the entirety of *Millennium* (1996-99), the thirteen-episode run of *The X-Files* spin-off *The Lone Gunmen* (2001), the nine-episode-run of *Harsh Realm* (1999-00), and the revival run of *The X-Files* (2016-present). While he is considered to be at the forefront in growing the Vancouver-Hollywood relationship, many others, including Brad Wright (Stargate franchise, 1997-2011)

⁵⁰ In addition to NBC's Saturday "Thrilllogy" block during the late 1990s, other examples of block programming during the same decade include ABC's "TGIF" block on Friday evenings which consisted of sitcoms for family audiences and NBC's "Must See TV" block on Thursday evenings which consisted of two hours of sitcoms and one hour-long drama which collectively were touted as the best of television programming overall. See note 37 for more information.

⁵¹ MTM Enterprises, an independent production company headed by Mary Tyler Moore and then-husband Grant Tinker, was eventually bought by News Corp. (Fox's parent company) in 1997.

⁵² Kimmel, *The Fourth Network*, 160.

and Simon Barry (*Continuum* [Syfy, 2012-15], *Van Helsing* [Syfy, 2016-present]), have considered Vancouver as headquarters for multiple science fiction television productions, a genre that remains prominent in Vancouver productions today.⁵³

This industrial notion of franchising as well as the appeal of producing sci-fi and fantasy programming in Vancouver has led to an incredible economic boom for the local production industry. Initial success stories for television producers, such as Chris Carter, to film in Vancouver has influenced repeat business in the city, allowing for producers to franchise their legacy among a number of productions that mainly film in one location. The dependence of Vancouver production on Hollywood sci-fi—and franchises such as *The X-Files*—also has provided a myriad of opportunities for Canadian-based producers to co-produce programs and eventually led Canadian producers to export locally produced Canadian programs through the Hollywood infrastructure, as seen by Simon Barry’s production of *Continuum*, *Van Helsing*, and *Blood Wars* (Syfy, 2017-18). Indeed, “of the more than 100 movies and television programs produced in Vancouver in 1997, only thirty-eight were Canadian productions.” Additionally, “most were ‘industry shows’—the term applied to domestic productions that fulfill CanCon’s industrially defined cultural requirements but are actually intended for the American market.”⁵⁴ Referring to Mittell’s contention that “genre is best understood as a process of categorization that is not found within media texts, but operates across the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics, and historical contexts,” it’s clear that there is a distinction to be made for the sci-fi programming that is produced in Vancouver as a particular brand of sci-fi

⁵³ Writing and production credits for Brad Wright include *Highlander: The Series*, *Poltergeist: The Legacy*, *The Outer Limits*, *Stargate SG-1*, *Stargate Atlantis*, *Stargate Universe*, and *Travelers*. Writing and production credits for Simon Barry include *Continuum*, *Van Helsing*, and *Ghost Wars*. All of these productions were filmed in Vancouver.

⁵⁴ Tunic, *On Location*, 52. CanCon refers to Canadian content, the national quota system established by regulations noted in the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission’s Broadcasting Act of 1968.

television.⁵⁵ And as Marsha Lederman notes, as “Canadians went from staffing the American productions to creating their own ... Canadian science-fiction is undeniably having a moment.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

Until 1993, Vancouver’s role in relation to the larger global film and television industries was relatively limited. However, starting in the mid-to-late 1990s, runaway productions such as *The X-Files* spurred a movement of Hollywood-branded productions to Canada. TV studios such as 20th Century Fox Television and Paramount Television took advantage of financial incentives, a variety of accessible locations, and a service industry willing to train and work under the Hollywood model. Once disconnected from the operations of network television in the United States, an era of deregulation ushering in three new broadcast networks and many more cable outlets in the 1990s encouraged production studios to expand their operations to meet distribution demands. After the relaxation of the fin-syn rules, vertically integrated networks grew more inclined to greenlight in-house productions. For Fox, Rupert Murdoch and the executives working under him perceived the success of a show as due to number of elements, many of which were new for the time. These included relying on in-house production and exploiting the network-studio corporate relationship, becoming a number one hit, turning to in-house divisions to syndicated content (e.g., FX in Fox’s case with *The X-Files*), and relying on distribution through various international markets via News Corp.’s global operations.⁵⁷

Because of the perception of Vancouver’s long-term viability as a global production hub of science fiction programming by industry insiders and business journalists, other Hollywood-

⁵⁵ Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), xii.

⁵⁶ Marsha Lederman, “How Canada is Becoming the Sci-Fi Nation,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 26, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/television/how-canada-is-becoming-the-sci-fi-nation/article11157191/>.

⁵⁷ Kimmel, *The Fourth Network*, 161.

based studios, including Warner Bros. Television, desired to film expensive productions in the Canadian city. For Warner Bros., the launch of their own network—The WB—in 1995 contributed to a major shift in production and distribution for the corporation and represented new competition to the existing broadcast networks. Following a couple of years courting black audiences with sitcoms such as *The Wayan Bros.* (1995-99) and *Sister, Sister* (1994-99),⁵⁸ The WB shifted their focus to pursuing the teenage demographic. This move was accelerated following the critical success of *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* during its inaugural 1997-98 season. The next chapter discusses one of Warner Bros. Television's most successful programs of this time period, *Smallville* (2001-11), and examines how The WB network, in part, sustained a brand aimed at younger viewers with sci-fi and fantasy programs by producing programs in Vancouver, British Columbia.

⁵⁸ *Sister, Sister* aired on Fox between 1994-95 and moved to The WB in 1995.

Chapter 2: Truth, Justice, and the Vancouver Runaway:

Warner Bros., *Smallville*, and a Teen-Oriented Broadcast Network

The impact of media deregulation in the 1990s opened up avenues for more studios to launch broadcast and cable networks. Even as some in the industry remained skeptical regarding the viability of a fourth network (Fox, in this case), two more networks were nonetheless launched in 1995. Debuting within a week of each other in January 1995, The WB and UPN both attempted to replicate the strategies that enabled Fox's success story over the previous decade. As discussed briefly in the last chapter, one of the strategies employed by the executives at The WB (many of whom earlier worked during the development of Fox) involved courting marginalized audiences through particular genres and formats, such as sitcoms with African-American casts, children's animated programming, and niche genre dramas (e.g. science fiction and fantasy). In a move similar to Fox's greenlighting of sci-fi and horror series in the 1990s, such as *The X-Files* in 1993, The WB invested in launching several sci-fi and supernatural series as well. These shows, including *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (1997-03; from here on, *Buffy*), *Charmed* (1998-06), *Roswell* (1999-02), *Angel* (1999-04), *Smallville* (2001-11), and *Supernatural* (2005-present), all aimed to draw in younger viewers by combining teenage drama and romance with elements from science fiction and fantasy, such as vampires, demons, superheroes, and aliens (see **Table 2.1 for more context**).¹ Additionally, as many sci-fi and fantasy programs of the 1990s and early 2000s were filmed in Vancouver (including *Smallville*

¹ *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and *Roswell* were both moved from The WB to UPN in 2001 after negotiations between 20th Century Fox Television and Warner Bros. fell through. As discussed later in this chapter, executives at 20th Century Fox Television as well as the Warner Bros. network feuded publicly on who was responsible for the success of *Buffy*. This led executives at 20th Century Fox Television to move their programming to Warner Bros.' strongest rival, UPN. *Smallville* and *Supernatural* were both moved from The WB to The CW in 2006 when The WB and UPN merged to form the new network.

and *Supernatural*), the launch and development of newer netlets, including Fox, The WB, and UPN, pushed production studios to film more television programs on cheaper budgets, thus increasing the volume of programs produced in Vancouver. **Table 2.1** maps out a timeline of genre-inflected programming on The WB. As I will discuss in further detail throughout this chapter, the production of *Smallville* from Warner Bros. Television marked a turn for The WB as the network began prioritizing in-house productions.

Table 2.1: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Superhero, and Horror Programming on The WB (1997-present)

<i>Buffy, the Vampire Slayer</i>	The WB (1997-2001) UPN (2001-03)	20 th Century Fox Television
<i>Charmed</i>	The WB (1998-2006)	Spelling Television
<i>Angel</i>	The WB (1999-2004)	20 th Century Fox Television
<i>Roswell</i>	The WB (1999-2001) UPN (2001-02)	20 th Century Fox Television
<i>Smallville</i>	The WB (2001-06) The CW (2006-11)	Warner Bros. Television
<i>Birds of Prey</i>	The WB (2002-03)	Warner Bros. Television
<i>Glory Days</i>	The WB (2002)	Dimension Television
<i>Vampire High</i>	The WB (2001-02)	Canadian Import
<i>Tarzan</i>	The WB (2003)	Warner Bros. Television
<i>Supernatural</i>	The WB (2005-06) The CW (2006-present)	Warner Bros. Television

As discussed in the previous chapter, the in-house production of *The X-Files* by Fox's production studio, Twentieth Television (later, 20th Century Fox Television), helped ignite a strong migratory wave of runaway productions of sci-fi programming to Vancouver during the 1990s and early 2000s. This chapter focuses on a similar strategy employed by Warner Bros. Television and The WB network during this same time period. However, one key distinction leads the argument in this chapter for The WB. Whereas Fox eventually broadened their audience reach to a more general viewership, The WB embraced a targeted strategy aimed directly at the underserved teenage demographic. Although The WB (and UPN) ceased

operations in 2006, this targeted strategy continued at The CW, the successor network to both The WB and UPN.

The WB's eleven-year lifespan between 1995 and 2006 can be roughly split into two halves, with the year 2001 serving as a critical turning point for the network. Prior to 2001, most of The WB's programming hailed from a number of rival studios, most notably 20th Century Fox Television. However, by the 1999-00 season, "[The WB] had evolved from what critics called 'a struggling, almost pathetic sixth-placer in the primetime wars,' into a media site engaged actively in creating, mediating, and (re-)shaping teen entertainment culture."² The stronger emphasis on programming aimed at younger viewers was apparent. By 2001, the executives of The WB network had completely rejected a strategy aimed at pursuing broad audiences in favor of a more targeted strategy aimed for teens and young adults. Additionally, The WB underwent a shift in 2001 that saw the studio division producing more content for its network sibling. This shift can be directly attributed to the heightened tensions between Fox, The WB, and UPN. As all three networks continued to expand and compete more aggressively in terms of content and target audiences, 20th Century Fox Television surprised the industry by moving their productions of *Buffy* and *Roswell* from The WB to UPN.³ This move of productions from one network to another came as executives between 20th Century Fox Television and Warner Bros. Television publicly disagreed and feuded over which firm was more responsible for the success of *Buffy*. Ultimately, 20th Century Fox Television chose UPN—The WB's rival network—as the new home for the two productions. Due to this transition from one network to another, the scope of this chapter focuses not only on The WB network's attempt to brand itself as a teen-oriented

² Valerie Wee, "Teen Television and the WB Television Network," in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 43.

³ Jim Rutenberg, "'Buffy,' Moving to UPN, Tries to be WB Slayer," *The New York Times*, April 21, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/21/business/buffy-moving-to-upn-tries-to-be-wb-slayer.html>.

network but also considers the network's growing reliance on in-house productions produced via their Warner Bros. Television studio division with programs such as *Everwood* (2002-06), *One Tree Hill* (2003-12), *Smallville*, and *Supernatural*.⁴

In line with those objectives, producers Mike Tollin and Brian Robbins pitched the idea to Peter Roth (who had left Fox to become the president of Warner Bros. Television in 1999) to develop a television series based on “the formative years of the Bruce Wayne character” before he would eventually become Batman.⁵ Roth was ecstatic with the idea. Roth, who would still have to persuade the film division of the studio to allow the development of a television adaptation, realized that a superhero property “was a succinct, instantly marketable, genius idea that was perfect for the WB demo.”⁶ Although there was a small number of programs produced by Warner Bros. Television airing on The WB during their earlier years, including *Hyperion Bay* (The WB, 1998-99) and *Jack & Jill* (The WB, 1999-2001), the network still heavily relied on programming from rival studios, especially 20th Century Fox Television (which produced *Buffy*, *Roswell*, and *Angel*), for much of its sci-fi and fantasy fare. With many of its sci-fi programs faring well with teenage and young adult audiences, The WB continued to show strength as the nation's dominant fifth network and would continue to develop genre offerings, with Tollin, Robbins, and Roth developing a property based on Clark Kent instead of Bruce Wayne, a project that would become *Smallville* in 2001. Although the pilot of *Smallville* was filmed in Los Angeles, production for the series moved to Vancouver shortly after. *Smallville* may have been the first Warner Bros. television project to film in Vancouver, but several others followed soon after, including *Black Sash* (2003), *The Mountain* (2004-05), and *Supernatural*. Thus, I argue the

⁴ *One Tree Hill* was moved from The WB to The CW in 2006 when The WB and UPN merged to form the new network. See note 1 for *Smallville* and *Supernatural*.

⁵ Susanne Daniels and Cynthia Littleton, *Season Finale: The Unexpected Rise and Fall of the WB and UPN* (New York City: HarperCollins, 2007), 236.

⁶ Daniels and Littleton, *Season Finale*, 236.

use of Vancouver as a runaway production site for science fiction television expanded from the strategies employed by executives at Fox to other newer networks, including The WB and UPN throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Additionally, Warner Bros.' extensive use of Vancouver as a production site for many of its sci-fi and fantasy programs has reinforced the assertion that I have made that Vancouver should be considered as a genre-inflected media capital.

As *The X-Files* and *Smallville* were both in-house productions for Fox and Warner Bros., respectively, it is clear that there is a connection between vertically integrated media companies and a rising trend in media productions being filmed in runaway production sites, such as Vancouver. With Fox and The WB also including a significant number of sci-fi and fantasy programs on their primetime schedules, there is clear evidence that Vancouver's development as a science fiction media capital is at least partially attributed to the vertical integration of media companies after the relaxation of fin-syn rules in 1995.

By 2001, the network began relying more on in-house productions to save money but also turned more toward runaway production sites as a way to tame rising budgets in television production. Thus, while *The X-Files* primarily filmed in Vancouver due to the diversity of locations in the area, *Smallville* filmed in Vancouver so the production studio and network could save money. The filming of *Smallville* in Vancouver can be seen as indicative of Warner Bros. Television's determination to cut costs through the exploitation of Canadian incentive programs.⁷

⁷ Amanda Coles, "Unintended Consequences: Examining the Impact of Tax Credit Programs on Work in the Canadian Independent Film and Television Production Sector," *Cultural Trends* 19, no. 1-2 (2010): 111-12, DOI: 10.1080/09548961003696120. Beginning in the 1990s, the federal and provincial governments in Canada began to implement various tax credits for film and television production in Canada. The Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit (CPTC) was developed in 1995 to replace an ineffective tax shelter program for the domestic production sector. Two years later, the Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit was developed as the nation's first tax credit targeting the foreign production sector. Simultaneously, individual provinces began to roll out tax credit programs to lure domestic and foreign productions to their respective provinces. These tax credit programs

While Fox experimented with filming in Vancouver between Stephen J. Cannell's late 1980s productions and the production of *The X-Files* between 1993 and 1998, Warner Bros. remained confident in filming television in the city, starting with *Smallville* in 2001 and producing many more during the 2000s in the Canadian city, including *Supernatural*. And while it would take a few more years for Warner Bros. to rely heavily on Vancouver as a site for television production, the studio had already begun relocating other productions to several sites in the U.S. that proved welcoming film and television productions, including *Everwood* in Utah and *One Tree Hill* in North Carolina. Thus, this chapter outlines a clear network history from 1995 to 2006, focusing highly on the niche audience strategy employed by executives at The WB with programming containing both elements of teenage drama and romance as well as science fiction and fantasy elements.

This chapter begins with the immediate effect of the industry's deregulation on integration, specifically focusing on Warner Bros.' development of a broadcast network. First, I will document the history of Warner Bros. attempting to secure a place in broadcast television, beginning with the short-lived Prime Time Entertainment Network (PTEN) in 1993, the transition to The WB in 1995, and the network's final days in 2006. Second, I will discuss the network's formative years, specifically focusing on the network's strategy to court a teenage demographic that had largely been underserved in years past. However, the network's operation was highly dependent on programming from rival studios, such as 20th Century Fox Television. Third, I will discuss the turning point for The WB in 2001. By 2001, The WB had lost *Buffy* and *Roswell*, two of the network's best performers. Although the network still had other hits, such as *Gilmore Girls* (2000-07), the loss of *Buffy* compelled The WB executives to rethink their

directly targeted U.S. productions, allowing firms from south of the border to migrate north and produce content for a fraction of what it would cost stateside.

primetime production strategies.⁸ Finally, I will discuss the vertical integration between Warner Bros. Television and The WB network, focusing on the emphasis of runaway productions beginning with *Smallville* in 2001 to save the studio in production costs. Overall, this chapter documents The WB's evolving strategy concerning a teenage demographic, its turn toward vertical integration and in-house productions, and its partial focus on production in Vancouver. Whereas Fox's *The X-Files* initially filmed in Vancouver for location interests, The WB's primary interest in Vancouver production was financial. Yet, as studios and networks integrated in the immediacy of industry's deregulation, Warner Bros. faced unique obstacles as a broadcast network with a not-so-broad audience.

Battle of the Fifth Networks

The discussion of The WB and UPN pursuing to be the fifth national broadcast network must include the precedent set by the short-lived Prime Time Entertainment Network (PTEN), launched in 1993 and in existence through 1997. Prior to the 1990s, Paramount Television and Warner Bros. Television were two of the larger major television production studios that did not have a network sibling. Once the fin-syn rules were relaxed in 1995 and networks were once more allowed to have a financial stake in the productions airing on their networks, conglomerates perceived it imperative to own both studio and network divisions. Many mergers and acquisitions followed, including the purchase of Capital Cities and ABC by Walt Disney Company in August 1995.⁹ While certain studios were directly aligned with networks through these mergers and acquisitions through vertical integration or what Amanda Lotz has coined as

⁸ *Gilmore Girls* was moved from The WB to The CW in 2006 when The WB and UPN merged to form the new network.

⁹ Geraldine Fabrikant, "Walt Disney to Acquire ABC in \$19 Billion Deal to Build a Giant for Entertainment," *The New York Times*, August 1, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/01/business/media-business-merger-walt-disney-acquire-abc-19-billion-deal-build-giant-for.html>.

“common ownership” (for example, Touchstone Television with ABC and Universal Television with NBC),¹⁰ other studios, including Paramount Television and Warner Bros. Television, were still dependent on licensing their content to outside networks. Not to be left out of the era of conglomeration, the owners of both of these studios quickly developed strategies to launch their own respective networks as well.

In 1993, Warner Bros. partnered with Chris-Craft Industries by supplying a block of syndicated programming to the latter’s television stations, thus launching PTEN. Although PTEN was technically functioning as a national broadcast network, the short-lived operation was never intended to blossom into a competitor of the major networks. Warner Bros.’ vision for owning and operating a national network depended on negotiating a primary affiliation with a core group of television stations that would air its programming. However, PTEN was doomed to fail as Warner Bros. was simultaneously attempting to secure an ownership stake in a national network, rather than just providing content to a select group of stations.¹¹ Additionally, Chris-Craft was courted by Paramount Television for the same goal of a national network, complicating Warner Bros.’ desire to launch.

PTEN was not without successful programming. In its short lifespan, PTEN aired at least four original programs produced by Warner Brothers, two of which—*Time Trax* (1993-94) and *Babylon 5* (1994-98)—were of the sci-fi genre.¹² Although the former did not have much of a lifespan beyond its original forty-four episode run (a feat for a network that had only existed for four years), the latter evolved into a viable franchise due in part to a syndication deal with TNT. This deal allowed the cable outlet to develop the series for additional seasons beyond the four

¹⁰ Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 100.

¹¹ Jim Benson, “5th Web Woes: No O&Os,” *Variety*, September 6, 1993, <https://variety.com/1993/tv/news/5th-web-woes-no-o-os-110150/>.

¹² After the demise of PTEN, *Babylon 5* aired on cable channel TNT.

that aired on PTEN.¹³ PTEN's faint success was partially attributable to dual affiliations many independent stations had with PTEN as well as Fox. Due to Fox's one-day-at-a-time programming strategy, many stations that were Fox affiliates also were able to air PTEN programming on Fox's off nights.¹⁴

Eventually, Fox's completion of a seven-day programming slate as well as the dual announcements of Warner Bros. and Paramount launching national networks led to a quick decline in PTEN's role in broadcast television. After acquiring Paramount Communications in 1994, Viacom jointly launched United Paramount Network (UPN) with Chris-Craft Industries in 1995 as a home network for Paramount Television productions. Paramount Television had fared well in the syndication market through the 1980s, especially with *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-94), even after the failed attempt at launching a national network the decade before.¹⁵ Warner Bros. partnered with Tribune Broadcasting to launch The WB in 1995 as well. After hiring many former executives from Fox, including Jamie Kellner (president of Fox from 1986 to 1993) and Garth Ancier (programming head of Fox from 1986 to 1989), The WB's formative years highly mirrored the strategies implemented at Fox. The WB would begin with only a sole night of programming in its first year, yet it was the network's choice to pursue underserved audiences that began to shape the branding of the company from its onset. As for PTEN, the service shifted to a variable schedule, with affiliates choosing when to air programs, in effect transitioning the network into a syndication service. Ultimately, this did not work for

¹³ Dennis Michael, "Babylon 5 Prepares for Final Bow," *CNN*, November 20, 1998, <http://edition.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/TV/9811/20/babylon.5/index.html>.

¹⁴ Jim Benson, "Warner Weblet to 2-Night Sked," *Variety*, May 28, 1993, <http://variety.com/1993/tv/news/warner-weblet-to-2-night-sked-107288/>.

¹⁵ In the 1970s, Paramount Chairman and CEO Barry Diller planned to launch a television network entitled the Paramount Television Service. Diller planned to greenlight a *Star Trek* sequel series entitled *Star Trek: Phase II* as the flagship series for the network, but neither the series nor the network came into fruition. Diller would later launch the Fox network.

long, and soon after, PTEN was shut down after both operating partners formally activated their plans for their own “fifth networks.”¹⁶

The WB Network and the Pursuit of the Teen Audience

Even as both The WB and UPN launched in 1995, many industrial analysts began to see the disruption in television distribution, especially with the emergence of DVD and Internet technologies.¹⁷ This perspective became more widespread as cable continued to transform TV’s distribution models and fragment the former “mass” audience. Increasingly, networks targeted niche audiences through specialty channels dedicated to certain types of programming. When he signed on to launch a network for Time Warner, “[Jamie] Kellner steered The WB towards narrowcasting to a select, niche audience ... [and] decided to target a younger, more narrowly defined demographic: 12-to-34-year-olds of both sexes.”¹⁸ While The WB explicitly targeted a younger audience, UPN’s strategy appeared to be unclear. Both networks mimicked Fox’s initial strategy of courting black audiences, primarily with black-cast sitcoms. However, by the 1996-97 season, The WB largely shifted their attention toward dramatic hour-long programming. The period between 1996 and 2001 demonstrates two slightly different strategies that the networks used in order to remain viable during the volatile multi-channel transition period.

In contrast to The WB’s shift away from black-cast sitcoms, UPN remained dedicated to programming for black audiences. However, UPN executives also depended on some of their niche fare, including *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) and *The Sentinel* (1996-99), to draw in other segments of American viewers. By 1997, the network had also negotiated with film studios

¹⁶ Frank Garcia and Mark Phillips, *Science Fiction Television Series, 1990-2004* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 26-27.

¹⁷ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 132.

¹⁸ Wee, “Teen Television,” 46.

to air science fiction films on Thursday evenings, after the moderate success of their block of sci-fi series on Wednesdays.¹⁹ However, due to the drastically different audience segments that the network tried to court on different evenings of the week, UPN's overall branding was difficult to define. The following year saw a major overhaul for the network's programming, even as the network expanded to five nights of programming a week.²⁰

The WB's programming strategy during this same time period between 1995 and the turn of the century was more clearly defined. Although the network initially aired black-cast programs, such as *The Wayan Bros.* (1995-99) and *The Parent 'Hood* (1995-99) during its first season on the air, the network turned toward an underserved teenage demographic only two years later with the debut of *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*. This entrance into teen-oriented programming was soon followed by the debuts of *Charmed*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002), and *Hyperion Bay* in 1998 as well as *Buffy*-spinoff *Angel*, *Popular* (The WB, 1999-2001), and *Roswell* the year after. The WB's branding as a destination for 12-to-34-year-olds was clear. Much of this programming included sci-fi, horror, paranormal, and supernatural elements. As Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein argue, "Teen TV lends itself to cult status, with much of it existing on smaller networks and relying on a core audience to 'spread the word' about any given program."²¹ Further, Ross and Stein argue that as "[t]he generic nature of much Teen TV programming is not easy to pin down in any singular, fixed way, ... they rely on other generic elements substantially."²² By mixing multiple genres together, networks can

¹⁹ "UPN Loads Up on Sci-Fi for New Movie Night," *Variety*, August 27, 1997, <https://variety.com/1997/tv/news/upn-loads-up-on-sci-fi-for-new-movie-night-1116676574/>.

²⁰ Jenny Hontz, "UPN Shakes Up Fall Sked," *Variety*, May 21, 1998, <https://variety.com/1998/tv/news/upn-shakes-up-fall-sked-1117471104/>.

²¹ Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, "Introduction: Watching Teen TV," in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 8.

²² Ross and Stein, "Introduction," 8.

promote programs not only to teenage viewers but also fans of science fiction, fantasy, and horror media. *Buffy's* vampires, *Charmed's* witches, *Roswell's* aliens, and *Angel's* continuation of the Buffyverse highlighted not only teenage-oriented dramas, but ones in which sci-fi and similar niche genres played an influential role in the narratives of these programs.

Many of these programs indicate the instability of “pure” genres in television and the reliance on “transgenericism.” Rather than treating newer programs as hybrids of more established genres, as Louisa Stein notes, transgeneric programs “cannot be easily separated into their component generic parts.”²³ Transgeneric programs gained visibility during the late 1990s as the newer netlets attempted to court the teenage demographic. By the turn of the century, teen-oriented transgeneric programming filled the slates of all of the newer netlets as well as a handful of cable channels, including MTV. In the case of The WB, *Buffy* helped pave a unique pathway for The WB in a crowded broadcast environment. In turn, this gave Warner Bros. a precedent on the type of programming that worked best for The WB as the network continued to develop. Vancouver-produced transgeneric programming, such as *Smallville*, which merged “markedly divergent generic discourses, superimposing teen generic elements onto the apocalyptic, superheroic, and fantastic,” helped build the brand of the city as a genre-inflected media capital.²⁴

Of the teenage-oriented dramas airing on The WB, the majority of these programs were filmed in California. Meanwhile, a few of The WB's programs, particularly those produced by minor television studios, were runaway productions. Spelling's *Savannah* (1996-97) was filmed in Georgia, Columbia's *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) was filmed in North Carolina, and

²³ Louisa Stein, “‘They Cavort, You Decide’: Transgenericism, Queerness, and Fan Interpretation in Teen TV,” *Spectator* 25, no. 1 (2005): 12.

²⁴ Stein, “‘They Cavort, You Decide,’” 12.

Touchstone's *Felicity* was filmed in New York. During these formative years, Warner Bros.' two in-house productions—*Hyperion Bay* and *Jack & Jill*—were both filmed in California.

By the 2000-01 season, The WB had expanded from their lone night of programming to six nights of primetime a week, including two-hour teen drama blocks every weekday evening. Saturday evenings remained the only night The WB did not air original programming. In contrast, during the same season, UPN offered two-hour sitcom blocks on Monday and Friday evenings, *WWE SmackDown* (1999-present) on Thursday evenings, and a range of hour-long programs on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings that directly competed against the biggest of The WB's teen dramas. Fox's practices of targeting specific audiences and focusing on developing themed programming blocks worked well for The WB. Meanwhile, UPN struggled to sustain a loyal, consistently viewing audience base.²⁵

Thus, The WB's replication of Fox's one-day-at-a-time strategy as well as its aggressive approach to air programming aimed at younger viewers led the network toward moderate success over the first five years on the air. However, 2001 would mark a turning point for both The WB and UPN that led to a decline for both networks. Prior to 2001, the majority of the network's programming was not produced in-house. Notably, *Buffy*, *Angel*, and *Roswell* were 20th Century Fox Television productions, while *Charmed* came from Spelling Television. However, as the Fox-owned productions came upon contract renewal negotiations, the already heated rivalry between The WB and UPN came to its apex with the move of *Buffy* and *Roswell* to the Paramount-owned network. The WB not only lost some of its strongest-rated programs but had also weakened relations with studios from where much of its programming slate originated. Therefore, while The WB had built its brand on teen-oriented programming acquired from rival

²⁵ "Chris Craft Sells UPN Stake," *CNN Money*, March 20, 2000, <http://money.cnn.com/2000/03/20/deals/upn/>.

studios through the 1990s, the network would need to shift its strategy once again in the 2000s to remain viable as a fifth network.

2001 and the Turn Toward Vertically-Integrated Operations

Initially, the launch of a Warner Bros. network intended to give Warner Bros. Television a distribution outlet for its television productions. However, as I have detailed in the previous section, The WB depended on productions from independent and rival studios throughout most of its first six years on the air. By 2000, the network had only debuted its third in-house drama with *Gilmore Girls*, while the studio continued to sell hour-long offerings, such as *Brimstone* (Fox, 1998-99), *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999-2006), and *The Fugitive* (CBS, 2000-01), to other networks. The WB's early successes in teenage-oriented programming thrived on acquired productions rather than in-house productions. Meanwhile, as the major networks found Warner Bros.' entrance into broadcast television a threat, rival networks paid extra to keep WB studio productions for themselves and off of The WB.²⁶

In the years following The WB's launch, the company's vision for integration was slow to develop. Arguably, the biggest reason for this lack of fluid integration between Warner Bros.' various divisions was due to the mega-merger in 2000 between AOL and Warner Bros.' parent company, Time Warner. Although the vision of the combined companies was to develop a more digitally-forward strategy while maximizing synergy between various assets, development and growth for AOL Time Warner was slow.²⁷ This effect was amplified by the defensive position

²⁶ Jennifer Holt, "Vertical Vision: Deregulation, Industrial Economy, and Prime-time Design," in *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry, and Fans*, eds. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (London: BFI, 2003), 25.

²⁷ Jerry Knight, "AOL Time Warner Merger Adds Up to Less Than the Sum of Its Parts," *Washington Post*, April 1, 2002, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/2002/04/01/aol-time-warner-merger-adds-up-to-less-than-the-sum-of-its-parts/2417b5cd-6260-4a78-879b-4ed90e3ee53b/?utm_term=.afd2607351a8.

Turner properties had taken four years beforehand when Turner Entertainment was purchased by Time Warner.²⁸ This rapid succession of acquisitions for Time Warner led to a shuffle of personnel amidst a reorganization of the company's managerial hierarchy.

Jamie Kellner was the key individual that stymied much of the growth and efforts at exploiting synergies at The WB. Kellner first rose through the ranks of television management under the purview of Rupert Murdoch, who had hired Kellner in 1986 to assist in the launch of the Fox network. As head of The WB from 1995 to 2001, Kellner was responsible for ushering in the aforementioned wave of teenage-oriented drama that helped keep the network viable by focusing on a previously underserved demographic. In 2001, Kellner transferred to Turner Broadcasting System, where he served as chairman and chief executive officer for two years. However, before Kellner moved over to the cable operation, the Warner Bros. network head made industry headlines concerning the fate of one particular program—*Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*.

Although Kellner was praised for his strategy in targeting demographic niches, his weakness until 2001 had been his territorialism.²⁹ By 2001, the fifth network had mainly depended on the programs produced by rival studios, particularly Fox's 20th Century Fox Television. In the spring of 2001, Kellner, who was still at the helm of The WB network, was involved in a highly public feud with 20th Century Fox Television (and by extension, Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy*) as the contract between the Fox studio and the Warner Bros. network over *Buffy* was coming to an end that year. Kellner lamented that the network picked up *Buffy* when no other network was interested, scheduled the program in the strongest primetime

²⁸ Mark Landler, "Turner to Merge into Time Warner; a \$7.5 Billion Deal," *The New York Times*, August 23, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/23/us/turner-to-merge-into-time-warner-a-7.5-billion-deal.html>.

²⁹ John M. Higgins, "A Gentler Jamie Kellner?" *Broadcasting and Cable*, March 11, 2001, <https://www.broadcastingcable.com/news/gentler-jamie-kellner-96634>.

slot (as a lead-in to fellow network hit, *Dawson's Creek*), bought a spin-off program (*Angel*), and offered the highest license fee in the network's history.³⁰ Yet, he felt that Fox and Whedon were never satisfied. Kellner never backed down from his position, thereby continuing his feud with Whedon as well as with Sandy Grushow, Kellner's former boss at the Fox network who had moved on to head 20th Century Fox Television. Kellner began to allude to the possibility that it was time for The WB to "refresh our network," leading fans of *Buffy* to realize that the show was likely to move to Fox or to another outlet.³¹ Kellner's comments about refreshing the network's lineup also indicated that the network was not invested in developing a media franchise beyond the one other program it already aired in primetime, *Angel*. Ultimately, in refusing to renew *Buffy*'s license beyond its fifth season, Kellner opted to sacrifice "not just a show but a night for the network."³² The move of *Buffy* to rival UPN was coupled with an 11th-hour deal that also included the move of The WB's *Roswell* to its competitor.³³ As a result, the network lost two of its key sci-fi and fantasy teen programs, both of which were strong performers for the network overall.

Although *Felicity*, *Angel*, and *Gilmore Girls* continued to perform well on The WB, the network needed a new program that could achieve ratings comparable to *Buffy*. With relations between the network and Fox studios strained, the network turned to its sister studio, Warner Bros. Television, for its next hit program. This newly-strengthened vertical integration between Warner Bros.' studio and network mirrored the corporate relations between other networks and their studio counterparts. Meanwhile, executives at the network began to search for intellectual

³⁰ Josef Adalian, "UPN Sinks Teeth into WB's 'Buffy,'" *Variety*, April 23, 2001, <http://variety.com/2001/tv/news/upn-sinks-teeth-into-wb-s-buffy-1117797571/>.

³¹ Daniels and Littleton, *Season Finale*, 255.

³² Daniels and Littleton, *Season Finale*, 260.

³³ Michael Schneider, "UPN Deals for 'Roswell,' Benches Vet 'Moesha,'" *Variety*, May 16, 2001, <http://variety.com/2001/tv/features/upn-deals-for-roswell-benches-vet-moesha-1117799599/>.

property commonly owned by Time Warner that the network could exploit into a small-screen adaptation. On the big screen, Warner Bros. had fared well with a handful of live-action feature-length films based on the Batman property. Yet, by 1997, negative reception of *Batman & Robin* (1997, d. Joel Schumacher) led the film studio to scrap plans for a fifth film. In the years that followed, the film and television divisions of the studio clashed on the development of a never-produced series focusing on the young life of Bruce Wayne.³⁴ By 2001, the television studio decided to trade in their efforts on adapting the Batman franchise, instead greenlighting a series based on the teenage years of Clark Kent, the alias for the Superman character.

***Smallville*, Warner Bros., and the Push for Vancouver Runaways**

Smallville was a well-timed solution to The WB's programming challenges. In 2000, the television production team of Mike Tollin and Brian Robbins (Tollin/Robbins Productions) had entered into a development deal with Warner Bros. Over the next year, the production team worked to produce an adaptation of a DC Entertainment property, first with an attempt at *Bruce Wayne*, the aforementioned unproduced series focusing on the teenage years of Bruce Wayne's life. After creative differences between the film and television divisions of the studio led to the shelving of the proposed series, Tollin and Robbins approached the head of the television division, Peter Roth, with an alternative pitch, focusing on the early years of the Superman character rather than the Batman character. Excited at the reignited potential of adapting a DC Entertainment property for The WB, Roth hired the writing team of Miles Millar and Alfred

³⁴ Cynthia Littleton, "Superhero TV Thrives After Warner Bros. Loosens Film's Grip on DC Entertainment," *Variety*, November 24, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/tv/news/the-cw-warner-bros-dc-the-flash-arrow-1201646970/>.

Gough to run the show.³⁵ With Tollin, Robbins, Millar, and Gough deciding on a “no tights, no flights” policy behind a Superman that was centered more on his teenage upbringing and less on his heroic endeavors, the network seemed to have a promising program coming from their in-house studio division. The development of what would eventually be titled *Smallville* occurred simultaneously with Jamie Kellner’s public feud with Fox over the future of *Buffy*. By 2001, an emergent trend could be seen from both the development of *Smallville* and the departure of *Buffy* from The WB: whereas previously there had been largely unsuccessful synergies developed between sibling divisions within AOL Time Warner, *Smallville* represented a welcome surprise in terms of coordination between various divisions of the conglomerate. Additionally, the network’s successful attempt at exploiting synergy between Warner Bros. Television and DC Entertainment provided opportunities for future exploration, which Warner Bros. would do nearly a decade later.

As mentioned in the previous section, the majority of the programming slate for The WB prior to 2001 was predominantly licensed from rival studios, with the vast majority of those programs filmed in California. By 2001, the production of *Smallville* began a narrative of Warner Bros. filming multiple television programs in British Columbia. Warner Bros. productions that filmed in greater Vancouver include *Smallville*, *Black Sash*, *The Mountain*, and *Supernatural*. And although *Black Sash* and *The Mountain* were all short-lived on the network, *Smallville* aired for ten seasons while *Supernatural* will enter the 2018-19 season with its fourteenth season.

Similar to why other Hollywood productions chose to film in the region, financial factors primarily contributed to the location choice here. The provincial and federal governments developed tax incentives for wishing to use studio space and shoot on location in the area. By the

³⁵ Tatiana Siegel, “Tollin, Robbins Going Solo,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 13, 2007, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/tollin-robbins-going-solo-131870>.

late 1990s, it was clear that the Canadian government was “committed to maintaining the necessary infrastructure for what has become one of British Columbia’s primary economic resources after tourism and forestry.”³⁶ So while Warner Bros.’ studio and network integrated to keep production costs at a minimum while synergizing efforts within the larger company, runaway production in places, such as British Columbia, further assisted in the lessening of financial risk for the network’s newer programs.

Through the construction of four sound stages at The Bridge Studios in 1987, Stephen Cannell’s development of North Shore Studios in 1989, and an agreement through MGM Studios for the construction of a fifth sound stage at The Bridge (for television program *Stargate SG-1* [Showtime, 1997-2002; Sci Fi, 2002-07]), Vancouver quickly adapted to the mass exodus of film and television productions from California and into this bustling metropolis. The appeal of a diversity of locations—the primary force drawing Chris Carter to film *The X-Files* in Vancouver less than a decade earlier—similarly resonated with the *Smallville* producers. Vancouver’s small-town suburbs served as a “stand-in for mainstream USA.”³⁷ Additionally, as Jane Landman argues, “the contemporary global studio’s range of locations offerings blur distinctions between ‘reality, artifice, superficiality, and verisimilitude.’” Thus, in a similar means of providing forests for Carter’s program, the Lower Mainland of B.C. also provided Millar and Gough with a small-town aesthetic that is difficult to attain in busy, urban southern California.

In addition to offering a range of scenic locations and ample studio space, the production of *Smallville* also benefited the labor pool and the local economy of Cloverdale, B.C. (the small-town suburb of Vancouver). As Lincoln Geraghty details in his chapter on the Canadian cult

³⁶ Serra Tinic, *On Location: Canada’s Television Industry in a Global Market* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 33.

³⁷ Lincoln Geraghty, “‘I’ve a Feeling We’re Not in Kansas Anymore’: Examining *Smallville*’s Canadian Cult Geography,” in *The Smallville Chronicles: Critical Essays on the Television Series*, ed. Lincoln Geraghty (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2011), 134.

geography of *Smallville*, the Cloverdale Business Improvement Association's webpage asked fans of the program to leave comments of support and affection in a dual-marketing campaign: Cloverdale courted *Smallville* fans for authentic feedback of the town for future tourism potential while it also highlighted the possibility for future film and television productions in the small-town suburbs of Vancouver.³⁸ Since the production of *Smallville* began, small-town locations in British Columbia have been relied on more frequently in television productions, with shows such as *The 4400* (USA, 2004-07), *Supernatural*, *Once Upon a Time* (ABC, 2011-18), and *Riverdale* (The CW, 2017-present) embracing the proximity of small-town suburbs to urban Vancouver.³⁹

The 2001 series premiere for *Smallville* was a monumental hit for The WB. With over 8 million viewers tuning in, the premiere was the highest-rated of any series in WB history, while the program's premise drew in a considerable young male demographic as well.⁴⁰ For several years, the series continued to dominate ratings for the network, even as the network was in an economic decline at the same time. By 2005, both The WB and UPN saw declines in overall viewership. In part, this was due to the fact that many of the most successful shows had completed or were soon to finish their runs on both networks. That same year, The WB began production on another transgeneric program aimed at a young demographic—*Supernatural*. Although the pilot of *Supernatural* was filmed in Los Angeles, the production of the series moved to Vancouver to save money on production costs.

At this time, Viacom, which now solely owned UPN (as the company had bought out Chris-Craft through a controversial buy-sell contractual clause in 1999), split into two

³⁸ Geraghty, "I've a Feeling," 138.

³⁹ While the other aforementioned examples may film in both rural and urban locales (or urban and suburban), *Once Upon a Time* (2011-2018) illustrates the small-town mode of production by fully utilizing Steveson Village to recreate the fictional, rural Storybrooke as the primary setting for the series.

⁴⁰ Rick Kissell, "'Smallville' Bow Super for the WB," *Variety*, October 17, 2001, <https://variety.com/2001/tv/ratings/smallville-bow-super-for-the-wb-1117854472/>.

companies. The future of UPN, which was now owned by CBS Corporation, remained uncertain. That same year, The WB was suffering along with the rest of its parent company, as the AOL-Time Warner merger proved to be financially disastrous.⁴¹ Faced with these challenges, the owners of UPN and The WB decided to shut down their respective networks and instead collaborate on a new joint venture. In 2006, the CW launched with CBS Corporation and Warner Bros. as equal owners and partners, and many stations previously affiliated with the two networks signing on 10-year agreements.⁴² A more viable “fifth” network was reborn.

Conclusion

In 1993, *The X-Files* premiered on Fox. Filmed in Vancouver, *The X-Files* began a trend of runaway productions to the Canadian city for newer television netlets. Two years later, Warner Bros. launched their own network and soon began targeting the teenage demographic with transgeneric programs, especially ones blending teenage drama and romance with science fiction, fantasy, and paranormal elements. However, The WB network depended on programs from rival studios, many of which were the network’s top performers. When tensions rose between The WB and Fox in 2001, the network turned to its studio division sibling in order to develop programming for the network. The WB’s turn to in-house production in 2001 was a critical moment for a network that had essentially cut ties with its largest supplier of television programming. Moving forward, executives at The WB as well as Warner Bros. Television had to work together in order to keep The WB on air. Many of the network’s in-house programs were

⁴¹ “Final Farewell to Worst Deal in History - AOL-Time Warner,” *The Telegraph*, November 21, 2009, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/media/6622875/Final-farewell-to-worst-deal-in-history-AOL-Time-Warner.html>.

⁴² Nellie Andreeva, “The CW & Tribune Reach New 5-Year Agreement, Chicago Affiliation Switches to Fox-Owned Station WPWR,” *Deadline Hollywood*, May 23, 2016, <http://deadline.com/2016/05/the-cw-tribune-new-affiliate-agreement-2-1201761192/>.

filmed in runaway production sites, such as Vancouver, in order to cut costs on production budgets. *Smallville*, The WB's in-house success following the departure of *Buffy* and *Roswell* from the network, was filmed in Vancouver throughout its ten-season run. As other long-running hits, including *Charmed* and *Angel* were finishing their runs on the network, executives explored options for newer fare with science fiction and fantasy elements. In 2005, the network produced yet another Vancouver-filmed, supernatural series entitled *Supernatural*. The following year, the network ceased operations. Warner Bros.' decision to film these programs in Vancouver supported an already-growing industry of science fiction and fantasy television productions that had begun in 1993 with *The X-Files*.

The time period that The WB was on the air (1995-2006) roughly covers the same time period that *Stargate SG-1* (1997-2007) aired on Showtime and Sci Fi. Produced by MGM Television, *Stargate SG-1* showcases a long-running series that was mainly supported by Canadian cast and crew, while financed by a Hollywood studio. After Showtime's decision to cancel the series in 2002, Sci Fi picked the series up for continuation. This effectively benefitted multiple actors simultaneously. MGM was able to continue production at a time when the company was recovering from serious financial debt. Sci Fi was able to secure first-run rights on a show that most identified with the cable outlet's desire for original science fiction content. Fans were notably more interested in a cable outlet dedicated to the genre, once Sci Fi secured rights to a number of genre programs. And most importantly, Vancouver continued to grow as a genre-inflected media capital, especially as broadcast networks began to shift away from sci-fi programming in the early 2000s. This continuation of growth was deemed possible by the growth of Sci Fi (as well as a handful of other cable outlets) and the desire to brand a destination for genre content.

Chapter 3: Television's Next Frontier:

MGM Studios, *Stargate SG-1*, and Cable's Foray into Sci-Fi Television

By the end of the 1990s, media companies had integrated into fully functioning conglomerate firms, operating different units and divisions of media production and distribution all under the same corporate banner. For many television production studios, this meant vertically integrating with a sibling network in order to minimize financial risk in production and maximize potential profit in distribution. After Fox, Warner Bros. and Paramount all entered the broadcast television market, a handful of television studios found themselves scrambling for a distribution partner. During the 1980s and 1990s, MGM Television was bought, sold, and merged with various other studios (notably, United Artists) in several attempts to boost MGM's television production profile. Whereas Fox and Warner Bros. were able to launch networks in 1987 and 1995, respectively, MGM opted to not launch a network at the time.

By 1995, MGM began developing a series of sci-fi and horror television programs. In 1995, MGM partnered with Showtime to produce *The Outer Limits* (1995-2002) for the premium cable service.¹ The following year, MGM partnered with Showtime once again to produce *Poltergeist: The Legacy* (1996-99).² In 1997, MGM's third co-production with Showtime—*Stargate SG-1* (1997-2007)—was a deliberate attempt to carry existing fans of the *Stargate* film (1994, d. Roland Emmerich) over to an adaptation on cable television.³ The film's producers, Dean Devlin and Emmerich, had originally intended to produce a trilogy of films, but after the rights of the film were sold to MGM, the studio opted instead to develop a television series based

¹ *The Outer Limits* aired on Showtime between 1995-2000 and moved to Sci Fi in 2001.

² *Poltergeist: The Legacy* aired on Showtime between 1996-98 and moved to Sci Fi in 1999.

³ *Stargate SG-1* aired on Showtime between 1997-2002 and moved to Sci Fi in 2002.

on the Stargate concept.⁴ By 1998, the blossoming Sci Fi [Channel] paid \$150 million for exclusive basic cable rights to air all three MGM Television programs in syndication.⁵ As noted by Rod Perth, president of entertainment for USA Networks, “[a]ll three of these series represent oxygen to Sci-Fi Channel, and they will allow the network to build on its core franchise.”⁶ In the case of *Stargate SG-1*, the three-window distribution deal (first-run on Showtime, second-run syndication on Fox stations, and third-run on Sci Fi) helped build a strong viewership and a make a strong case for MGM to continue producing the program. As the Showtime window expired in 2002, the Stargate series helped Sci Fi build its brand as a destination for sci-fi content on basic cable. The sixth season of *Stargate SG-1* averaged the highest ratings for any series in the channel’s history while it was the seventh highest-rated scripted series in all of basic cable in 2002.⁷

By the mid-1990s, many science fiction and supernatural programs were filmed in Vancouver, British Columbia. While a 1980s-developed tourism motto for the province—”Super Natural British Columbia,” which is currently still in use—intended to “promote travel to the province by extolling the beauty and variety of British Columbia’s natural landscape ... by the mid-1990s, the slogan became more closely associated with the fact that Vancouver was the production home of nine of the top American ‘supernatural’ television series.”⁸ All three of

⁴ “An Interview with Dean Devlin,” *IGN*, July 16, 2002, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2002/07/16/an-interview-with-dean-devlin>.

⁵ Ray Richmond, “Sci-fi Aiming High,” *Variety*, March 30, 1998, <http://variety.com/1998/biz/news/sci-fi-aiming-high-1117469302/>. Throughout its history, the U.S. sci-fi-oriented cable channel has been known by three names—Sci-Fi Channel (1992-99), Sci Fi (1999-09), and Syfy (2009-present). As the majority of this chapter focuses on the early-to-mid-2000s, I will primarily use Sci Fi unless referring to the channel outside of the 2000s decade.

⁶ Linda Moss, “Sci-Fi Boosts Lineup with Off-Net Fare,” *Multichannel News*, April 5, 1998, <https://www.multichannel.com/news/sci-fi-boosts-lineup-net-fare-154970>.

⁷ John Dempsey, “‘Stargate’ Levitates,” *Variety*, August 26, 2002, <https://variety.com/2002/scene/markets-festivals/stargate-levitates-1117871914/>.

⁸ Serra Tinic, *On Location: Canada’s Television Industry in a Global Market* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 30.

MGM's aforementioned sci-fi productions were also filmed in the Canadian city. Further, in the case of *Stargate SG-1* (as well as its future spin-offs [Table 3.1]), as a production that was not only filmed in Vancouver but heavily involved Canadians behind and in front of the camera, the complex identity of *SG-1* and future spin-offs as both American and Canadian is an interesting case in understanding the implications of international joint ventures (IJVs) in terms of production as well as distribution. Thus, I argue that *Stargate SG-1* marks a turn for science fiction television, especially as the genre slowly shifted away from broadcast networks and more toward specialized cable outlets, such as Sci Fi. The programs that aired—and, in fact, thrived—on Sci Fi during this time period, likely would not have been able to succeed on the broadcast networks during the multi-channel transition. The launch of newer networks and the proliferation of cable outlets fractured an audience that broadcast networks had traditionally relied upon. Thus, networks began to prioritize programming with more general interests—such as reality and competition programs—rather than niche genres—such as science fiction and fantasy. The resilience of Sci Fi to keep *Stargate SG-1* on the air, especially after Showtime's cancellation of the series in 2002, showcases a moment when an American distribution outlet opted to continue financing a Hollywood runaway production mainly employing Canadian cast and crew as a means in building genre-oriented brand identity. **Table 3.1** shows an outline of the history of the *Stargate* franchise.

Table 3.1: The Stargate Franchise

<i>Stargate</i> (film)	October 28, 1994 (theatrical)	Director: Roland Emmerich
<i>Stargate SG-1</i> (television)	Showtime (1997-2002) Sci Fi (2002-07)	Creators: Brad Wright and Jonathan Glassner
<i>Stargate Infinity</i> (animated television)	Fox (2002-03) [not considered canonical]	Creators: Eric Lewald and Michael Maliani
<i>Stargate Atlantis</i> (television)	Sci Fi (2004-09)	Creators: Brad Wright and Robert C. Cooper
<i>Stargate: The Ark of Truth</i> (film)	March 11, 2008 (direct-to- DVD)	Director: Robert C. Cooper
<i>Stargate: Continuum</i> (film)	July 29, 2008 (direct-to- DVD)	Director: Martin Wood
<i>Stargate Universe</i> (television)	Syfy (2009-11)	Creators: Brad Wright and Robert C. Cooper
<i>Stargate Origins</i> (web series)	Stargate Command (2018)	Creators: Mark Ilvedson and Justin Michael Terry

Thus, the focus of this chapter maps out the beginning of a shift of science fiction television distribution from broadcast networks to cable outlets while runaway production of these programs in Vancouver continued to rise over the late 1990s and early 2000s. In this chapter, I will first briefly document MGM's historical attempts at launching a broadcast network. Second, I will contextualize MGM's partnership with Showtime as the studio exploited niche intellectual property (IP), such as the *Poltergeist* franchise as well as the aforementioned *Stargate* film. Third, I will discuss the migration of MGM's programming from Showtime to Sci Fi while also focusing on the latter's attempt in courting both casual viewers as well as fans of the science fiction genre. Finally, I will concentrate on the support of Canadians on the production of *Stargate SG-1*, noting the growing influence of Canadians in the production of science-fiction programming for North American outlets. Thus, this chapter concludes a set of a chapters that illustrate the trend in science fiction television productions moving to Vancouver for location shooting as well as financial incentives. While Fox's *The X-Files* (1993-02; 2016-present) initially filmed in Vancouver because of the diversity of locations and The WB's

Smallville (2001-2011) filmed in the Canadian city to lessen the financial risk on in-house productions, *Stargate SG-1*'s production in Vancouver not only gave MGM Television tax breaks but continued to train Vancouver cast and crew in the production of science fiction television during the 2000s.⁹

MGM's Search for a Network

As examined in the previous two chapters, the relaxation of fin-syn in the 1990s allowed studios to launch their own networks. However, some studios were left without a direct broadcast option as broadcast television became crowded with the dual launches of The WB and UPN in 1995. Historically, changes in television regulation have affected the operations of network television. In some cases, these changes can hinder a network's operations, such as the case with DuMont Television Network and the FCC's four-year freeze on television license applications between 1948 and 1952. In other cases, regulation can help networks launch. In 1970, the FCC passed the Prime Time Access Rule (PTAR) which limited the number of hours a television station could broadcast content from a network, regardless if the station was owned-and-operation directly by the network or simply affiliated. This ruling, which was launched simultaneously with the fin-syn rules, intended to expand opportunities for television production studios not directly associated with networks. By 1973, MGM launched MGM Family Network (MFN), an attempt to capitalize on the restrictions placed on the Big Three networks—CBS, NBC, and ABC.¹⁰ Their affiliates now needed programming to fill the spaces created by the PTAR, so MGM could try to fill that space. However, MFN only programmed family-friendly

⁹ *Smallville* moved from The WB to The CW in 2006 when The WB and UPN merged to form the new network.

¹⁰ "Business Briefs: 'Yearling' Slated for MGM Network," *Broadcasting*, September 3, 1973, 29, <https://www.americanradiohistory.com/Archive-BC/BC-1973/1973-09-03-BC.pdf>.

films from its library and only aired four times a year, on Sunday evenings. MGM did not produce any scripted television content, but rather used the MGM Family Network banner to distribute a handful of original half-hour educational programs—collectively entitled *America: The Young Experience*—co-produced by television station groups, Avco Broadcasting Corporation and Meredith Broadcasting Corporation during the 1975-76 season.¹¹ The network faded from broadcast by 1976 with no word on any anticipated return or future broadcasts.

After a merger with United Artists in 1981, the renamed MGM/UA Television launched a network in a similar strategy to the Family Network of the previous decade. The Premiere Network intended to air theatrical films that had never been aired on commercial television beforehand.¹² In this instance, MGM/UA partnered with a number of independent stations across the country to air films that the networks had turned down in distribution deals. Rather than pay a fee for the films, the stations agreed to nearly half of their 23 advertising minutes to the studio, which then resold those minutes for their own revenue.¹³ Both of MGM's attempts at launching a network supports the studio's desire to capitalize on existing properties. Yet, both of these fraught attempts to further develop national networks failed to gain momentum against the Big Three networks. MGM/UA continued to undergo several changes in ownership and structure throughout the 1980s, including a purchase and immediate resale of the company by Ted Turner in 1986, which saw the media mogul hold on to a library of over 2,000 films.¹⁴ By the mid-1990s, MGM was still in serious debt, had restructured several times, and was in no position to launch a network as their rivals were planning at the time. However, the recovering MGM

¹¹ "TV Syndication: MGM to Barter Avco-Meredith Shows," *Variety*, May 14, 1975, 139.

¹² Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 191

¹³ Stephen Farber, "Film Studio's New Approach to TV," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1984.

¹⁴ Al Delugach, "Turner Sells Fabled MGM But Keeps a Lion's Share," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1986, http://articles.latimes.com/1986-06-07/news/mn-9950_1_turner-broadcasting.

company managed to distribute a commercial success in 1994 with the theatrical release of *Stargate*. The film's success would become a resource for MGM, as the studio adapted the concept for television only three years later.

Meanwhile, in 1992, USA Networks launched Sci-Fi Channel (shortened to Sci Fi in 1999), a sister channel to its flagship USA Network.¹⁵ With about 300 films from the libraries of Paramount and MCA playing on weekends and acquired syndicated programs as well as short-lived broadcast programs playing during weekday primetime hours, the channel showed promising growth potential. Through several business transactions during the 1990s, the ownership of Sci-Fi Channel changed hands many times until 2001, when Barry Diller (former chairman of Fox Broadcasting) sold the entertainment assets of USA Networks to Vivendi Universal. Subsequently, these assets would become part of NBC Universal.¹⁶ The numerous changes in ownership effectively shifted the programming strategy for the channel during its formative years. Initially, the libraries of MCA and Paramount were available to the cable outlet for genre programming. However, by the turn of the century, the programming slate of the cable channel lacked two key elements in their daily schedule—"a combination of programs that can be promoted as flagship or signature shows along with a number of different programs that appeal to multiple target audiences."¹⁷ Thus, this chapter looks closely at the acquisition of *Stargate SG-1* and the branding strategy of the channel that allowed *Stargate SG-1* to remain on the air for a decade.

¹⁵ USA Networks was jointly owned by Paramount Communications and MCA Inc., the latter of which also owned Universal Studios.

¹⁶ "Diller Says 'Oui' to Vivendi," *Wired*, December 17, 2001, <https://www.wired.com/2001/12/diller-says-oui-to-vivendi/>.

¹⁷ Barbara Selznick, "Branding the Future: Syfy in the Post-Network Era," *Science Fiction Film and Television* 2, no. 2 (2009): 184, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/365349>.

MGM and Showtime (1995-2002)

In 1993, former Paramount executive, John Symes, was named president of MGM/UA Television.¹⁸ Although operations in television production were “essentially eliminated” the year before, MGM CEO Frank Mancuso Sr. desired MGM “to function as a full-service studio, including more activity in TV.”¹⁹ Although MGM announced plans to co-produce original films for the premium cable outlet through the television production division, the studio chose to produce three science fiction programs instead. *The Outer Limits* debuted in 1995 and was produced through MGM’s ownership of United Artists Television, the original rightsholder to the original series (ABC, 1963-65). *Poltergeist: The Legacy* debuted in 1996, and although the series bears the same title as a trilogy of horror films released through the 1980s, the series has almost no narrative connection to the films. *Stargate SG-1* debuted in 1997 and was consistently a high ratings performer for the pay television service for several seasons.²⁰ These three programs not only mark the entrance of MGM Television and Showtime in contemporary science fiction production but also further examples of studios moving production of sci-fi programs to Vancouver.

It was pure coincidence that two of the co-executive producers of MGM’s *The Outer Limits*, Jonathan Glassner and Brad Wright, had separately approached different executives of MGM Television in 1996 about the potential of a *Stargate* series. With considerable operational infrastructure set up in Vancouver by MGM, Symes greenlit the project and paired the two

¹⁸ Brian Lowry, “Symes Tops MGM/UA TV,” *Variety*, November 30, 1993, <https://variety.com/1993/scene/news/symes-tops-mgm-ua-tv-116516/>.

¹⁹ Lowry, “Symes Tops MGM/UA TV.”

²⁰ John Dempsey, “TV Biz’s Gay Pride Parade,” *Variety*, December 12, 2000, <https://variety.com/2000/tv/news/tv-biz-s-gay-pride-parade-1117790288>.

producers to begin development on what would be coined *SG-1*.²¹ Symes' decision to greenlight another MGM production and film it in Vancouver makes sense, as MGM had partnered with the provincial government to build a fifth stage at Bridge Studios.²² As Serra Tinic notes, "[t]he agreement allowed MGM a five-year lease on the sound stage for the television series *Stargate [SG-1]*."²³ This pairing of production firms with studio space is similar to Lions Gate Studios (then known as North Shore Studios) hosting the production of *The X-Files* from 1993 to 1998. Glassner and Wright served as co-executive producers for the series until Glassner's departure in 2000 led Wright to become the sole executive producer for two seasons. Beginning in 2002, Robert C. Cooper joined Wright in sharing executive producer responsibilities.

The two-hour premiere episode of *Stargate SG-1* was watched by over 1.5 million homes (of the 12 million households subscribed to Showtime) and generated the highest-ever ratings for a series premiere for the pay-television service.²⁴ Along with *The Outer Limits* and *Poltergeist: The Legacy*, Showtime quickly became a hotspot for sci-fi and fantasy programming on a cable outlet. Soon thereafter, MGM Television negotiated a syndication deal with owned-and-operated stations from Fox Television Group as a means of expanding the audience reach for the program. This deal allowed for 41% of the country to access the program via broadcast.²⁵ Syndication for the *Stargate* series on Fox-owned stations as well as independent stations continued through the entire run of the series, even as first-run rights shifted from Showtime to Sci Fi in 2002.

²¹ Frank Garcia and Mark Phillips, *Science Fiction Television Series, 1990-2004* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 308-09.

²² Ben Goldsmith and Tom O'Regan, *The Film Studio: Film Production in the Global Economy* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 28.

²³ Tinic, *On Location*, 36.

²⁴ Ray Richmond, "'Stargate' Showtime's Home Run," *Variety*, August 1, 1997, <http://variety.com/1997/tv/news/stargate-showtime-s-home-run-1116678643/>.

²⁵ Chris Pursell, "'Stargate' Fences in Fox," *Variety*, November 16, 1999, <http://variety.com/1999/tv/news/stargate-fences-in-fox-1117758132/>.

However, Showtime's branding as a science fiction destination was only short-lived. In 2002, "a change in personnel in the upper management changed the network's priorities."²⁶ *Poltergeist: The Legacy*, *The Outer Limits*, and *Stargate SG-1* left the premium cable outlet in 1998, 1999, and 2002, respectively, while *Jeremiah* (2002-04), MGM's fourth science fiction series with Showtime was unofficially cancelled before the second season's debut in 2003.²⁷ Science fiction had fallen out of favor with Showtime's strategy, while Sci Fi was looking for original content to brand their channel. However, MGM Television's syndication deal with Fox stations as well as Sci Fi helped the studio's genre-oriented strategy migrate to basic cable, which, in turn, helped Sci Fi truly begin branding itself as a premier destination for science fiction content.

MGM, Sci Fi, and Genre Branding

By the time *Stargate SG-1* had moved from Showtime to Sci Fi for first-run broadcasts in 2002, both *Poltergeist: The Legacy* and *The Outer Limits* had finished their series runs on Sci Fi. At the same time, many broadcasters had suffered several failures with sci-fi programming and had increasingly begun to push niche programming toward cable outlets. Programs, such as *Sleepwalkers* (NBC, 1997-98), *Strange World* (ABC, 1999), *Harsh Realm* (Fox, 1999-2000), *The Others* (NBC, 2000), *The Lone Gunmen* (Fox, 2001), *Night Visions* (Fox, 2001) highlighted a growing saturation of science fiction programming on broadcast television while broadcast viewers were becoming increasingly uninterested in the genre. Only three episodes of *Harsh Realm* aired on Fox until the company shifted the rest of the season's schedule to its cable

²⁶ Garcia and Phillips, *Science Fiction Television Series*, 133.

²⁷ Garcia and Phillips, *Science Fiction Television Series*, 134.

counterpart, FX. Similarly, only three episodes of *Strange World* aired on ABC until the network cancelled the show abruptly. The rest of the season aired on Sci Fi three years later.

The turn of the century saw many sci-fi television producers consider first-run distribution of their programs on the dedicated channel for the genre—Sci Fi. These producers were able to do so because Sci Fi became increasingly interested in carrying original programming as a means of growing a distinct brand identity and further building its audience base. The shift coincided with a general trend in the television industry as the proliferation of cable outlets increased demand for more content overall as well as niche programming that could target specific demographics according to taste interests. Many of these newer productions followed in the footsteps of *The X-Files* and filmed in Vancouver to lessen the costs of their production. Reciprocally, the increase in Hollywood productions in Vancouver further built the labor force as well as the production infrastructure of British Columbia's Lower Mainland.

Over the first decade of its operations, Sci Fi remained within the initial branding concept as a destination for sci-fi programs. This was the case even as other cable channels have reoriented their brand concepts (as in the case of MTV, which has moved away from music videos to air more original content for teen audiences) or as audience demographics change (as in the case of ABC Family's rebranding to the millennial-focused Freeform). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Sci Fi rebranded several times, launching new logos and slogans in the process. Nonetheless, despite such brand refreshes and tweaks to the types of programming aired, the cable channel remained dedicated to airing sci-fi programming. Among the examples of changes that took place overtime include changing its name from Sci-Fi Channel to Sci Fi in 2002 and then Syfy in 2009. Many mocked this final change to Syfy, but channel president, Dave Howe, noted "the Sci Fi name is limiting" and "[t]hat [it] didn't capture the full landscape

of fantasy entertainment.”²⁸ Additionally, the name change allowed NBC Universal to trademark the channel—something that was not possible with the generic Sci Fi name.

Sci Fi employed a couple of key strategies in courting an audience for both individual programs as well as its larger schedule. First, the channel attempted to find a series to serve as the channel’s flagship program. As quoted by Barbara Selznick, “Barry Schulman, Sci Fi’s vice president of programming, noted that the network needed ‘that one program that I call a “gotta watch.” The must-see event.’”²⁹ Secondly, the channel rebranded their image “as a source of imagination, the fantastical in the everyday, the extraordinary in the common ... to remove itself from the geeky imagery of space ships and aliens and to create an emotional connection to viewers around the idea that our everyday lives can be extraordinary.”³⁰ As mentioned earlier, the channel aimed to court fans of the genre with targeted programming but also desired channel flippers, or those who would casually tune into the channel. By airing science fiction programming that prioritized character development along with extra-terrestrial world building, Sci Fi was able to gain loyal viewers of the sci-fi genre as well as channel flippers. Thus, *Stargate SG-1* encompassed qualities that gave the show “flagship potential.”³¹ Stan Beeler notes how the series “is brilliant in its simplicity,” especially as the “consistent pseudoscience allows the viewer to be comfortable with the parameters of the Stargate world; military drama underpins the structure of the episodes through an archetypal struggle between good and evil; a familiar mythology allows the audience to anticipate the introduction of characters, locations, and plot structures; and the strong differentiation of the characters provides a comfortable template for

²⁸ Stuart Elliott, “Sci Fi Channel Has a New Name: Now, it’s Syfy,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/16/business/media/16adcol.html>.

²⁹ Selznick, “Branding the Future,” 187. Original quotation found in Ray Richmond, “Sci-Fi Channel Preps for Broader Makeover,” *Variety*, July 22, 1996, 21.

³⁰ Selznick, “Branding the Future,” 189.

³¹ Selznick, “Branding the Future,” 192.

much of the dialogue and action.”³² Alas, *Stargate SG-1* never broke out as the signature series for the channel, although the ten-year run of the series paved the way for future series (including *Stargate* spin-offs *Atlantis* [Sci Fi, 2004-09] and *Universe* [Syfy, 2009-11]) to achieve hit status. Additionally, as the *Stargate* franchise didn’t belong to NBCUniversal, the latter worked on developing an in-house production that could be promoted as the channel’s flagship series. In 2005, *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci Fi, 2004-09), a property which originated from a 1979 television series produced by Universal Television, gave the channel the hit it desired. Franchises for both *Stargate* and *Battlestar* properties continued to develop and air on the channel through the 2000s.

Canadianizing the Runaway

Developed as an extension of MGM’s *Stargate* franchise, *Stargate SG-1* was initially considered an American project. However, with Canadians Brad Wright and Robert C. Cooper co-producing the majority of the entire televisual franchise, 400 of the cast and crew hailing from the Great White North, and much of the production filming at The Bridge Studios in Vancouver, *Stargate* is just as Canadian as much as it is American, if not more.³³ The economic impact of the *Stargate* series amounted to \$500 million in production in British Columbia over a ten-year period.³⁴ Even as sci-fi programs were pushed away from network television and into the more niche-market outlet of Sci Fi, this newer era of quality sci-fi programming “attracted a loyal and relatively affluent audience that could afford to buy into the ever-growing merchandising

³² Stan Beeler, “*Stargate SG-1* and the Quest for the Perfect Science Fiction Premise,” in *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader*, ed. J.P. Telotte (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 268.

³³ Marke Andrews, “*Stargate*’s Success is Out of This World,” *The Vancouver Sun*, April 8, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090528222127/http://www2.canada.com/vancouvernews/business/story.html?id=8cadeca7-c0a8-403f-b6d6-7c1f728a9aa7&k=25558>.

³⁴ Andrews, “*Stargate*’s Success.”

market.”³⁵ The ability of sci-fi programming to be marketable in ancillary industries was gaining traction with its central focus on bringing in this growing demographic of sci-fi television viewers to the cable outlet. This market strategy not only kept programs on distribution outlets for long periods of time, but it also kept the production of these programs ongoing for several years at a time. The Bridge Studios, host of *Stargate SG-1* as well as the spin-off programs and television films, rented 75% of its soundstage space to the franchise.³⁶ Thus, the economic impact for Vancouver, home to several sci-fi and fantasy television productions was not just about tax revenue for the metropolitan area (and the province of British Columbia), but it also kept a large and growing industry of media professionals steadily employed. In turn, this has quickly turned a city that had sci-fi productions to *the* city known for sci-fi television productions.

Additionally, “the show is not creatively controlled by transplanted Americans, but rather by Canucks.”³⁷ This shift of runaway productions embracing Canadian creative control enforces Serra Tinic’s paradoxical argument regarding the cultural industries in Vancouver: “runaway American production does erase Vancouver as a *lived community* but simultaneously provides the necessary opportunities and infrastructure for domestic producers to develop independent local stories—facilities and opportunities denied them by the central-Canadian broadcasting powers.”³⁸ Unlike runaway productions that have been created and produced by Americans, *Stargate SG-1*’s Brad Wright produced the show with Canadians in mind. In response to a report from the *Toronto Star* labelling *Stargate SG-1* as “industrially Canadian,” Wright noted that “most of the cast is Canadian, the crew is almost 100%, and all the writers, directors, and

³⁵ Lincoln Geraghty, *American Science Fiction Film and Television* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 96.

³⁶ Ilona Beiks, “Sci-fi Series a Boon for B.C.,” *Playback: Canada’s Broadcast and Production Journal*, May 1, 2006, 28.

³⁷ Beiks, “Sci-fi Series a Boon.”

³⁸ Tinic, *On Location*, 31-32.

producers are Canadian.”³⁹ Indeed, in a more recent interview with Simon Barry, creator and executive producer of the Vancouver-produced (and Vancouver-set) *Continuum* (Syfy, 2012-15), the Vancouver native noted the influence of the *Stargate* and *Battlestar Galactica* franchises on his series, even though Barry himself did not work on any *Stargate* production.⁴⁰

According to Creative BC, the provincial agency in charge of fostering the film and television industry in Vancouver, twenty-seven of the nearly fifty television programs being shot in 2016 were sci-fi, superhero, supernatural, or fantasy series.⁴¹ Not only do these programs keep cast and crew consistently employed in the region, but it has also led to the numerous runaways of the 1990s and early 2000s training many Vancouverites to work within the same genre. This has contributed to the previously mentioned contradiction of the Vancouver industry, a model in which the local industry has ascribed as the vision for Canadians: “it is not uncommon for Vancouver’s local ‘service’ producers to work within the Hollywood North structure only until they have amassed the capital and connections they need to stabilize their own production companies for domestic television and film development.”⁴² The runaway franchises of *Stargate* and *Battlestar Galactica* helped posture a system in which more Canadian programs were able to be produced simultaneously with the same cast and crew, a notable distinction for fans of the genre with a keen eye. For example, Amanda Tapping was cast as the lead for the Canadian *Sanctuary* (2008-11), which was broadcast on Syfy in the United States, but is primarily known for her lead role as Samantha Carter on *Stargate SG-1* and her recurring role on *Stargate Atlantis*. Similarly, the producers of the *Stargate* franchise have developed non-

³⁹ Beiks, “Sci-fi Series a Boon.”

⁴⁰ Liz Shannon Miller, “How the Magic & Economics of Canadian Sci-Fi TV Helped Create ‘Continuum,’” *Indiewire*, December 9, 2014, <https://www.indiewire.com/2014/12/how-the-magic-economics-of-canadian-sci-fi-tv-helped-create-continuum-67089/>.

⁴¹ Alexandra Samuel, “Vancouver Residents Get a Taste of the Future,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 16, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/vancouver-residents-get-a-taste-of-the-future-1492394642>.

⁴² Serra Tinic, *On Location*, 53.

related projects, including Brad Wright's *Travelers* (2016-present) as well as Joseph Mallozzi and Paul Mullie's *Dark Matter* (2015-17), the latter which aired on Syfy.

Conclusion

Although broadcast television struggled with creating sustainable science fiction programming by the 2000s, the industry surrounding and embracing Vancouver-produced science fiction continued to grow. British Columbian legislation that shifted away from cultural protectionist policies to a concern for cultural exports continued to support Hollywood's presence in the city. Simultaneously, the growth of the cable industry throughout the 1990s and 2000s increased demand for content production. Thus, Vancouver's interests and role in the Hollywood system has remained healthy, even as larger American factors, including the 2007-08 Writers Guild of America strike, negatively affected the local industry in California.⁴³

Although *Stargate SG-1* was arguably the last of the major science fiction hit television programs before the industry entered into a post-network era, the trajectory of programs between *The X-Files* and *Stargate SG-1* showcase an ongoing shift occurring underneath the veil of runaway production in Vancouver. As Amanda Lotz notes, prized content, or "programming that *people seek out and specifically desire*" marks "[o]ne type of content enabled by the post-network era."⁴⁴ The increase in television production has most certainly benefitted the growing cable landscape, an environment in which post-network television's entrance thrived on segmented audience and niche programming. In the midst of perpetual danger of cancellation, MGM Television developed Stargate spin-off, *Stargate Atlantis* years before *SG-1* officially

⁴³ Etan Vlessing, "Could Canada Be the Beneficiary of a Writers Guild Strike?" *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/could-canada-be-beneficiary-a-writers-guild-strike-992047>.

⁴⁴ Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 12.

ended. The same time period ushered in Sci Fi's arguable signature series—*Battlestar Galactica*. Both series were filmed in Vancouver. Thus, even as television fully transitioned into a post-network era by the mid-2000s, Vancouver became a full-fledged genre-inflected media capital, specifically dedicated to science fiction and fantasy television production.

Conclusion:

Vancouver-Filmed Sci-Fi Television in the Post-Network Era and Beyond

Throughout this project, I have discussed three major developments in television during the 1990s and 2000s. First, this time period, which Amanda Lotz refers to as the “multi-channel transition,” saw a shift in television distribution with the development of niche-market cable outlets as well as the launch of several new broadcast networks.¹ Second, the rise in distribution outlets led to an uptick in demand for content production. This, in turn, led to certain production sites—in this case, Vancouver—expanding their role as a host for more cost-effective, runaway productions. Third, as audiences began to fragment and be drawn toward specialized programming, a wave of science fiction, horror, and supernatural productions gained momentum throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s. I argue that these three developments are not distinctly separate but rather interwoven. Subsequently, there is a need to analyze the effects of these developments as Vancouver-filmed sci-fi programming not only began to appear on the schedules of newer networks, such as Fox, The WB, UPN, and The CW as well as cable outlet Sci Fi, but also dictated network strategies in terms of business models, genre branding, targeting audiences, and studio-network integration.

The narrative of Vancouver’s boom in runaway productions begins in the 1980s as renowned Hollywood producer Stephen J. Cannell migrated to the Canadian city to film *Stingray* (NBC, 1985-87), *Wiseguy* (CBS, 1987-90), and *21 Jump Street* (Fox, 1987-91). As Serra Tinic and others have noted, Cannell’s desire to film there led other Hollywood producers to follow his

¹ Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 8.

strategy of filming in British Columbia.² Although Canadian policymakers were historically protective of their cultural industries beforehand, the geographical and physical separation of interests between central Canada and the province of British Columbia led them to embrace Hollywood's desire to film in Vancouver. This political shift from cultural interests to economic ones saw the province investing in building location infrastructure (particularly in studio space development and expansion) as well as offering tax breaks to Hollywood firms operating in the area.

Meanwhile, *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002, 2016-present) showcased a positive result of runaway production. While Chris Carter was initially unhappy with the locations in the Los Angeles area, the diversity of locations in Vancouver proved viable for the budding television producer. Additionally, the decision to film north of the border reflected positively for Fox's in-house television production division, as many more genre-inflected productions for 20th Century Fox Television would also migrate to Vancouver for filming. The effects of Fox's runaway production strategy with *The X-Files* and other programs carried over to The WB. A key moment came when The WB turned toward in-house production for more of their own programs after the sudden departure of *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (The WB, 1997-2001; UPN, 2001-03) and *Roswell* (The WB, 1999-2001; UPN, 2001-02) in 2001. *Smallville*, Warner Bros.' first Vancouver-filmed production, stayed on The WB (and Warner Bros.' successor network, The CW) for ten seasons. *Supernatural* (The WB, 2005-06; The CW, 2006-present), another Vancouver-filmed Warner Bros. production, began filming in 2005 and will air its fourteenth season during the 2018-19 season.

² Serra Tinic, *On Location: Canada's Television Industry in a Global Market* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 36.

Following the relaxation of fin-syn rules in the mid-1990s, vertical integration between television studios and broadcast networks built vertically integrated television powerhouses as part of larger conglomerates such as NewsCorp. (owner of Fox) and Warner Bros. However, a few major television studios were unable to vertically integrate. MGM Studios provides an example of a television production division that turned toward cable outlets for distribution of its genre-inflected material. Initially partnering with pay-TV channel Showtime in the late 1990s, MGM Television invested heavily in the production of sci-fi and horror television. The studio's production of *Stargate SG-1* (Showtime, 1997-2002; Sci Fi, 2002-07) represents yet another runaway production that employed the influence and talents of Canadian creative personnel. As the production was primarily run by Canadians, *Stargate SG-1* can be seen as a key moment for sci-fi production in Canada. Although Hollywood company MGM financed the show, the growth and development of a Canadian labor force specializing in the sci-fi genre led to Canadians developing their own sci-fi productions over the next decade. Brad Wright (co-creator and co-executive producer of *Stargate SG-1*, *Stargate Atlantis* [Sci Fi, 2004-09], and *Stargate Universe* [Syfy, 2009-11]) later developed Vancouver-filmed *Travelers* (Netflix, 2016-present) as a co-production between Netflix and Showcase, a specialty cable channel in Canada. Further, Toronto-filmed *Dark Matter* (Syfy, 2015-17) was the creation of Joseph Mallozzi and Paul Mullie, writers and producers on all three Stargate productions.

This thesis sought to address three key questions: First, why did the 1990s and early 2000s usher in a sudden increase of sci-fi and similar genre television productions? I showed that this increase is due in part to the launch of new networks in broadcast television as well as the proliferation of new cable channels, especially during the 1990s. An increase in distribution outlets caused the demand for content production to rise as well. Additionally, as cable television

was especially dedicated to more targeted programming and niche audiences, genre-based productions, especially science fiction and supernatural genres, began to increase in number as well.

Second, I asked how and why did deregulation of the Hollywood television industry impact the relationships between new distribution outlets and runaway production sites, such as Vancouver? I illustrated that deregulation ushered in a wave of consolidation and conglomeration, allowing once-disparate production and distribution units to become commonly owned. Additionally, major studios were able to develop and launch networks, as previously noted. Newer networks and cable outlets could not afford risky financial decisions, thus their sibling studio divisions filmed in locations offering subsidies and other financial benefits to offset risk. *The X-Files* and *Smallville* gave Fox and The WB, respectively, the commercial successes necessary to enable the newer netlets' sustainability amidst the expansion of broadcast television in the 1990s.

Third, I examined what impact Hollywood financed sci-fi television production had on the development of the television industry in Vancouver. Here, I illustrated how the numerous runaway productions throughout the 1990s and early 2000s eventually trained a large Vancouverite labor force skilled in creating genre television. *Stargate SG-1* was arguably the apex of Hollywood runaway production that was mainly produced by Canadian personnel rather than American personnel. As Serra Tinic notes, "it is not uncommon for Vancouver's local 'service' producers to work within the Hollywood North structure only until they have amassed the capital and connections they need to stabilize their own production companies for domestic television and film development."³ Additionally, the vertical integration of Hollywood firms was

³ Tinic, *On Location*, 53.

paralleled by the similar corporate merger activity north of the border.⁴ In 2013, “Vancouver-based Thunderbird purchased [Vancouver-based] Reunion Pictures.”⁵ Reunion, the parent production company of time travel series, *Continuum* (2012-15), as well as a handful of other sci-fi and horror television productions, highlights a case in which a native production company of Vancouver has gained enough experience in science fiction production in order to develop programs along with or completely outside of the Hollywood North structure.⁶ This shift in Vancouver production culture can be seen in the setting of *Continuum*, a production that not only filmed in Vancouver, but took place in the Canadian city as well.

Theoretical Takeaways

In 2001, Toby Miller and Marie Claire Leger offered a new framework—the New International Division of Cultural Labor (NICL)—to think about issues surrounding the growing global influence of Hollywood, especially as it “centralizes the importance of ‘flexible’ cultural labor to the new global cultural economy.”⁷ Although Hollywood’s globalization strategies may infer that the centrality of the industry’s political economic power is weakened, Miller and Leger argue that international production hubs—such as Vancouver and Toronto—still linger well behind Los Angeles and New York in terms of production revenue.⁸ Therefore, it remained pertinent to study the phenomenon of runaway production in Vancouver as one that is strongly rooted in Hollywood’s economic anxieties and desires.

⁴ Tunic, *On Location*, 54.

⁵ Etan Vlessing, “MIPTV: Thunderbird Films Acquires ‘Continuum’ Producer Reunion Pictures (Exclusive),” *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 4, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/miptv-thunderbird-films-acquires-continuum-433076>.

⁶ Reunion Pictures also produced *Flash Gordon* (2007-08) and *Olympus* (2013 in Canada, 2015 in the U.S.).

⁷ Toby Miller and Marie Claire Leger, “Runaway Production, Runaway Consumption, Runaway Citizenship: The New International Division of Cultural Labor,” *Emergences* 11, no. 1 (2001): 90, DOI: 10.1080/10457220120044684.

⁸ Miller and Leger, “Runaway Production,” 106.

Hollywood's development of Vancouver as a runaway production site calls upon Michael Curtin's call for media capitals to be "reassessed in light of increasing multi-directional flows of media imagery."⁹ While previous theories of media imperialism have overlooked the nuances of Vancouver as more than a cheaper site for media production, this thesis has highlighted the significant development of Vancouver's position in Hollywood's global system of production. In his book on *World Television*, Joseph D. Straubhaar argues that complexities have arisen "beyond the original limitations of dependency and imperialism" through asymmetrically interdependent relationships between two countries.¹⁰ Straubhaar defines asymmetrical interdependence as "the variety of possible relationships in which countries find themselves unequal but possessing variable degrees of power and initiative in politics, economics, technological capabilities, and culture."¹¹ As Hollywood continued to develop Vancouver as a site for cheaper production through the 1990s and early 2000s, Vancouver also became specialized in the business of Hollywood production as well as the production of genre-specific media, particularly science fiction and fantasy television. Indeed, Vancouver has become a media capital through Hollywood's exploitation of federal and provincial funds that assisted the development of the production sector in the Canadian city, but more importantly, Vancouver has become a genre-inflected media capital through the flexible cultural labor that has developed and evolved under the guise of "Hollywood North." Vancouver's diversity of locations and the city's specialized workforce continue to draw Hollywood productions north of the border, but Canadian laborers have begun to utilize their specializations for domestic productions as well. As I detail in the next section, Canadian production studios have continued to develop sci-fi and

⁹ Michael Curtin, "Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 203, DOI: 10.1177/13678779030062004.

¹⁰ Joseph D. Straubhaar, *World Television: From Global to Local* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2007), 21.

¹¹ Straubhaar, *World Television*, 21.

fantasy television as the production sector in Vancouver, Toronto, and in other Canadian locales continues to push and pull with Hollywood's presence in the major media capitals of Canada.

Future Research

This project has explored the intersection of runaway production, genre programming, and vertical integration in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, more work could (and should) attempt to continue examining how sci-fi production in Vancouver continued (and continues) to evolve through the 2000s and into the 2010s. Additionally, the continued investment of Hollywood firms in Vancouver and the evolution of a culture of Canadian production have contributed to a continual rise of sci-fi production not only in Vancouver but throughout Canada. By 2013, Thomas Vitale, executive vice-president of programming and original movies for Syfy, stated that “[t]here’s been great science fiction that’s come out of Canada.”¹² Indeed, on the cable outlets, productions such as *Eureka* (Sci Fi/Syfy, 2006-12) and *Sanctuary* (2008-11) as well as numerous *Stargate* and *Battleship Galactica* spin-offs continued to be filmed in Vancouver throughout the 2000s and 2010s.

Another area of potential research involves further exploring the role that sci-fi production has had in Toronto, Canada's other major media production capital. Much of Syfy's 2010s-era programming slate was filmed in this Ontarian city, including *Warehouse 13* (2009-14), *Alphas* (2011-12), *Defiance* (2013-15), and *12 Monkeys* (2015-18). Critically acclaimed productions, such as *Orphan Black* (2013-17), highlight the quality of Canadian content produced in Toronto. The weak exchange rate between the Canadian and U.S. dollars had lured Hollywood studios to runaway production sites, such as Toronto in the early 2010s. However, by the middle

¹² Marsha Lederman, “How Canada is Becoming the Sci-Fi Nation,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 11, 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/television/how-canada-is-becoming-the-sci-fi-nation/article11157191/>.

of the decade, the Ontarian government decreased their provincial tax incentive programs, citing a “reduced need for government support.”¹³ Concurrently, Syfy’s schedule evolved beyond Canadian-filmed runaway productions as well. Canadian-produced content, such as Nova Scotia-filmed *Haven* (2010-15), Toronto-filmed *Lost Girl* (2010-15), Montreal-filmed *Being Human* (2011-14), Vancouver-filmed *Continuum*, and Toronto-filmed *Dark Matter* (2015-17) have been imported and mixed into the scheduling of runaways on U.S. television, further complicating the notion of what is Canadian on Syfy’s current programming slate.

Additionally, Warner Bros. has continued to amplify their presence in Vancouver through an increase in runaway productions there. In the spring of 2006, The WB and UPN both went off of the air. By the fall, a new network, The CW, had emerged in their place. Operating as both a joint venture between CBS Corporation (owner of UPN) and Warner Bros. (owner of The WB) as well as a successor to the two now-dead networks, The CW revised the prior networks’ strategies in terms of teen programming. The new network was headed by Dawn Ostroff, who previously had served as President of UPN. The CW carried over existing programming, including the aforementioned *Smallville* and *Supernatural*, from both The WB and UPN in order to fill prime-time slots during its debut season.

The CW’s interest in airing science fiction and horror content initially wavered for a few years, with Ostroff prioritizing more straightforward teen dramas such as *Gossip Girl* (2007-12) and *90210* (2008-13). However, the sci-fi, horror, fantasy, and superhero fare that did appear was largely produced in runaway production capitals both in Canada and the United States. Atlanta-filmed *Vampire Diaries* debuted in 2009, while Vancouver-filmed *The Secret Circle* debuted in 2011. The following year saw the network’s renewed interest in its commonly-owned DC

¹³ Etan Vlessing, “Ontario Cuts Foreign Film Tax Credit, Hollywood to Take Hit,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 23, 2015, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/ontario-cuts-foreign-film-tax-791058>.

Entertainment catalog, debuting *Arrow* in 2012, *The Flash* in 2014, *DC's Legends of Tomorrow* in 2016, and the reacquired *Supergirl* that same year.¹⁴ All of these productions continue to film in Vancouver. Additionally, *The 100* (The CW, 2014-present), *iZombie* (The CW, 2015-present), and *Riverdale* (The CW, 2017-present) all film in the Canadian city as well. In 2016, the city of Vancouver touted Warner Bros. as “Vancouver’s biggest TV client,” with the studio filming seven television productions in the city at the time.

Vancouver has also benefited from Fox’s periodic efforts to revive sci-fi programming on its network. Perhaps the most notable example of this is *Fringe* (Fox, 2008-13). After filming the pilot in Toronto, the series moved to New York City for production on its first season. In an attempt to further cut back on its production budget, the series relocated to Vancouver the following year.¹⁵ WB-produced *Almost Human* (2013-14) filmed in Vancouver before getting cancelled after one season. *Minority Report* (2015) also filmed in the Canadian city but was another casualty of cancellation following its debut season. *The X-Files* was revived in 2016, with the production of the series relocating back to Vancouver from Los Angeles.

There is much more television, particularly during the post-network era, that could and should be studied through the same lens as this current project. However, this project could also be supplemented by employing other methodologies. For example, interviews with network executives and regulators, as well as with creative personnel involved with producing sci-fi programming during the 1990s, would continue to expand our understanding of the intersection of place, policy, and industry. It is my desire to use this project as a means of further exploration, especially as television continues to transform and evolve in the 2010s. I would like to consider

¹⁴ *Supergirl* aired on CBS between 2015-16 and was filmed in Los Angeles. Beginning in 2016, the series moved production to Vancouver (thus, joining its three franchise siblings) and began airing on The CW.

¹⁵ Lindsay Soll, “‘Fringe’ Moves Production to Canada,” *Entertainment Weekly*, February 21, 2009, <http://ew.com/article/2009/02/21/fringe-fox/>.

how streaming platforms have engaged in runaway production with shows, such as *The Man in the High Castle* (Amazon, 2015-present), *Travelers* (Netflix, 2016-present), *Altered Carbon* (Netflix, 2018-present), and *Lost in Space* (2018-present). I would position my questions to ask the following: Are these programs produced in similar ways—in terms of labor exploitation in Vancouver and financial incentive programs—that broadcast and cable network studios have employed? Have any studios or production sites emerged due to the investment of newer players in production and distribution? What might an exploration of more recent programs and streaming platforms indicate about this ongoing evolution of the television landscape? Ironically, attempts to understand the future of science fiction television demand a better interrogation of the genre's past.

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