Histories of Telefantasy: the Representation of the Fantastic and the Aesthetics of Television

Volume 1 of 2

by

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Acknowledgements

Declaration

I hereby declare that the following thesis is solely my own work, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree, either in the same or different form, to this or any other University.

Earlier versions of sections of this thesis have been published in the following articles:

'Exploiting the Intimate Screen: *The Quatermass Experiment*, Fantasy and the Aesthetic Potential of Early Television Drama', *Small Screen, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s*, Janet Thumim (ed.), London: I.B.Tauris, 2002.

'*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*', and '*The X-Files*', in *The Television Genre Book*, Glen Creeber (ed.), London: BFI, 2001.

Earlier versions of sections of this thesis have been presented in the following conference papers:

'Primetime Fantasies: The Scheduling and Production of Contemporary Telefantasy in Britain', paper presented to the CPUK conference, University of Bristol, July 2001.

'Strategies of Darkness: Telefantasy and *The X-Files*', paper presented to the 10th Annual *Screen* Conference, University of Glasgow, July 2000.

Abstract

Over five case studies, this thesis brings together six 'telefantasy' programmes, television dramas that have been understood as 'cult' texts because of their fan audiences and that are centrally concerned with representing the fantastic. By situating the *Quatermass* serials, *The Prisoner*, *Star Trek*, *The X-Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)* within their contexts of production, this thesis challenges the characterisation of such programmes as 'unique' cultural phenomena.

Through this analysis, this thesis argues that the fantastic suggests itself as a particularly rich area for re-examining the central assumptions about the aesthetics of television. Challenging the notion of television as an intimate medium of 'talk' that addresses a distracted viewer through a small screen in the living room, this thesis argues that the display of the image in these programmes functions as an aesthetic and economic strategy to address an attentive viewer with distinctive programmes. However, this tendency towards spectacle and distinctiveness is not opposed to the 'intimate' model of television, but is used to negotiate a position for these programmes in which they are both spectacular and intimate, distinctive and familiar, addressing an attentive and a distracted viewer.

By analysing the different ways in which the representation of the fantastic is negotiated within each case study, this thesis reassesses the industrial and aesthetic history of 1950s/1960s television, and engages with the debates about the impact of the rise of satellite, cable and digital television services. Through an analysis of the different status of telefantasy on contemporary US network and UK terrestrial television, this thesis explores the different ways in which these two industries have responded to the fragmentation of the industry over the 1980s and 1990s. By re-theorising the aesthetics of television, this thesis argues that we need to have a clearer understanding of the complexity of television history if we are to assess fully the impact of the current changes on the future of the medium.

Introduction

Approaching Telefantasy: History, Industry, Aesthetics

Over the last fifteen years there has developed a growing body of academic work

concerned with a range of popular television programmes, primarily from the US, that

share two dominant characteristics: they attract loyal fan audiences and they represent

fantastic tales of futuristic space travel, superheroes, demons, witches and alien

invasions. Much of this work, on programmes such as *Star Trek*, *Dr Who*, *The*

Avengers, *The Prisoner*, *The X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, is primarily

concerned with exploring these texts within their social context (by asking what these

programmes can tell us about the society that produced and watched them[1]), or with

exploring their social function (by asking how they are used by their avid fans[2]).

Within these studies there is a tendency to separate these programmes from 'normal'

television and characterise them as exceptional in television history[3].

What these arguments raise, and what has been generally ignored in such studies, is

what these 'exceptional' programmes offered to producers within their original

context of production, and how these 'unique' programmes can be situated within a

broader industrial history of television as a medium. Although there are some incisive

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[1] See for example, Miller (1997) on *The Avengers*, Barrett and Barrett (2001) on *Star Trek*, Kellner (1999 and 1999a) and Wildermuth (1999) on *The X-Files*, and Playden (2002) on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

[2] See for example Jenkins (1992), Bacon-Smith (1992), Penley (1992) and Lewis (1992).

[3] For example Harrison, Projansky, Ono and Helford, in their introduction to a collection of critical essays on *Star Trek*, describe the series as a cultural phenomenon which 'is unique within the televisual world' (1996, 3). Douglas Kellner claims that the 'aesthetically innovative and thematically challenging texts [of *The X-Files*...] are rather unique in the history of mainstream television' (1999, 164).

production studies of programmes such as *Star Trek* and *Dr Who*[4], no comparative

work exists that asks whether there are any recurring discourses in the production of

these fantasy/cult dramas, or how the production of such programmes can be

understood in relation to historical developments in the television industry. The

starting point for this thesis, therefore, is to examine how we can analyse a range of

television drama series and serials that variously represent fantastic fictional worlds

and that have been understood as 'cult' texts because of their loyal fan audiences, in

relation to the industrial contexts within which they were produced. Through case

studies which examine the *Quatermass* serials (BBC, 1953, 1955, 1957-8), *The*

Prisoner (ITC, 1967), *Star Trek* (Desilu/Paramount, 1967-9), *The X-Files* (Fox/10:13,

1993-2002), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Kuzui/Sandollar/Mutant Enemy/Fox, 1996-)

and *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)* (WTTV, 2000-01), this thesis explores the

circumstances within which these programmes were originally produced and asks

what this can tell us about these programmes and about television more broadly.

Such a study, rather than approaching these programmes as 'unique' in the history of

television, examines how they can be understood as part of a broader industrial

history of television, and explores the consequences of this for our understanding of

television history itself.

The Problematic Paradigms of Fantasy and Cult Television

While it is possible to identify an historical range of television dramas that have

attracted fan audiences and that represent fantastic events and characters, the

categories of fantasy television and cult television are diffuse and ambiguous, and not

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[4] For *Star Trek* see Bernardi (1998) and Pounds (1999), for *Dr Who* see Tulloch and Alvarado (1983).

all of the texts that I have selected fit easily into them. The fantastic is a generically

unstable category. The boundaries between fantasy, science fiction and horror have

consistently proved problematic in explorations of these genres and representations of

the fantastic are frequently incorporated into a wide range of other genres[5]. *Ally*

McBeal and *The X-Files* both represent fantastic events, but does this mean that they

can be usefully understood to occupy the same generic category? Over and above

this, the tendency towards generic hybridity within television programmes has proved

problematic for the study of television genre[6]. For example, *The X-Files* can be

categorised as a science fiction series (thematically concerned with alien invasion and

the dangers of science and replete with the iconography of space ships and aliens) and

as a detective series (following its detective protagonists through narratives of

investigation)[7]. The series is also frequently horrific in its representation of serial

killers and murders, laced with ironic comedy in its treatment of social and genetic

difference, and embedded in the action-adventure format common to series television

in the US. *The Prisoner* can be categorised as a spy series (following its spy

protagonist as he attempts to escape from his kidnappers) and as a science fiction

series (thematically concerned with technological developments to induce mind

control and alter perception). The series also uses the narrative form of the action-

adventure series and frequently adopts surreal representational strategies. While the

fantastic is central to both series, in *The X-Files* this is represented through a dark

aesthetic that *suggests* the presence of aliens, genetic hybrids and space crafts (see

Chapter 5), while in *The Prisoner* this is represented through a surreal, colourful

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[5] The debates about the definitions of science fiction, fantasy and horror as genres will be explored in more detail in the literature review in Chapter 1.

[6] See Feuer (1992), Neale (2001) and Turner (2001).

[7] Indeed Bellon (1999) refutes *The X-Files'* classification as a science fiction series and argues that it can be more usefully understood as a detective series.

landscape that combines old-world charm with unexplained futuristic technology (see Chapter 3).

The notion of 'cult television' is equally problematic. Studies of cult media are primarily concerned with analysing the reception of television programmes; exploring (and often valorising) the ways in which fan audiences engage with and produce a range of cultural artefacts. The study of the cult text is further problematised by the textual indeterminacy of the media cult. All of the fantasy/cult television programmes under examination here have been exploited across a range of cultural products, from books, magazines and films, to toys, calendars and chocolate bars. Fans engage not only with the original programme, but also with a range of other related cultural artefacts that contribute to the creation of the media cult. Some fans, such as the writers of *Star Trek* slash are active producers themselves, and are part of a large international fan community. Other fan communities, such as the fan following for *Quatermass*, are relatively small and specialised by comparison. Some cult texts, such as the remake of *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*, can attract a range of different fans, from those who were fans of the original programme, to those who are fans of its new stars, the comedians Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer. Cult television programmes are by definition constructed through their mode of reception, rather than their mode of production. Producers may attempt to create a media cult, but it is only through the activities of audiences that a television programme can become a cult text. Matt Hills suggests that as a consequence 'there can be no final and absolute

classification of the media cult' (Hills 2002, 131)[8].

However, despite these problems in defining the cult text and delineating the fantasy genre, within fan discourses television dramas that attract cult fan audiences and represent the fantastic are commonly brought together under the term 'telefantasy'. The term 'telefantasy' was first used in the late 1970s and early 1980s in magazines for fans of media science fiction, fantasy and horror. The first of these was a US magazine entitled *Starlog*, which was launched in 1976. *Starlog* was followed in Britain by *Starburst*, first published by Marvel Comics in 1978. Both magazines comprised of interviews, production details, episode guides and commentary on science fiction, fantasy and horror in film, television and comics. *Starburst*'s early editions proclaimed it as the magazine of 'Science Fantasy in TV, Cinema and Graphics'. The use of the term 'Science Fantasy' in this tagline reflects the difficulty that the contributors to *Starburst* had in defining their readers' areas of interest, and within the magazine writers frequently used fantasy, science fiction, supernatural fantasy and SF as interchangeable terms. In a 1979 editorial for *Starburst*, Dez Skinn refers to three articles on 'Television fantasy' (1979, 3) examining the *Quatermass* serials, *Sapphire and Steel* (ATV, 1979-82), and *Dr Who* (BBC, 1963-89). While all of these series are concerned with representing the fantastic they use very different generic strategies to do so. The *Quatermass* serials explore alien invasion, with an emphasis on scientific explanation and the horrific threat of destruction. *Sapphire and Steel* tells a series of ghost stories connected by the investigation of unworldly characters that can control time. *Dr Who* concerns a scientific alien time traveller

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[8] Hills' examination of the textual attributes of the media cult will be further examined in Chapter 1.

who frequently saves the Earth (and an assortment of other planets) from oppression and/or destruction. Tise Vahimagi addresses the difficulty of situating such texts within clearly defined generic boundaries in his subsequent article on *Sapphire and Steel*, a series that he claims 'operates in a *twilight* zone somewhere between science fiction and supernatural fantasy' (Vahimagi 1979, 14). A year later in 'TV Zone', his regular column for *Starburst*, Vahimagi has begun to use the term 'tele-fantasy' as a broad catch-all to cover the generic range and hybridity of the television programmes of interest to the fan audience for the magazine[9].

The term telefantasy draws together a range of texts that otherwise appear generically disparate through a recognition of their representation of the fantastic and their status as cult texts of interest to fan audiences. In doing so it recognises a link between cult television and fantasy television drama that has been relatively unexplored in academic analyses of cult media, which tend to focus on cult fans over cult texts. The term telefantasy in itself does not solve the methodological or conceptual problems in historicising 'fantasy/cult' television programmes, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 1. However, the use of the term telefantasy indicates the discursive construction of a corpus of programmes that have generated cult followings *and* that represent the fantastic, within which we can situate all of the series selected for analysis here.

Telefantasy, Television and Aesthetics

I have so far argued that we can identify an historical corpus of television

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[9] Tise Vahimagi first uses the term 'tele-fantasy' in 'TV Zone', *Starburst*, 27 (1980, 38).

programmes termed telefantasy that intersect with discourses of cult and fantasy, and

that have been primarily removed from the broader industrial history of television in

academic analyses. I want to go on to explore in more detail why an historical

analysis of the production of telefantasy might be particularly valuable for television

studies. The programmes selected for analysis here intersect with discourses of

fantasy and cult in ways that enable us to explore the historical development of the

two terms as a way of thinking about television texts and in ways that raise central

questions to television studies. I want to suggest that discourses of fantasy television

and cult television tend to problematise the dominant aesthetic paradigms within

television studies, which may indicate why such programmes have been characterised

as 'exceptional' and 'unique' texts in television history.

Mark Siegel's analysis of television science fiction indicates the difficulties that the

representation of the fantastic raises for an understanding of television aesthetics.

Writing in 1984, Siegel claims that television science fiction has historically

replicated cinematic science fiction's emphasis on spectacle, action and 'gimmick-

laden space-opera' and preoccupation 'with juvenilia and with marvels and wonders

rather than solid characterization or intellectually stimulating themes' (Siegel 1984,

65). Siegel argues that the presence of such 'cinematic' elements in television science

fiction was unsuccessful because it was unsuited to television's small screen and

domestic setting. Adopting Horace Newcombe's (1974) construction of television's

basic attributes, Siegel argues that the intimacy, continuity and immediacy of

television as a medium is more suited to the intelligent illumination of contemporary

social anxieties characteristic of literary science fiction than the spectacular display of

cinematic science fiction. Siegel's analysis of television science fiction reflects a

general tendency to understand television as inherently visually inferior to its

cinematic counterpart[10]. This stems from an historical model of the aesthetics of

television and cinema that, as Martin McLoone points out, 'opposes the extremes,

rather than the characteristics, of the two media – television at its least "adventurous"

(aesthetically) and cinema in its big picture, "event" mode' (McLoone 1997, 81). The

opposition of television as a 'writer's' medium or a medium of talk against the visual

spectacle of the cinema reflects what John Caughie argues as a general omission in

television studies of the analysis of style and narrative. Applying Todorov's model of

the three aspects of the literary text, Caughie claims that the majority of the scholarly

writing on television is 'grounded in the dominance of the semantic [thematic] aspect,

with relatively little analytical or historical attention to the "verbal" (style, mise-en-

scene) or the "syntactic" (narrative structure)' (1991a, 137).

Accordingly, textual studies of the representation of the fantastic in television drama

have largely concentrated on theme, or have argued as Siegel does that television is

unsuited to spectacle. By contrast the emphasis in literary and cinematic analyses of

science fiction, fantasy and horror has been on the ways in which the fantastic

challenges conventional representational strategies, and in cinema such genres have

proved particularly fertile sites for an examination of the use of style, image and

spectacle (see Chapter 1). Discourses of fantasy outside of television therefore

suggest telefantasy as a useful site from which to address the relative lack of analysis

of the 'verbal' and the 'syntactic' in television studies, and to explore the adequacy of

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[10] Hockley's analysis of science fiction television goes some way towards countering this, although he still maintains that science fiction television places an emphasis on 'addressing moral, ethical, political and philosophical themes' that is 'notably different from many, although not all, of its special effects-driven counterparts in the cinema' (2001, 26).

the dominant paradigms of intimacy, continuity and immediacy for an understanding of the aesthetics of television.

Discourses of cult television raise related questions about the dominant construction of television as a medium within television studies. The cult television fan has been characterised as an abnormal, even pathological, spectator[11]. Even those studies that have attempted to challenge this construction of the fan tend to imply that the engaged, loyal and attentive fan represents an exceptional form of television spectatorship. Jenkins argues that 'One becomes a "fan" *not by being a regular viewer* of a particular programme but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity' (1991, 175; my italics), suggesting that the 'active' *fan* can be differentiated from the 'inactive' *spectator*. The intensity of fan attachment to television texts suggests of mode of engagement that counters the dominant paradigm of 'glance theory' for understanding television spectatorship. John Ellis (1982) argues that because of television's location within the domestic sphere and integration into the routines of everyday life, television spectatorship is primarily a distracted activity. Glance theory implies an aesthetic model of television as ephemeral (fleetingly glimpsed rather than actively and repeatedly viewed), aural (something to be listened to and glanced at rather than watched) and lacking in intrinsic aesthetic value (not worthy of attentive viewing). These two related notions of television spectatorship reflect broader cultural discourses about the aesthetic value and social function of television that can be summed up in two British slang terms for the medium: 'gogglebox' and 'moving wallpaper'. 'Gogglebox' suggests television as a

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[11] Jenkins (1992) critiques such stereotypes of the media fan.

potentially dangerous medium and reflects the fears associated with the attentive

engagement of the television fan with the television text. 'Moving wallpaper' reflects

glance theory's implications that television lacks any intrinsic aesthetic value and

invites a distracted mode of spectatorship. While audience analyses of cult fans have

challenged the characterisation of the fan as a pathological viewer, I want to ask if an

analysis of the production of texts that have gone on to become the objects of such

engaged fan attention can challenge these notions of the aesthetics of television.

As texts that appear to go against the dominant paradigms for our understanding of

television as a medium, what place do these fantasy/cult programmes have within

production discourses and how can we situate them within television history? There

are two issues here. Firstly these fantasy/cult programmes invite an exploration of the

adequacy of the dominant paradigms in television studies for an understanding of

these particular texts and of television history. Secondly these programmes allow an

examination of the ways in which producers have engaged with the dominant

aesthetic notions of television as a medium, and an exploration of how and why these

may have shifted historically.

Structure, Corpus and Methodology

I have argued that the programmes selected for analysis in this thesis occupy a dual

position in that they can be understood as both cult and fantasy texts, and that the

discourses of cult and fantasy raise a number of related questions about the dominant

aesthetic paradigms within which television has been understood. I have also

suggested that by resituating these series within their historical context of production,

it is possible to explore the adequacy of these paradigms for our understanding of

television history and to examine the ways in which discourses of production engage with these paradigms. This thesis is therefore concerned with exploring what these texts can tell us about television as a medium and about television history. However, rather than offering a range of programmes from across television's history, I have selected texts that belong to two historically distinct periods in the history of television as a medium. These two periods correspond to historical shifts that have had a particular impact on the industrial history of television *and* on the histories of cult and fantasy television.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 explore programmes produced in the 1950s and the 1960s in a period of television's history that John Ellis has termed the 'era of scarcity' (2000, 39-60). At this time national stations (such as the US networks and the UK terrestrial channels) were the primary providers of television programmes, transmitting a small number of programmes to large national audiences. During this period when television provided 'the nation's private life' (Ellis 2000, 46), the notion of 'cult television' was relatively unexplored. This is not to imply that in the 1950s and the 1960s audiences did not develop affectionate and loyal relationships with television texts. Rather it is to argue that the notion of the television fan only emerged as a culturally prominent and broadly accepted idea over the 1970s. While programmes from the 1950s and the 1960s have attracted fan audiences and become media cults, in the industrial context within which they were produced the television 'fan' and the 'cult' television text were not culturally current notions. The three programmes examined in Chapters 2-4, the *Quatermass* serials, *The Prisoner* and *Star Trek*, have

all gained fan followings, yet they were produced at a time when television offered universal provision to broadly defined consensus audiences[12].

Over the 1970s and the 1980s, television fandom gradually became more culturally prominent with the increasing visibility of fan communities around programmes such as *Star Trek* and *Dr Who*. In the same period television industries underwent dramatic changes as the dominant position of the national broadcasters was challenged by the growth of satellite, cable and digital television. The shift over the late 1970s and the 1980s towards what Ellis has termed the 'era of availability' has created a fragmented global economy in which television 'is at once more global and more highly individualised' (Ellis 2000, 69). Ellis argues that as a consequence television has,

> Reconstructed itself to incorporate increasing choice, and to cater for the increasingly diverse demands of its viewers. [...] Once more than three or four channels exist, more nuanced notions of the audience begin to develop. The audience is conceived as much more a loose assemblage of minorities to be brought into various kinds of coalition, or even to be addressed singly. (Ellis 2000, 71)

Within this fragmented media economy, Matt Hills (1999a) argues that the cult fan has begun to be recognised as an ideal audience segment in television production.

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[12] While *The Prisoner* and *Star Trek* have organised and international fan communities, the fan following for the *Quatermass* serials is much smaller, in part because of the difficulty in accessing the original serials.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine programmes from the early 1990s to the present day, a period in which cult television programmes no longer occupy a marginal position, but have become an important part of the mainstream primetime television schedules. Chapter 5 explores *The X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, two series that are indicative of the production of primetime television for the niche fan audience in contemporary US network television. Chapter 6 examines *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*, a British remake of a series from the 1960s, and asks how UK terrestrial television has responded to the changes to the television industry and the discourses of cult television over this period.

These two periods, as well as corresponding to changes in the television industry and cult television, are also significant in the history of television fantasy. The *Quatermass* serials were the first adult dramas written specifically for television in the UK that were based upon a fantastic premise. Over the 1960s when *The Prisoner* and *Star Trek* were produced, television fantasy drama had developed as a particularly successful form of programming in the UK and the US. While television fantasy has always been a part of the television schedules, it re-emerged as a dominant form of programming in the 1990s. Within the later part of the 1990s the television schedules (particularly in the US) have been saturated with programmes such as *Charmed*, *Babylon 5*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Lexx*, *Space Above and Beyond* and so on. By exploring the intersection of discourses of cult *and* fantasy in relation to broader shifts in the industrial history of television, this thesis asks what links there might be between the development of fantasy and cult television in these two different periods of television history.

The programmes explored in this thesis, as well as coming from two different

historical periods, also come from two different national contexts: the United States of

America and the United Kingdom. While John Ellis' historical model of television's

development from an era of scarcity to an era of availability is useful, an exploration

of the development of cult and fantasy television suggests that this history may be

more nationally contingent than Ellis implies. The resurgence of telefantasy in the

1990s stems primarily from the US. This suggests that Hills' notion of the fan viewer

as an ideal audience in contemporary television production may be less applicable to

the UK than the US[13], and that the shift from consensus to coalition television may

have very different consequences within different national contexts. The nationally

comparative approach taken in this thesis enables these differences to come to the

surface and be thrown into relief. Furthermore, by concentrating on the changes to

US *network* and UK *terrestrial* television, this thesis focuses particular attention on

the ways in which these 'national' broadcasters have changed in response to the

fragmentation and diversification of the television economy since the late 1970s.

The nationally comparative approach taken in this thesis also enables an address to

the transnational nature of television production and consumption. All of the

programmes explored in this thesis that were produced and initially transmitted on US

network television, have since aired on UK terrestrial television. *Star Trek* has been a

regular part of the UK terrestrial schedules since it was first transmitted in the UK in

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[13] Hills has incorporated these criticisms, which I presented in a paper given to the 10th Console-ing
Passions Conference at Bristol University in July 2001 (Johnson, 2001), in the recently published
monograph of his doctoral thesis (Hills 2002, 36).

1969[14] and both *The X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* continue to be transmitted

on British terrestrial television (see Chapter 6). Furthermore, although not all of the

British programmes examined here have been transmitted in the US, the relationship

between the UK and US industries is an important factor in understanding the

production of each of these series. The *Quatermass* serials were not transmitted in the

US, being produced at a time when the international export of television programmes

from the UK was relatively rare, largely because most television production at this

time was still live. However, when the *Quatermass* serials were adapted for cinema,

the US market was particularly important[15]. *The Prisoner* was sold to the US network

CBS as part of a strategy by the British company ITC to infiltrate the US television

market (see Chapter 3), and although *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)* has not yet

been transmitted in the US, 13 episodes of the series have been produced with the

notion that this will improve its chances of being sold to US television (see Chapter

6).

The export of US programmes to the UK and vice versa, is not an equal exchange,

with US television programmes making up a far more significant part of the British

schedules than UK programmes do in the US. While the UK television industries

have successfully exported their programmes across the world, their primary imports

come from the US[16]. Despite this US television has traditionally been evoked as a

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[14] According to Roger Fulton, 'In the UK there have been *Star Treks* every year from 1969 to 1981, 1984-6 and 1992-94 with the series clocking up six full BBC screenings and runs on Sky One' (Fulton 1997, 430).
[15] The correspondence in the BBC Written Archive Centre at Caversham, UK, suggests that Hammer pursued its interest in purchasing the rights to *The Quatermass Experiment* because of the interest of their US partners in adapting the television series into a film (WAC, R126/401/1).
[16] Strinati (1992), Lealand (1984) and McCabe (2001) have all explored the impact and place of US television programmes in the UK.

marker of what British television must avoid – an indication of the perils of over-

commercialisation. In recent years, with the escalated expansion and fragmentation

of British television, there has been much fear that television broadcasting in Britain

will succumb to what is seen as the increasingly global threat of US television,

adopting its programmes and institutional formats[17]. Yet it is myopic to presume that

British television can only be understood as those programmes produced within the

British television industry. By adopting a transnational approach, this thesis offers a

comparative analysis of the production of telefantasy in relation to the historical shifts

in the UK terrestrial and US network television industries, and explores the ways in

which the international export of programmes between the UK and the US has

influenced indigenous television production. Such a comparative approach avoids an

overly parochial approach to television and addresses the complexity of the medium

as at once a nationally specific industry and a collection of national and international

texts.

Methodologically, although this thesis situates these texts within their industrial

contexts of production, it differs from the tradition of production research undertaken

by D'Acci (1994), Silverstone (1985), Tulloch and Alvarado (1983) and Born (2000).

All of these studies are concerned with examining the experience of producing

television programmes by interviewing those involved in the production and, if

possible, directly observing the production process. By contrast, this thesis is less

concerned with the actual *process* of production that with the broader *discourses*

within which this process takes place. It is less interested in 'how' these series were

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[17] See for example Ellis' defence of public service broadcasting in his theorisation of the future impact of the current changes in the television industry (2000, 162-78).

produced than with understanding how different sets of expectations (associated with

the discourses of fantasy television and cult television) were negotiated in the broader

debates surrounding the production of these programmes and the impact that these

had on the text. While such an analysis could have been complemented through

interviews with production personnel, the national and historical range of my case

studies restricted the possibilities for producing an extensive account of the process of

production, but did enable a detailed comparative analysis of the industrial context of

production. In order to maintain the comparative historical and national breadth that

has been relatively absent from studies of these programmes (and from most

production analyses), this thesis focuses primarily on archive and published sources

found within the public domain, combined with detailed textual analysis of the

programmes. Sources such as articles, advertisements and interviews in magazines,

newspapers and trade journals do not offer evidence of the actual practices of

production, but are particularly valuable for examining the public discourses within

which a programme's production is negotiated. An analysis of such sources has been

situated within a broader understanding of the industrial context of production to try

to understand why certain debates arise at certain moments, and the sources for these

have varied from academic histories, the BBC written archives, fan publications,

parliamentary debates, US government commissions and so on[18].

In undertaking such a study I am firstly arguing that we can identify a range of

television programmes that can be variously understood to intersect with discourses of

fantasy and cult television, and that can be usefully grouped under the term

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[18] The relevance of particular sources varies depending upon the historical and national context under examination.

telefantasy. However, by drawing these texts together, I am not proposing telefantasy as a genre within which these programmes can be categorised. These are programmes that could easily be situated in relation to different sets of discourses and grouped with a different range of texts[19]. What I am offering here, therefore, is just one of a number of histories within which these programmes could be situated. This is a history that, by focusing on the discourses of fantasy and cult, raises particular questions about the adequacy of the dominant aesthetic paradigms in television studies for an understanding of television history. By bringing together a range of historical case studies, this thesis asks what recurring discourses arise across these instances in relation to the representation of the fantastic and the notion of cult television, and what an analysis of these discourses and their textual articulation can add to our understanding of the dominant paradigms within which television has been understood.

Each chapter offers a case study that explores these questions within a particular moment in the history of television through a production and textual analysis of one or two programmes. Such an approach, as Lynn Spigel has argued, works against a notion of popular culture as homogenous and repetitive, but need not constitute a rejection of the general (2001, 13-14).

> From this point of view, individual case studies are not a set of fetish facts or mere anecdotal flourish with no relation to more abstract thought and generalization. Instead, the individual example becomes the ground for a

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[19] For example, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X-Files*, *Star Trek* and *The Prisoner* are all referred to as examples of 'action television' in Osgerby and Gough-Yates (2001).

theorization of language and culture that is capable of understanding things

that do not fit into reigning epistemologies or social practices (as well as

things that do). (Spigel 2001, 14)

By exploring programmes that appear to go against the dominant notions of television

as an intimate medium that privileges the spoken word over the image and that offers

a continuous flow of programmes glanced at by a distracted viewer engaged in

everyday domestic routines, this thesis asks how these specific historical instances

might offer a starting point from which we might re-theorise the dominant paradigms

within which the aesthetics of television have been understood.

Chapter 1

Literature Review: Exploring the Discourses of 'Fantasy' and 'Cult'

In this chapter I want to build on some of the observations made in the introduction about the academic discourses that have circulated around the terms 'fantasy' and 'cult'. The aim is to consider what questions these discourses, and the intersections between them, may raise for an analysis of telefantasy. However, I will not restrict myself to discourses concerning cult and fantasy television, but will rather ask how broader debates about fantasy and cult in other media may have impinged on the terms within which the discourses surrounding telefantasy have been situated.

Discourses of Fantasy in Literature and Cinema

The discourses of fantasy in literature and cinema have been shaped by the difficulty of generically delineating between fantasy and its related genres of science fiction and horror, and by a concern with how to understand and validate the different narrative and formal strategies in representing 'fantastic' events and characters. Early criticism tended to argue that science fiction literature could be differentiated from fantasy by its emphasis on scientific realism in the representation of the fantastic. For example, the late 19th century writer Jules Verne heavily criticised H. G. Wells' novels as inferior fantasies without the basis of 'sound physical principles' in comparison to his own 'voyages extraordinaires', which were characterised by an emphasis on realism and detailed scientific justification (see Asimov 1968, 10). In the 1920s and 1930s Hugo Gernsback, editor of a number of magazines that were central to the growing recognition of science fiction as a distinct genre, actually set up a panel of experts to

maintain the scientific accuracy of the stories published in his new magazine *Science Wonder Stories* (Parrinder 1979a, 68). Kingsley Amis reiterates this emphasis on scientific realism in differentiating science fiction from the 'anti-realistic' (1961, 31) form of fantasy.

However, the formal experimentation of the New Wave science fiction writers of the 1960s threatened such distinctions by moving away from a commitment to rational scientific discourse, frequently expressing cynicism about scientific enterprise. By introducing an exploration of the 'softer' social sciences and the realms of religion and magic into literary science fiction (see Parrinder 1979a), the New Wave writers blurred the boundaries between science fiction and other literary genres, threatening the distinctiveness of the genre, and leaving Scholes and Rabkin to conclude that in the future 'science fiction will not exist' (1977, 99)[1]. As a consequence, analyses of the genre developed to encompass more fluid definitions of scientific discourse[2], which opened up debates about the history of the genre and its relationship to fantasy[3]. For example, Darko Suvin argues that literary science fiction as a genre can be traced back to the fantastic voyages of Lucian and More (1979, viii). However, he maintains a distinction between fantasy and science fiction, by arguing that while fantasy introduces anti-cognitive laws into the empirical environment, science fiction literature represents the fantastic as 'a realistic irreality' (ibid.), creating cognitive

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[1] Such shifts lead Christopher Priest to argue that 'The only completely reliable definition of science fiction is that anything *labelled* as science fiction *is* science fiction' (1979, 187).

[2] For example Woodman (1979) argues that the scientific discourse in science fiction can be linked to metaphysics and theology.

[3] For example Aldiss (1973) understand science fiction as a sub-genre of literary fantasy that can be traced back to the gothic novel and that arose alongside the changing attitudes towards God brought about by the industrial and evolutionary revolution of the 18th century.

estrangement by representing something that appears to be both fantastic and 'real' (1979, 7-8).

Todorov's (1975) seminal study of the literary fantastic is similarly concerned with understanding the function of realism in the representation of the fantastic. Todorov situates the fantastic on the frontier of two neighbouring genres, the marvellous (fairy tales, myth and so on) and the uncanny. He argues that 'marvellous' literature posits a supernatural explanation for the fantastic events depicted, while literature of the 'uncanny' represents events that, although disturbing or horrific, can be accounted for by the laws of reality. The fantastic occupies the liminal world between these two alternative responses to supernatural events, maintaining ambiguity and hesitation in the reader[4].

Todorov goes on to argue that as a consequence of maintaining ambiguity, the literary fantastic *transgresses* the structural and thematic laws that govern the representation of the real.

> Whether it is in social life or in narrative, the intervention of the supernatural elements always constitutes a break in the system of pre-established rules, and in doing so finds its justification. (Todorov 1975, 166)

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[4] Mark Nash (1976) adapts Todorov's notion of hesitation in his analysis of *Vampyr* (Dreyer, 1931), arguing that the film produces hesitation through a narrative strategy that disturbs the objectivity of point of view and omniscient narration to undermine the viewer's certainty about what is being represented.

These pre-established rules are based on the reader's understanding of the real and of

the literary conventions for representing the real. In creating hesitancy in the reader,

the fantastic 'questions precisely the existence of an irreducible opposition between

real and unreal.' (Todorov 1975, 167). Rather than understanding the fantastic as

'anti-cognitive' as Suvin does, for Todorov it is the creation of hesitation between a

cognitive and anti-cognitive explanation for the fantastic events represented that

distinguishes the literary fantastic from related genres such as horror (1975, 35) and

science fiction (1975, 172).

Extending Todorov's structural poetics of the literary fantastic, Rosemary Jackson

(1981) argues for a more inclusive model of the literary fantastic that situates the

development of the fantastic in relation to the changing socio-political context of

writing. Drawing on Fredric Jameson's understanding of literary modes, Jackson

argues that 'Fantasy provides a range of possibilities out of which various

combinations produce different kinds of fiction in different historical situations'

(1981, 7). Thus, while Todorov's theoretical definition of the fantastic is rigidly and

restrictively formed, by constructing literary fantasy as a mode, Jackson is able to

formulate a more fluid definition of the fantastic that encompasses,

> romance literature, or 'the marvellous' (including fairy tales and science
>
> fiction), 'fantastic' literature (including stories by Poe, Isak Dinesen,
>
> Maupassant, Gautier, Kafka, H.P. Lovecraft) and related tales of abnormal
>
> physic states, delusion, hallucination, etc. (Jackson 1981, 7)

Central to her analysis is the belief that there is no ideal model of the fantastic.

There is no abstract entity called 'fantasy'; there is only a range of different

works which have similar structural characteristics and which seem to be

generated by similar unconscious desires. [...] Fantasy is not to do with

inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with

inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new

relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* "new",

absolutely "other" and different. (Jackson 1981, 7-8)

Jackson's model of the literary fantastic therefore centres on the implications of

representing the unreal. Centrally, she argues that this process involves not an escape

from the real, but an engagement with and dislocation from culturally constructed

perceptions of reality. This fracturing of the real disturbs both the culturally dominant

notions of what is perceived as reality, and disrupts the artistic rules for the

representation of the real. Jackson argues that by 'eroding and scrutinizing the "real"'

(1981, 180) the literary fantastic can be understood as a subversive literature that,

'hollows out the "real", revealing its absence, its "great Other", its unspoken and its

unseen' (ibid.).

If the debates in literary studies about science fiction and fantasy have been concerned

with analysing the different formal and narrative strategies used to represent the

fantastic, the debates in film studies have been concerned with exploring cinema's

ability to *visually represent* the fantastic. While the early debates in literary studies

attempted to differentiate science fiction from fantasy, the early debates in film

studies focused on the relationship between science fiction and horror. Many early

attempts to explore science fiction cinema argue that because such films lack the

scientific basis of literary science fiction, they can be more usefully understood as

'monster movies', 'horror films with a veneer of scientific justification' (Scholes and

Rabkin 1977, 102)[5]. Susan Sontag claims that 'Science fiction films are not about

science. They are about disaster' (1965, 213), arguing that the visual nature of

cinema leads to an emphasis on the immediate representation of the extraordinary,

substituting spectacle for scientific discourse and emphasising the experiential over

the intellectual.

This differentiation between literary science fiction as 'intellectual' and cinematic

science fiction as 'experiential', is countered by Vivian Sobchack (1987) who argues

that science fiction cinema and literature are both pro and anti science, and that

science fiction films can be as thoughtful, profound and intellectually stimulating as

science fiction literature. However, Sobchack accepts that any attempt to delineate

science fiction cinema is complicated by the blurred boundaries between cinematic

science fiction that functions to evoke interest, and cinematic horror that aims to

evoke fear. What unites these genres, she claims, is the confrontation with and

representation of the unknown with images that must 'exceed the anthropomorphic

limits of the human imagination while still attempting to remain comprehensible'

(1987, 91).

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[5] Scholes and Rabkin argue that 'the term *science fiction film* is confusingly imprecise' (1977, 100), a problem that they link to the association of the 'monster' films released by Universal in the 1930s with cinematic science fiction. Johnson elaborates on this, noting that it is only in the 1950s, with the profusion of what he also categorises as 'monster' films, that the term science fiction cinema comes into use (1972a, 8). See also Brosnan who also argues that films that the 1950s cycle of 'science fiction' films should be understood as 'monster' movies because they demonstrate little knowledge or understanding of science (1978, 282).

The relation between science fiction film and what Constance Penley terms 'its evil twin, the horror film' (1991, vii) has continued to problematise attempts to delineate cinematic science fiction and horror as genres[6]. This difficulty, along with theoretical and methodological shifts in film studies, has led to a re-articulation of genre criticism in the discipline, away from questions of what a genre *is* towards an exploration of 'what, in cultural terms, it *does*' (Kuhn 1990a, 1). Mark Jancovich argues that the generic hybridisation between cinematic horror and science fiction is 'something which has always been an important feature of American popular cinema, and one of the central ways in which genres are used and developed' (1996, 10). What is apparent in analysis of cinematic science fiction and horror in the 1990s is a shift in focus away from attempts to delineate either genre, towards an exploration of the ways in which recurring textual elements are used to address particular themes and issues. Drawing on Todorov's model of the literary fantastic, James Donald argues that the textual operations in the representation of the fantastic are based upon exploring 'the *insecurity* of the boundaries between the "I" and the "not-I", between the real and the unreal' (1989a, 237). Hunter's collection of essays (1999) analyses the ways in which British science fiction cinema has articulated specific national concerns, while Penley, Lyon, Spigel and Bergstrom's edited collection (1991) focuses on the ways that science fiction cinema has opened up a space for the articulation of difference. Much of the work on horror and science fiction cinema has adopted a psychoanalytic approach to understand the 'otherness' of the fantastic

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[6] For example, I.Q.Hunter is unable to resolve the horror/science fiction dichotomy, concluding that 'frequently they [British science fiction films] are horror films rather than "pure" sf' (1999a, 14), while being unable to clarify the distinction between the two genres. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska similarly note the generic instability of science fiction cinema, arguing that 'As a genre, science fiction needs to add new twists to its conventions and to react to cultural and technological change if audience interest is to be maintained' (2000, 11). Paul Wells argues that because horror is characterised by a 'playful engagement with its own conventions' it has no clearly defined generic boundaries (2000, 7).

fictional worlds and events depicted[7]. However, there has also been a considerable body of work in film studies concerned with exploring the centrality of special effects to horror and science fiction cinema[8]. While psychoanalytic approaches are concerned with understanding the fantastic as a representation of unconscious desires or fears, these analyses tend to be more concerned with discourses of realism, exploring how the use of special effects to visually represent fantastic images positions the spectator in relation to systems of belief.

Steve Neale argues that the move away from defining generic categories has lead to the assertion of the multi-dimensionalilty of genre.

> the argument that genre is multi-dimensional means that attention now needs to be paid as much to the factors that impinge on audience expectations, the construction of generic corpuses, and the processes of labelling and naming as to those that impinge on the films themselves (Neale 2000, 31)

Consequently, genre theorists are increasingly turning away from topological or iconographic definitions of generic categories, to exploring their broader socio-cultural significance as markers of institutional and audience expectation.

Neale goes on to argue that the systems of expectation that spectators bring to the cinema, and which interact with the films they view, 'involve a knowledge of, indeed they partly embody, various regimes of verisimilitude – various systems and forms of

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[7] See for example Clover (1992) and Creed (1994).
[8] See for example Buckland (1999) and Pierson (1999).

plausibility, motivation and belief' (2000, 32). He argues for two basic types of

verisimilitude: generic, and socio-cultural, which does not equate directly with truth

or reality, but with broader culturally constructed notions of what is *believed* to be

true. Neale notes that within all genres there exists a tension between generic and

socio-cultural verisimilitude, and goes on to argue that in certain 'non-

verisimilitudinous genres [such as horror, science fiction and fantasy] these relations

can be particularly complex' (Neale 2000, 37). These genres construct fictional

worlds that may not correspond to the norms, rules and laws of systems of everyday

knowledge. Part of their generic verisimilitude is precisely engaged with disrupting

viewer expectation by representing places and events that counter socio-cultural

verisimilitude. However, the very effect of disturbing viewer expectation is

dependent upon the construction of a world that is in some ways recognisable and

interpretable by the viewer. Therefore, while these films may represent fictional

worlds that confound socio-cultural verisimilitude, they are also crucially engaged

with explaining the rules that govern their particular fictional world, a process that is

only possible through generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude (Neale 2000, 38).

Although Neale goes on to argue for maintaining a distinction between horror and

science fiction (2000, 92), his linking of science fiction, horror and fantasy as 'non-

verisimilitudinous genres' mirrors Jackson's construction of the literary fantastic as a

mode within which different genres concerned with representing the fantastic can be

drawn together through their shared structural characteristics. As with Neale, Jackson

(1981) claims that the representation of the fantastic disturbs the dominant cultural

notions of reality (corresponding to Neale's notion of socio-cultural verisimilitude)

and disrupts the representational tools for portraying that reality (corresponding to

Neale's notion of generic verisimilitude). What Neale's analysis adds to Jackson's is

a recognition that this disruption of the real is part of the generic verisimiltude of

these non-verisimilitudinous cinematic genres, and that the viewer's expectation of

disruption is central to an understanding of the cultural instrumentality of these

genres.

Television Fantasy and Genre

Neale's notion of the multi-dimensionality of genres suggests a way in which we can

move away from the construction of generic corpuses to exploring the ways in which

texts make use of a wide number of different generic expectations. Rather than

delineating 'fantasy' as a genre, we can explore how texts use and combine

expectations associated with a range of different genres, and examine the textual

strategies that arise specifically in relation to the representation of the fantastic. Such

an approach is particularly valuable in television studies, which has struggled to apply

literary and cinematic theories of genre. Jane Feuer has argued that the dominant

characteristics of television as a medium make the applicability of theories of film

genre to television problematic, pointing out that television programmes 'do not

operate as discrete texts to the same extent as movies; the property of "flow" blends

one program unit into another and programs are regularly "interrupted" by ads and

promos' (Feuer 1992, 157). While genre has been understood as central to the

production and marketing of movies, the flow of television programmes may make

genre a less significant factor than scheduling in television production and in the

selection of programmes by viewers.

The difficulties raised when applying genre theory to television are particularly

pronounced in relation to television series and serials, whose narrative structures are

constructed precisely around the notions of flow and interruption. Unlike the

contained narrative of a movie, a series is made up of a sequence of discrete yet

linked episodes that must share a narrative and visual format whilst also developing

and extending that format over time. Graeme Turner argues that within the television

industry the term 'format' is much more common than genre as a way of describing

television programmes.

> Formats can be original and thus copyright, franchised under licence, and
>
> traded as a commercial property. Genres, by definition, are not original.
>
> Format is a production category with relatively rigid boundaries that are
>
> difficult to transgress without coming up with a new format. (Turner 2001a, 7)

Turner's description of the format as a dominant category in television production

suggests that the 'format' may be a more useful concept in approaching television

programmes than genre. The notion of the format recognises the problems of

approaching television genre, and allows an analysis of the ways in which a range of

different generic expectations may be combined within one format to create a set of

expectations that are specific to a particular series. However, formats tend to describe

a set of expectations that are specific to *one* series, and that can be used to distinguish

that series from other television programmes. Therefore, the term 'format' operates

quite differently from genre, functioning primarily as a way in which programmes can

be distinguished from each other, rather than as a set of expectations and conventions

that can be shared by a range of texts.

A generic approach to television is further complicated by the technological changes

to television over the last two decades. The development of the remote control allows

viewers to move easily from one channel to another, while home VCRs enable time-

shift viewing in which it is possible to remove programmes from their place in the

schedules. As the number of television channels has expanded, scheduling has

become increasingly sophisticated, with channels frequently 'stripping' their

schedules with certain genres linked to specific scheduling slots. Also, while UK

terrestrial and US network television may still broadly follow the 'flow' of scheduling

that is mapped to the patterns of everyday life, the newer satellite channels, such as

the Sci-fi Channel in the UK, are often constructed as 'genre' channels that only

screen one generic form of programming. Alongside this apparent resurgence in the

use of genre to organise television channels, comes a paradoxical tendency towards

increased generic hybridity within television programmes. As Feuer argues, while

these changes may challenge the applicability of existing theories of genre to

television, the rise of genre channels and the increasing propensity to rapidly shift

from one genre to another within a single text means that the need (and the ability) to

distinguish between genres becomes particularly acute (Feuer 1992, 158). What this

suggests is that while genre may be problematic as a categorising term in approaching

television as a medium, it still has a significant function in the production and

reception of television programmes.

I want to suggest a number of ways in which we can overcome these problems with a

generic approach to television. Firstly, rather than attempting to construct theoretical

television genres against which historical instances can be measured, we can explore

the development of historical genres by isolating specific examples. However, such an approach still depends on the identification of a series of texts that can be situated within a particular genre through the recognition that they share a set of similar characteristics. Neale tackles this by arguing that multiple generic participation is a characteristic of all texts, claiming that '*Friends* could be said to participate in the genres "television programme", "television series", "fictional narrative", "comedy", "situation comedy" and so on' (Neale 2001, 4). Furthermore, each of these genres carries their own sets of expectations, which a series such as *Friends* engages with. Rather than adopting a generic approach to television that attempts to construct a singular generic category, what Neale's analysis suggests is that we can explore the ways in which texts participate in different genres, by exploring the ways in which they utilise a range of generic expectations. The notion of generic participation is particularly useful in approaching television genre as it enables an analysis the ways in which television programmes often participate in a number of different genres.

What this suggests is that we can bring together a range of programmes that participate within the non-verisimiltudinous genres of fantasy, science fiction and horror without closing down a consideration of the other genres that these programmes might participate in. Such a study also enables an analysis of how genres function alongside other elements, such as scheduling and the construction of a format, in order to shape the expectations of producers and viewers. This is not to argue that it is not possible to refer to or explore the genre 'science fiction'. Rather it is to suggest that in doing so, we need to examine how this genre is constructed within broader public discourses.

Telefantasy and the 'Subversive' Potential of the Fantastic

The non-verisimilitudinous genres of science fiction, horror and fantasy have posed a

particular problem to genre study because they are concerned with disturbing the

boundaries between the real and the unreal, using textual strategies that function to

disrupt generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude. As a consequence, texts that

represent the fantastic frequently transgress generic boundaries, and the representation

of the fantastic has been understood as a potentially disruptive textual strategy.

Analyses such as Lynn Spigel's (1991) examination of the 1960s US 'fantastic sit-

com'[9] and Elcye Rae Helford's (1996) exploration of masculinity in *Star Trek*, argue

that by disrupting socio-cultural and generic verisimilitude through their

representation of the fantastic, these series invited the viewer to question, not the

fantastic aspects themselves, but the normative conventions of the everyday. Helford

(1996) argues that the use of fantastic devices in *Star Trek*, which allow Kirk's

personality to be displaced (into a woman's body in 'Turnabout Intruder') or divided

(into two separate characters in 'The Enemy Within'), complicate a reading of his

masculinity as stereotypically aggressive and dominant. Spigel argues that the

introduction of fantasy into the conventions of the US sit-com 'presented critical

views of contemporary suburban life by using tropes of science fiction to make the

familial strange' (2001, 122). Within both of these studies, an analysis of the fantastic

enables serious criticism of programmes that have been dismissed as 'escapist

fantasy' (in the case of the 1960s sit-coms) or 'sexist' (in the case of *Star Trek*). As

Lynn Spigel argues of the 1960s fantastic sit-com,

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[9] This article is reprinted in Spigel (2001) from which all quotations here are taken.

These programs have received little critical attention, most certainly because they seem to represent the "lower depths" of television's primetime past. Typically in this vein, critics tend to view such shows within the logic of cultural hierarchies, seeing their value in negative terms – that is, as the opposite of high art. Rather than leading to knowledge, these programs are said to constitute an escape from reason. (Spigel 2001, 108)

Spigel raises here, issues that have been central to the study of popular culture, television and fantasy, all of which have (at times) been characterised as 'low' forms of culture, at best providing distraction for their audiences and at worst duping them into an ideological complicity that serves to reinforce structures of power.

These debates circulate around many of the current attempts to take television fantasy programmes seriously, and can be illustrated by the recent debates surrounding *The X-Files*, a commercially successful and critically acclaimed series which depicts the investigations of two young FBI agents (Mulder and Scully) into cases of unexplained phenomena. As Mulder and Scully undertake their investigations they begin to uncover evidence that suggests that the US Government may be implicated in many of the cases of alien abduction and genetic mutation that the pair investigate, but they are consistently unable to prove such allegations. As Meagan Morris argues of the series, 'the evil emanates from Western institutions. The truth us out there but *they* are right here, insidiously warping reality. They are scientists, doctors, bureaucrats, teachers and academics' (1997, 368). David Pirie sees this as central to understanding the series.

The point about Scully and Mulder in *The X-Files* is that they are *not* a lone

couple, but rather two corners of an eternal triangle - and it is the third corner

that gives their weekly quests meaning. For their true nemesis is not aliens or

ghosts or plagues but that father of all conspiracy theories - the killer of

Kennedy, the dark wizard of Los Alamos, the constant concealer of UFOs and

monsters - the Big Bad US Government itself. (Pirie 1996, 22-3)

In *The X-Files*'s universe, where the Western institutions that have written history can

no longer be trusted, the alternative histories of conspiracy theories become just as

viable[10]. The third season episode, 'Paper Clip' explored the US importation of Nazi

scientists after World War II, and suggested that the experiments begun on Jews in

concentration camps have been continued under secret government sanctions on US

citizens. The fourth season episode, 'Musings of a Cigarette Smoking Man'

suggested that Mulder's nemesis may have been responsible for the assassination of J.

F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King under the instruction of J. Edgar Hoover,

implying that the 'real' history, and consequently the seat of power in the US, is

hidden from its public.

The arguments 'for' and 'against' *The X-Files* depend upon the interpretation of this

stance as either radical or reactionary. For Douglas Kellner, the series is an attempt to

depict the uncertainty of the contemporary moment, 'to comment on some of the most

frightening aspects of contemporary society, including government out of control,

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[10] Mark Fenster notes how in the series, 'Episodes often recycle unexplained stories from the
mainstream and tabloid news, as well as from the subcultures surrounding tales of alien abduction'
(1999, 133).

science and technology out of control' (1999, 174). Adrienne L. McLean takes this a step further in her analysis of the series in relation to the theories of Marshall McLuhan, arguing that 'in the end, both Marshall McLuhan and *The X-Files* are concerned with the decay of meaning in our lives, and both urge us to create for ourselves what we may no longer be able to find' (McLean 1998, 9).

However, the series' representation of the fantastic and its deliberate refusal of narrative resolution has lead other theorists to argue that rather than providing a radical agenda, the series 'demonstrates the infantilism of the American psyche, where a loss of faith in a political vision has given way to an ingenuous belief in everything else' (O'Reilly 1996, 6). In this counter argument the attack on science, technology and government that Kellner sees as progressive, is interpreted as an attack on rationality, which is solidified by the series' foregrounding of the paranormal and mythological over the sceptical and logical[11]. As John Lyttle writes,

> Mulder and Scully don't want you to wake up, and be responsible for, say,
>
> CIA involvement in the illegal overthrow of Chile's President Allende, or
>
> even the budget deficit. They want you to wake up, and be responsible for, the
>
> Loch Ness monster, for liver-eating mutants who live for hundreds of years,
>
> for Bigfoot. Which is no responsibility at all. [...] *The X-Files* promotes the
>
> very powerlessness it pretends to challenge. (Lyttle 1996, 17)

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[11] In his 1996 Dimbleby Lecure on BBC 1, Richard Dawkins took a similar line in criticising the series' attack on reason. As Thomas Stucliffe wrote of the lecture, 'week after week, he [Dawkins] pointed out, sceptical enquiry is vanquished in favour of moronic credulity' (Sutcliffe 1996, 36).

Lyttle argues therefore that the series functions as an apolitical attack on capitalism that rejects the rationalism that has let down society in favour of an unformed insecurity against an unnamed and secret conspiracy around phenomena that can never be proved.

These different readings of *The X-Files* depend on differing interpretations of the consequences of the series' representation of the fantastic. In the first set of arguments, characterised by Kellner's defence of the series, the fantastic opens up narrative possibilities for exploring contemporary anxieties about Government power. In the counter argument, characterised by Lyttle, the series is dismissed as 'apolitical' because it articulates contemporary concerns in a way that is 'fantastical' rather than 'rational'. Here we can see two sets of discourses being evoked in relation to the representation of the fantastic. The first drawing on the 'subversive' debate to argue that the fantastic offers a new (and potentially critical) perspective on contemporary concerns. The second drawing on the 'anti-cognitive' debate that sees the fantastic as *removed* from reality. These discourses function to either redeem or dismiss the cultural value of *The X-Files* as a text.

Discourses of Cult: Audience Studies and Cult Media

Charlotte Brunsdon argues that with the increasing concern with 'redeeming' popular culture from the pessimism of leftist critique and the elitism of high cultural dismissal in textual studies of the late 1970s and 1980s, the question of how audiences 'read' texts became increasingly pressing (Brunsdon 1990, 64-5). Central to the development of audience studies has been the analysis of fans, who have been understood to challenge the notion of the 'passive' spectator. As John Tulloch argues,

textual studies such as Buxton's analysis of *Star Trek*[12], were central to the move

towards the study of science fiction fandom, because they suggested, 'formal *textual*

spaces which invite an "active audience" process of working on the text' (Tulloch

1995, 44). These fan studies have tended to characterise the science fiction fan's use

of popular culture texts as an active re-articulation of the original text (what Jenkins

(1992) terms 'textual poaching') that functions as a prime example of the spaces

offered by popular culture for resistance to the dominant ideology.

As Shaun Moores argues, the turn to the audience is concerned with engaging with

the long-running concerns in social theory with questions of agency and structure.

Some theorists, then, have stressed the capacity of consumers to actively

appropriate commodities and put them to creative use in the construction of

everyday cultures. Others have tended to give more weight to the structural

constraints that impose themselves on consumers – the limited economic and

cultural resources available to those creative agents as a consequence of their

social positionings. [...] Alongside this pairing of agency/structure, or

creativity/constraint, another key opposition is that between the forces of

social transformation and the pressures of social reproduction (resistance

versus domination). (Moores 1993, 117)

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[12] In his textual analysis of *Star Trek* Buxton moves away from the pessimistic critique of the Frankfurt
School to argue that television science fiction can be both commercial (implying the inscription of the
dominant ideological position) and utopian (in appealing to and constructing spaces in which this
dominant ideology can be resisted) (Buxton 1990, 3).

These oppositions, between agency and structure, creativity and constraint, resistance

and domination, come to the fore in two of the case studies that John Tulloch (2000)

examines in the conclusion to his recent survey of audience studies in television.

Both E. Graham McKinley's study of fans of *Beverley Hills 90210* and Henry

Jenkins's study of fans of *Star Trek* engage with this debate through an analysis of the

discourses that constitute fan talk.

> Both McKinley's and Jenkins's fans find power in talk: but for McKinley this
>
> talk re-instantiates the 'strategies' of dominant structures and ideologies; for
>
> Jenkins, it poaches these values and tactically reworks them, as least for a time
>
> and until the next tactic is employed. (Tulloch 2000, 224)

Both studies are concerned with the ways in which fan expertise functions to reinforce

or resist dominant ideologies. The third study that Tulloch examines in his conclusion

(Hills 1999) attempts to move away from the binary oppositions of agency/structure,

creativity/constraint, resistance/domination as a way of understanding the relationship

between texts and audiences. Matt Hills' doctoral thesis on cult media (which has

recently been published as a monograph (Hills 2002)), argues for an understanding of

the media cult as a 'process of emergence' (1999, 7), arguing that 'the "text" does not

dissolve entirely into its audiences' readings, but neither does it solely or sufficiently

determine the perdurable (sic) text-audience relationships through which fan-

audiences distinguish themselves' (1999, 19). In doing so, Hills attempts to break

down a number of binary oppositions in the discourses that circulate around cult texts,

arguing that an emphasis on the rationalisation of fan's talk about their own fandom

has obscured the role of affect. By challenging the 'moral dualisms' that have

characterised fan studies, Hills posits the relationship between the fan and the cult text as constituting a 'dialectic of value', a process through which the fan's affective attachments intersect with economics of commodification (1999, 80) allowing the media cult 'the potential to both disrupt and intensify cultures of commodification' (1999, 81).

Hills' thesis complicates our understanding of the relationship between text and audience, structure and agency, forming a more complex model in which neither the meanings embedded in the text nor the activities of the audience are reified as sites of cultural power. In doing so, Hills moves away from a simple correspondence between textual ambiguity and the possibility of resistant viewing practices, arguing that 'the "cult" status of texts and icons hinges both on audience distinctions/valorisations *and* upon textual and iconic characteristics' (Hills 2002, 131). He thus argues that media cult texts share the textual attributes of the 'perpetuated hermeneutic' (a central mystery that repeats familiar characteristics but is never fully resolved) and 'hyper-diegesis' (an internally logical, stable, yet 'unfinished' fictional world). While Hills' analysis addresses the media cult more broadly, exploring examples from television science fiction and fantasy (such as *The X-Files*) alongside an analysis of cult icons (such as Elvis), he argues that fantasy texts have a particular propensity to become media cults because the representation of the fantastic is particularly suited to the maintenance of perpetuated hermeneutic and hyper-diegesis (Hills 1999, 58).

Producing Telefantasy

Hills' thesis is particularly useful for suggesting a way in which we can move beyond

the dismissal/redemptive debate in the study of popular culture, and explore the

complex and often dialectical processes at work in the text-audience relationship. In

doing so, Hills' opens up the possibility for a reconsideration of the producer-text

relationship, which, as Simon Frith (2000) argues, has been relatively neglected in

television studies. Georgina Born argues that the emphasis on agency within

audience studies has lead to a monolithic model of production in television studies,

claiming that,

> Implicit in the Television Studies romance of the audience is a psychic
>
> polarity in which production has been weighted negatively, associated with
>
> domination, ideology, state interests, capitalist accumulation or consumerism,
>
> leaving consumption to bear the burden of positivity as the sole potential
>
> moment of redemption. If production is theorized more adequately, including
>
> its potential for spaces for agency and redemption, both sides of the polarity
>
> are reweighted; its may even be possible to reconsider negative dimensions of
>
> consumption! (Born 2000, 417)

While Born's call for an examination of agency, creativity, innovation and diversity in

production is certainly a valuable one, by situating this call within the oppositions of

agency/structure, redemption/domination, Born limits the potential scope of such an

analysis. Rather than searching for spaces of 'agency and redemption' within

production discourses, I want to explore whether it is possible (as Hills' suggests of

audience studies) to go beyond these dichotomies and examine the ways in which such struggles are actually articulated within the discourses of production.

These fantasy/cult series are particularly useful in undertaking such a study because the discourses surrounding both fantasy and cult have been precisely negotiated around questions of redemption and dismissal. The production studies undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Council's Media Economics and Media Culture Research Programmes in the UK (of which Georgina Born's production study of the BBC was a part) suggest that questions of cultural value are central to an understanding of television production (see Frith 2000). Yet as Frith argues, our knowledge of the judgements and negotiations of television production is relatively restricted.

> if decisions are being made all the time and at all levels about what is "good" and what is "bad" television, it is not at all clear on what sort of knowledge or judgements such decisions rest, whether they are consistent or coherent at different levels and in different sectors of the industry (independent producers consistently refer to commissioners' "irrationality") or whether they in any way match or articulate accounts of good and bad television outside the industry. (Frith 2000, 39)

This thesis engages primarily with the last of these concerns, by exploring publicly articulated production discourses around telefantasy programmes that raise particular questions about the dominant aesthetic paradigms for understanding television as a medium (see Introduction). If the representation of the fantastic opens up spaces for

the disruption of conventional modes of representation and of the normative

conventions of the everyday, yet is equally associated with low forms of popular

entertainment, how much are these textual possibilities and discursive frameworks

apparent in the discourses of production surrounding telefantasy programmes and

what effect do they have on the final text? What can this analysis add to our

understanding of the discourses of value that Frith and Born suggest are central to

understanding television production?

Chapter 2

Spectacle and Intimacy: The *Quatermass* Serials (BBC, 1953-59) and the Aesthetics of Early British Television

Introduction

On Saturday 18 July 1953, over a quarter of a million British adults tuned to the television as the first manned space flight crash-landed in the outskirts of Wimbledon in Surrey with only one of its three astronauts on board. Over the following weeks viewers keenly awaited the outcome of this disastrous experiment, engineered by Professor Bernard Quatermass. Finally it was revealed that the surviving astronaut, Victor Carroon, had been infected by an alien organism that was threatening to conquer the Earth by dispersing spores which would destroy all of Earth's indigenous species, and it was up to Quatermass to avert Armageddon. Of course, this was fiction, a six part drama serial entitled *The Quatermass Experiment* (BBC, 1953) exploring the potentially horrific consequences of man's foray into space 16 years before Neil Armstrong's first walk on the moon captivated television viewers across the globe[1]. The initial serial was followed by two more *Quatermass* adventures produced by the BBC in the 1950s, *Quatermass II* (BBC, 1955) and *Quatermass and the Pit* (BBC, 1958-9), similarly concerned with Professor Quatermass's efforts to contain the disastrous consequences of scientific exploration[2]. All three serials were

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[1] *The Quatermass Experiment*, Saturday 18 July 1953 to 22 August 1953, transmitted in various half-hour slots between 8.15pm and 9.30pm.

[2] *Quatermass II*, Saturday 22 October 1955 to 26 November 1955, 8.00-8.30pm (except episode 3, 9.15-9.45pm, due to the broadcasting of the British Legion Festival of Remembrance); telerecorded

adapted into films by Hammer, and in the 1970s *Quatermass* was revived as a drama that was produced simultaneously as a film and a four part television series[3].

The Quatermass Experiment was the first original adult fantasy television drama serial produced in the UK. The BBC had transmitted previous adaptations of literary science fiction; most notably a 35-minute performance of Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* from Alexandra Palace in 1938, and an hour-long adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* in 1949. In 1951, the children's programme *Whirligig* featured a fortnightly insert of *Stranger from Space*, written specifically for television by Hazel Adair and Ronald Marriott, that told the tale of a young boy discovering a Martian who has crash-landed on Earth. However, *The Quatermass Experiment* was the first fantasy drama serial in the UK that was written specifically for television and aimed at an adult audience[4]. As such, *The Quatermass Experiment* offers a valuable starting point for exploring the representation of the fantastic as a production and a textual strategy in television drama.

The Quatermass Experiment and its sequels, while central to the history of British telefantasy, also span a transformative period in the history of British television. In

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repeat, 10.15-10.45pm, Monday 24 October 1955 to 28 November 1955. *Quatermass and the Pit*, Monday 22 December 1958 to 26 January 1959, 8.00-8.35pm.

[3] The film rights to *The Quatermass Experiment* were bought by Exclusive Films Ltd (who owned Hammer) in 1954, and in 1955 they released a film version entitled *The Quatermass Xperiment* (a marketing strategy used to highlight its classification under the X certificate which had been introduced in 1951). Further film adaptations by Hammer of *Quatermass II* and *Quatermass and the Pit* followed in 1957 and 1967 respectively. In 1979 Thames transmitted a four part television series entitled *Quatermass*, which was simultaneously produced as a film (entitled *The Quatermass Conclusion*) by Euston Films (see Newman (1989) and Petley (1984/5)).

[4] *The Quatermass Experiment* was written for the regular Saturday night serial slot in the BBC's evening schedules.

the early 1950s, British television was, in the words of Val Gielgud (Head of

Television Drama between 1949 and 1951), 'just beginning to advance from what

may be called the embryonic into the experimental and expanding stage'[5]. The decade

saw the expansion of the television service, the maturing of the production processes

for television, and the introduction of a commercial channel in 1955[6]. Within this

period of change and expansion, Charles Barr describes *The Quatermass Experiment*

as 'a landmark both in BBC policy, as a commissioned original TV drama, and in

intensity of audience response' (Barr 1986a, 215). These stories of space adventure,

alien invasion and impending Armageddon took advantage of the technological

developments (most notably in the use of filmed material) over the decade to

challenge dominant notions of what television as a medium was suitable for and

capable of producing. The *Quatermass* serials also had a strong cultural resonance

with audiences in the 1950s. By the third serial in 1958, the *Quatermass* programmes

had become a cultural event with *Variety* reporting 'a motion at one local council that

business shouldn't start until after the *Quatermass* transmission had ended', adding

that 'cinema exhibs testify to the pull of the program by saying that they had one of

the worst evening's biz in a long, long time'[7]. In a period when the BBC was having

to face up to the reality of competition for the first time, the popularity of these series

suggests them as a significant site for considering the strategies adopted by the BBC

in the face of the introduction and subsequent popularity of commercial television

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[5] WAC (BBC Written Archive Centre at Caversham, UK), T16/62/1, 9 August 1951.
[6] The Television Act was passed in 1954 breaking the BBC's monopoly on television broadcasting, and in September 1955 a second commercial television channel, ITV, began broadcasting under the auspices of the Independent Television Authority.
[7] Quoted in WAC, T5/2, 306/1, 13 March 1959.

over the 1950s. This chapter therefore asks what was it that these stories of space travel and alien invasion offered to UK television in this period of growth and rapid change. What possibilities was the representation of the fantastic understood to offer as a production and a textual strategy? What can this analysis add to our understanding of this transitional period in the history of British television?

Producing Television Drama: The BBC in the 1950s

By the early 1950s, television broadcasting in Britain had entered into a significant period of maturation that would continue over the decade. On 2 July 1953 the Postmaster General announced the extension of television broadcasting with the installation of new transmitters across the country, and an article in the *Radio Times* predicted that as a consequence television would be made available to 90 percent of the population within 18 months[8]. Concurrent with the construction of new transmitters was a gradual increase in the ownership of television receivers in the UK, which rose from one million to over five million between 1951 and 1955 (Briggs 1979, 428). This growth in ownership far exceeded the BBC's expectations, with combined sound and television licences reaching 2,142,452 in 1953, well above the BBC's estimated figure of 1,200,000[9] (Briggs 1979, 241).

At the same time, the BBC's production facilities were under development. The BBC acquired the White City site in 1949 for a planned Television Centre to open in 1960,

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[8] *Radio Times*, 10 July 1953, p. 3.
[9] In 1953, sound only licences fell below the 11 million mark for the first time in five years, and they continued to fall as the number of combined sound and television licences grew (Briggs 1979, 240).

while television production moved from Alexandra Palace to the superior facilities of

the Rank Studios at Lime Grove over the early 1950s[10]. With the expansion of the

television service came the departmentalisation and routinisation of the production

processes for television (see Briggs 1979, 286, 982-3; and Jacobs 2000, 111). The

rationalisation of production processes necessitated by the expansion of television

broadcasting demanded the development of a workforce who understood the

specificity of television as a medium. In 1951 the BBC established a training

department to equip staff with the particular skills of television production, and

introduced a Television Script Unit to deal with the increasing number of scripts

submitted to BBC television and to adapt scripts to the requirements of this new

medium. While in the early 1950s the BBC was implementing a production

infrastructure for the development of television broadcasting, it was also facing the

threat of competition. The new channel, ITV, threatened to take both audiences and

staff away from the BBC, and also challenged the norms of television programming

that had been established by the Corporation.

It was in this environment of expansion and rapid change for the BBC that the

Quatermass serials were produced, directed by Rudolph Cartier[11] and written

specifically for television by Nigel Kneale[12]. Rudolph Cartier joined the BBC staff in

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[10] The first new studio at Lime Grove was opened in May 1950, but it was not until 1954 that television broadcasting at Alexandra Palace closed altogether (Briggs 1979, 238).

[11] Cartier is credited as 'producer' of the serials, as in the early 1950s at the BBC the title of producer was used for what is now generally regarded as the role of the director. However, as Jason Jacobs points out, by the middle of the decade the differentiation of the two roles in the production process was becoming more clearly defined (2000, 111).

[12] Kneale and Cartier collaborated as writer and producer on a number of other productions, including an infamous adaptation of George Orwell's *1984* (BBC, 1954) which is discussed in depth by Jason Jacobs (2000, 139-155).

1952 following a career as a film director in Germany. Nigel Kneale arrived at the

BBC in 1951, gaining casual employment reading and adapting plays for the BBC

Television Department. Kneale's early career at the BBC highlights the debates about

the development of television at this time. In 1952 Kneale was given a full-time

position as an adapter for the newly formed Script Unit after Michael Barry (Head of

Television Drama) argued that the BBC 'cannot afford to lose his knowledge of

Television built up over nine months.'[13]. A year later (six months after the

transmission of *The Quatermass Experiment*), Barry suggests that Kneale be offered a

full time contract of five years, stating that 'as a most valuable asset [...] he is worth

much to the Corporation. At the same time he has a high market value outside.'[14]. In

1955, Kneale became the first staff writer at the BBC, and wrote *Quatermass II*,

which was transmitted a month after ITV began broadcasting[15].

Therefore, while Kneale's appointment as staff writer was a response to the need to

develop expertise in writing for the specific demands of television drama, it also

ensured that the talent nurtured at the BBC was not lost in the face of the impending

threat of competition. Yet aesthetically, the question of what was possible,

appropriate and valuable as *television* drama was a central point of debate at a time

when there was no consensus as to the criteria under which such judgements should

be made. As Kneale says of his work for the script unit, '[I was] mostly trying to

make stage plays a little more like "television", although nobody really knew what

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[13] WAC, T31/141/1, 9 July 1952.
[14] WAC, T28/124, 3 December 1953.
[15] Philip Mackie was also hired as a staff writer for the BBC at this time.

that was' (quoted in Wells 1999, 49). These debates concerning the specific demands

of television as a medium and the need for the BBC to safeguard its investment in

trained personal capable of producing programmes that exploited this in the wake of

the introduction of competition, are central to the discourses within which all three of

the *Quatermass* serials were produced.

The Aesthetics of Early Television: The Intimate and Expanding Screen

In his analysis of 1950s television drama, Jason Jacobs suggests that 'it is possible to

identify two tendencies in the production of early television drama in Britain by the

1950s: the intimate and the expansive' (Jacobs 2000, 117). Within the intimate

model, a suitable television drama is defined as one that emphasises the relay of a

continuous live performance through the close-up lens of the studio camera. These

intimate and penetrating images were transmitted directly into the familiar domestic

location of the living room, where the small 405 line receivers, regarded as unsuitable

for long shots because of the lack of definition, could reveal in close-up all the range

and sensitivity of an actor's performance. Michael Barry exemplifies this position in a

New Chronicle article entitled 'TV is Creating its Own Drama'. He writes,

> There is no particular mystery in writing for television. But there are certain
>
> rules to follow. The television screen is very small, and so it is desirable to
>
> have as few characters as possible. [...] The television camera is very
>
> penetrating. It shows what is going on in people's minds. Sincerity is,
>
> therefore, the most important quality required of both writers and actors. [...]

A great deal of television work is done in close-up. Thus, elaborate sets are

often wasted.[16]

Barry defines the stylistic possibilities of television drama through critical

assumptions about the medium's technical and aesthetic limitations. Unsuitable for

crowd scenes or complex sets, television's value is located here in its ability to relay

the intimacy and sincerity of an actor's performance to the viewer's home.

In a period when television drama was largely produced and transmitted live,

television was understood as a medium ideally suited to the mediation of a continuous

dramatic performance[17]. In this 'intimate' model of television drama, the emphasis is

placed on *what* is relayed through the television, rather than on the *process* of

mediation. As John Caughie suggests,

> Early television drama was a continual attempt to resolve the overwhelming
>
> contradiction between a rather cumbersome technology of mediation (however
>
> 'immediate') and an aesthetic of live performance. Some of the uncertainty of
>
> aim [...] lay in the assumption that the technology was there simply to serve
>
> the aesthetic rather than to produce it. (Caughie 1991, 29).

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[16] WAC, P655, 5 January 1953.

[17] In July 1954 the first filmed serial, imported from the US, was transmitted by the BBC, who also began to schedule telerecorded repeats of live drama productions in the place of live repeats (see Jacobs 2000, 112-3). However, at this time the majority of drama (including the three *Quatermass* serials) was transmitted live.

This understanding of early television drama as embodying an aesthetic of transparent mediation is exemplified in a 1983 article by Carl Gardner and John Wyver, who argue that until the late 1950s television drama 'picked up the dominant patterns, concerns and styles of both repertory theatre and radio drama (as well as many of their personnel, with their distinct training and working practices)' (1983, 115). At a time when adaptations of existing literature were prevalent, as was the relay of scenes from current West End plays, either recreated by the cast in the studio or broadcast live from the theatre, Gardner and Wyver argue that the value of television drama lay not in any intrinsic value that television had as a medium, but rather in its transparent translation of a separate pre-existing cultural artefact.

> Such an approach, which takes the television process itself as transparent, almost by definition precluded any innovation of TV style or any attempt to develop a specifically televisual form for small-screen drama. On the other hand the uniqueness of each production was recognised and valued, but any merit such production had was derived from elsewhere, rather than from TV. (Gardner and Wyver 1983, 115)

However, while Gardner and Wyver situate all of 1950s television drama within the intimate model, Jason Jacobs argues that it was the arrival of Nigel Kneale and Rudolph Cartier at the BBC 'that challenged the intimate drama directly' (2000, 130). Kneale characterises early television drama as theatrical, and claims that he saw the writing of *The Quatermass Experiment* as 'an opportunity to do something different - an adventure yarn, or something that wasn't people talking in drawing rooms.'

(Kneale quoted in Wells 1999, 50). Similarly, when Cartier arrived at the BBC in 1952, he felt that British television drama was 'terrible [...] the BBC needed new scripts, a new approach, a whole new spirit, rather than endlessly televising classics like Dickens or familiar London stage plays.' (quoted in Myles and Petley 1990, 126).

Kneale and Cartier reacted against the intimate model of television, which placed the medium's roots in radio and theatre and saw it as suitable only for the live relay of an intimate performance, by emphasising its potential as a *visual* medium with a closer affinity to the cinema. Talking about the influence of the cinema on his work, Kneale states,

> In my early years I went to the cinema about twice a week and was really influenced. I wanted to make my work more visual: less making points in verbal terms and more paying off through images, which you tended not to get then. Most of the stuff was designed for actors to make big points with a big verbal display in a speech instead of what one would try to do in a decent screenplay, which was to let the camera tell the story. (Kneale, quoted in Wells 1999, 49)

Kneale's rhetoric here, which opposes the visual to the verbal, relates directly to the 'intimacy' debate. Television is a visual medium. Kneale's desire to make his work 'more visual', needs to be understood specifically in relation to the *kind* of visuality against which he is fighting. He is arguing for a televisual style where the drama and action is not to be found simply in the close-up relay of a live virtuoso performance by

an actor, but also in the construction of a story through images as they are framed and relayed by the camera.

Kneale and Cartier use the fantastic premise of the three *Quatermass* serials to move away from locating the action in 'a big verbal display', towards exploring the potential for spectacle in television drama. Each serial builds up to the moment in which an event or object that confounds socio-cultural verisimilitude is *displayed* through a visual set piece. Episode five of *The Quatermass Experiment* climaxes with the depiction of Carroon, the surviving astronaut, who, having mutated into a huge plant-like alien, is revealed overwhelming Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey[18]. The final episode of *Quatermass II* shows Quatermass and his colleague Dr Pugh travelling into space and destroying a large alien organism living on a meteor circling earth. In the third serial, *Quatermass and the Pit*, a large devil-like image is projected into the sky by an unearthed alien space ship causing a wave of riots across London. In each of these serials, there is a build up to the climactic moment when the alien entity is spectacularly represented to the audience (and the characters) in sequences where the image plays a central signifying role.

To take *The Quatermass Experiment* as an example of this use of the image, the final mutated form of astronaut Victor Carroon is fully revealed at the end of episode five, during a BBC outside broadcast from Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey. Although there are no existing prints of the last four episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment*

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[18] I will discuss the significance of the Abbey as a location for this finale below.

the camera script gives a fair indication of the shape and tone of this sequence[19]. The

action cuts between the Abbey and the scanner van for the outside broadcast, where

the director, his secretary and a television engineer give instructions to the crew within

the Abbey. From within the van the secretary suddenly half rises as she stares at the

monitor and cries 'Look!'. The engineer also sees something and exclaims 'Up above

Poet's Corner – there's something moving'. After a pause in which according to the

camera script 'they all stand transfixed', the action cuts to a model shot of the alien

monster descending down Poet's Corner. The structure of this sequence reveals how

the moment in which the alien is revealed is constructed as a moment of spectacular

display. Here the fantastic element of the story is told in visual rather than verbal

terms. The scant dialogue that builds up to this visually exciting climax places the

emphasis clearly on the sheer spectacle of *seeing* the alien monster.

In constructing a serial that depicts a giant creature in a large historic building, Kneale

and Cartier are challenging an understanding of television as an intimate medium

incapable of crowd scenes or complex sets. However, the technical limitations of

early television production restricted the extent to which it could be used to create

such visually spectacular set pieces. These scenes of the creature in Westminster

Abbey were all shot live in studio A at Alexandra Palace with five bulky cameras. At

a time when there was no special effects department for television production, Kneale

describes the primitive techniques they used to create the model shots of the monster:

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[19] Telerecordings of the first two episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment* are held at the National Film and Television Archive in London.

I had a still picture of the Poets' Corner blown up to 4ft, cut a section out and put my hands through. They were covered with rubber gloves, wire, and wash leather. They looked like evil tendrils 40ft long.[20]

The climactic conclusion of the serial in episode six, in which Quatermass enters the Abbey and appeals to the remnants of humanity in the creature, exemplifies the particular way in which Cartier and Kneale manipulated the technical limitations of television production. The sequence is shot almost entirely in close-ups, cutting between Quatermass and model shots of the monster, overlaid by sound effects of the creature's rustling tendrils. This suggests that Quatermass and the monster inhabit the same physical location without the need to create a life-size model of the creature in the studio. Occasionally Quatermass and the monster are depicted in the same shot, but the use of close-ups allows this to be achieved through the creation of one or two tendrils that can be operated from out of shot. For example, as Quatermass plays the audio tape of the moment the astronauts were attacked to the creature, it becomes increasingly agitated. The camera script describes how this was achieved by remaining on a close-up of Quatermass as 'Tendrils sway into shot near Quatermass, and quickly away'. These techniques allow Cartier and Kneale to provide a visually spectacular climax in which the monster is revealed while still functioning within the limitations of live television production. Furthermore, the use of the close-up here to suggest that Quatermass and the monster are in the same physical place also enables the monster to suddenly invade Quatermass' space, heightening the fear and intensity of the scene.

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[20] WAC, P667, 12 November 1955.

Cartier has argued that the close-up is a particularly powerful tool in television production. He claims that within the dark and intimate environment of the living room, 'where close-ups appear life-size or even bigger' (Cartier 1958, 10), the television close-up is capable of bringing the audience much closer to the action than they can be in the cinema. For Cartier, the intimacy afforded by the close-up in television is not restricted to an increased closeness between viewer and character/actor, as Michael Barry suggested. It provides a specific dramatic tool which, when coupled with the domestic location of television, can be exploited to increase tension and suspense.

Cartier's deployment of the close-up to evoke fear and horror is particularly evident in the cliff-hangers at the end of each episode. The first episode of *The Quatermass Experiment* is concerned with the return of the missing rocket ship after it disappears in orbit over the earth. Eventually crash-landing on Wimbledon Common, the initial fear that it might be a bomb is dispelled. On-lookers and reporters alike have arrived to see the rocket from outer space in a scene that Kneale describes in his published script of the serial as 'something like Hampstead Heath on a Bank Holiday' (Kneale 1959b, 33). During this scene, the editing is steadily paced to heighten the sense of a gradual passage of time. The crowds are depicted predominantly in mid-shots waiting for the rocket to cool, and the movement of characters and cameras is fluidly choreographed. This allows the atmosphere of a boisterous gathering to be created in the studio without the expense of a large number of extras, or the use of establishing shots of crowds, which would appear indistinct on the small low-resolution receivers.

After the rocket is opened, Quatermass realises that Victor Carroon is the only one of

the three astronauts to have returned and marches out to confront him. Carroon,

centred in the frame, with Quatermass on the left shaking him angrily, is picked out by

a light directed onto his face. Instead of zooming in or cutting to a close-up of

Carroon, the character falls directly towards the camera so that his face momentarily

fills the screen, revealing a mere glimpse of the terror in his expression, before

dissolving into a blur. The shot fades to black and the caption 'The End' is displayed.

Again, Cartier uses the technical limitations of studio production to his advantage.

The bulky studio cameras used to shoot *The Quatermass Experiment* lacked easy

mobility and had fixed lenses making zooming or fast tracking impossible. Cartier

overcomes this technical difficulty by keeping the camera still and moving the actor.

The effect of this movement is heightened through the slow smooth choreography of

the action leading up to this climax. After the careful build up to the expectant return

of the heroic astronauts over the episode, the sudden and rapid close-up of Carroon's

terrified face is a particularly shocking and potent device. Carroon falls into the

camera, literally invading and occupying the entire space of the screen in the corner of

the living room.

For Cartier, television as a medium is particularly suited to such 'horrific' scenes

because of its domestic reception. He argues that the viewer at home, away from the

distractions and reassurances of the communal viewing experience of cinema, is more

easily frightened and ready to accept the fantastic as 'real'. He uses the differing

reception of the television production of *The Quatermass Experiment* against its 1955 film version to make his point.

> When the viewer was watching these "horrific" T.V. productions of mine, he
> was - I like to think - completely in my power, and accepted the somewhat far-
> fetched implications of the plot (such as the man who turned into a vegetable)
> without a murmur, while in the cinema, there was usually a titter or false laugh
> whenever one of these scenes came up. (Cartier 1958, 10)

Cartier's comments about the reaction to the *Quatermass* serials presuppose a particular form of domestic television reception (the isolated viewer in a darkened living room) at a time when much television viewing was a communal activity structured around special events, and fails to take into account the differences between the television and film versions of the stories. However, they do suggest that in constructing the horrific scenes in *The Quatermass Experiment* Cartier developed a visual style that took advantage of the intimacy associated with the medium. John Caughie has argued that the large number of 'demonstration' programmes in early British television 'give a sense of the homeliness of television's early notion of the domestic and the delicacy with which the BBC intruded into the home' (Caughie 2000, 32). As Jeffrey Sconce demonstrates, the introduction of television into the home was accompanied by anxiety about the 'electronic presence' of this new medium that combined sound and moving images.

The ability of this box in the living room to "talk" and "see" [...] made the medium something more than merely an inanimate technology. Television exuded a powerful presence in the household, serving in the active imagination as a fantastic portal to other worlds or even as a sentient entity brooding in the corner of the living room. Early television owners recognized that this medium had a qualitative "presence" that distinguished it from radio, a presence that made the medium even more fantastic and perhaps more sinister as well. (Sconce 2000, 131)

Cartier plays with this sense of unease about the alien presence of this seemingly sentient new medium within the domestic space of the home. Inverting the cosy domesticity with which the BBC traditionally addressed the viewer, he uses the intimacy afforded by the televisual close-up to bring the viewer suddenly and unexpectedly face to face with the horrific.

Fantasy, Genre and Television Aesthetics

Although the *Quatermass* serials offered Cartier and Kneale a means of creating spectacular sequences that *expanded* the possibilities of television's 'intimate' screen, such moments of spectacle equally offer opportunities to *exploit* the intimacy of television's small screen and domestic reception. Kneale and Cartier's challenge to the intimate tendency in early television drama is therefore not a rejection of the notion of television as an intimate, domestic medium, but rather a rejection of the notion that these attributes negate the aesthetic potential of television itself. For Kneale and Cartier, the specific qualities of television as a medium offer particular

possibilities for television drama. The nature of these possibilities becomes further apparent when one examines the discourses surrounding the specific expectations associated with fantasy, science fiction and horror as genres in the production of these serials.

When *The Quatermass Experiment* was produced in 1953, there was relatively little British science fiction, fantasy or horror in cinema or television. It was not until Hammer's film adaptation of *The Quatermass Experiment* in 1955 that British science fiction cinema emerged as a popular genre, and the distinct blend of science fiction and horror that would go on to characterise the British cycle of the film genre over the 1950s and 1960s has been attributed to the innovations of the television version of *The Quatermass Experiment* (see Petley 1986; and Hunter 1999a). However, US science fiction had begun to develop as a popular film genre after the release of *Destination Moon* in 1950 (see Sobchack 1987, 12; and Biskind 1983, 102). It is the expectations associated with this US cinematic form of the genre to which Kneale refers when discussing his use of science fiction in the *Quatermass* serials.

Despite his desire to make his television dramas more 'cinematic', Kneale is keen to differentiate the *Quatermass* serials from the expectations associated with US science fiction cinema of the early 1950s.

> At that time [1953] most science fiction films were terrible, nearly always American, full of flag-waving sentiments and crude, dreadful dialogue, made with a singular lack of imagination and a total lack of interest in human

characters. I wanted to get away from all that, plant it very firmly on the

characters because there was no other choice, you simply couldn't launch into

a load of special effects because there weren't any. (quoted in Petley 1984/5,

23)

Kneale's differentiation of *The Quatermass Experiment*, from similar generic cinema,

points to the specific possibilities that he associated with *television fantasy*. Unable to

create a vast number of sophisticated special effects, Kneale emphasises the potential

for the television serial's extended narrative and immediacy (Kneale was still writing

The Quatermass Experiment as the first episodes were being transmitted) to develop

complex plots and three dimensional characters.

The differentiation of *The Quatermass Experiment* from the pre-existing expectations

associated with early 1950s science fiction cinema is drawn attention to within the

fictional diegesis of the television serial itself. In episode four as Victor Carroon

begins to mutate into an alien entity, he goes on the run, hiding out in a cinema

screening a 3-D US science fiction film, *Planet of the Dragons*. The sequence in the

cinema mixes pre-filmed inserts of the movie, in which a Space-Girl and a Space-

Lieutenant find love in the face of terrible danger from space dragons, with studio

shots of an audience of middle-aged women watching the matinee while eating and

talking noisily. According to the camera script for *The Quatermass Experiment* the 3-

D effect in this sequence was created by double-printing the filmed sequences from

Planet of the Dragons. Therefore, while the use here of a 3-D film is a reference to

the technological developments in Hollywood in the early 1950s designed to entice

declining audiences back to the cinema, the television image would actually have appeared much more distinct than the filmic image in this scene. The irritated comments of one audience member within the diegesis, who exclaims of the 3-D spectacles, 'I dunno which is worse - with them on or with them off. Get a 'eadache or be driven loopy tryin' to watch it -', further denigrates the cinematic experience in favour of the experience of the television viewer watching comfortably at home. Furthermore, within *Planet of the Dragons*, moments of action take place off-screen. The monsters are heard, but never represented. This lack of spectacle is in direct contrast to the narrative of *The Quatermass Experiment*, which depicts Carroon's gradual transformation and finally reveals his monstrous alien form in the culminating episodes.

Science fiction cinema is further denigrated through the comparisons drawn between *Planet of the Dragons*' treatment of similar thematic material to *The Quatermass Experiment*. As the Space-Lieutenant begins a characteristically corny monologue, a slide is projected onto the screen displaying a photograph of Carroon and a caption 'Have you seen this man?', followed by a police notice. The film's dialogue continues over these images as the Space-Lieutenant exclaims,

> There's a new world waiting to be built right here, Julie. Some day, maybe, on this very planet of the Dragons, kids'll be able to sit down in a corner drugstore, same as home. There'll be roads and schools and movies - same as back home. We'll build that new world, Julie ... you and me ... and a lot of ordinary people like us.

The juxtaposition of this monologue, with the police notice to locate Carroon, makes

ironic reference to the treatment of the theme of alien invasion within both narratives.

While in the film it is the US humans who are colonising an alien planet through the

destruction of its indigenous inhabitants, in the television drama it is earth that is

threatened with colonisation by alien invaders and humanity that stands to be

destroyed. The film's cavalier treatment of this theme, in which the Space-

Lieutenant's commitment to the invasion of an alien planet causes the Space-Girl to

declare her love for him, is contrasted with the television drama's more complex

treatment of the consequences of alien invasion. The narrative of *The Quatermass*

Experiment warns of the dangers of space exploration and of complacency towards

man's position in the cosmos. It depicts Carroon's suffering as he struggles to resist

the invading alien entity, and the fear and bravery of ordinary people in the face of

potential destruction. The insertion of this film within the fictional diegesis, therefore,

draws a contrast between the serious treatment of the themes of colonisation, invasion

and scientific experimentation within the television narrative and the juvenile

pubescent treatment of similar generic terrain in US science fiction cinema[21].

The Quatermass Experiment therefore draws on the expectations associated with

cinematic science fiction to disassociate the television series from a cinematic genre

that, as Kneale's defence of his use of science fiction implies, was culturally

denigrated at that time. In setting up a dichotomy between the simplistic and crude

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[21] This sequence, while denigrating science fiction cinema in favour of the television experience, is also offering a typically negative comment on the 'Americanisation' of popular culture in the post-war era.

US science fiction film, and its own complex and serious narrative concerns *The Quatermass Experiment* asserts the social relevance of its fantastic narratives. The particular possibilities offered by the combination of fantasy and television for the 'serious' treatment of contemporary anxieties is further evident in Kneale's defence of his use of science fiction in the *Quatermass* serials. He claims, 'The form is appropriate, if taken seriously. And that is the way I do take it. I try to give those stories some relevance to what is around us today' (Kneale 1959a, 88).

For Kneale, science fiction offers opportunities to develop challenging material that tackles issues of contemporary social importance at a time when television was a relatively open arena for the exploration of new material. As he writes in 1959,

> that is the attraction of television at the present time - its readiness to tackle subjects that the film industry might balk at. Minority appeal pieces, or what later turn out to be majority-appeal pieces but which at first are new and frightening to the delicate sense of impresarios. TV is more receptive simply because its programming space has to be filled somehow, and the costs are relatively low. (Kneale 1959a, 88)

Kneale here implies that British television in the early 1950s was more readily experimenting with popular fictional forms than British cinema. This suggests that in this period of growth and experimentation, when as Charles Barr argues, 'TV was rapidly developing its own forms of strong popular fiction' (1986a, 215), television

provided Kneale with a forum to experiment with addressing socially relevant subject matter through popular generic forms such as science fiction and horror.

Furthermore, the production process for television drama was relatively short at this time, enabling television dramas to address contemporary issues with an immediacy that was not possible in the cinema. In the foreword to the published script of the second *Quatermass* serial, *Quatermass II*, Kneale explains how the fantastic premise of the drama deals with social anxieties that were of relevance to its specific period of production and transmission in 1955.

> It was 1955, an unconfident time. There was much public concern about a new brand of bureaucracy, which manifested itself in the form of secret establishments: giant radars reputed to endanger human life and concealed in huge plastic pods; germ-warfare establishments behind barbed wire; atom-proof shelters for chosen administrators. Imagine, then, a huge plant that looks something like an oil refinery with some inexplicable additions, set up ostensibly to produce synthetic foodstuffs, which indeed it does make but not for human consumption ... and the menace is firmly established on Earth before its real nature can be known. (Kneale 1979, 6).

While the representation of the fantastic enables the metaphorical treatment of such

social anxieties, the immediacy of television production allows these serials to deal

with issues that are particularly resonant to their contemporary audiences[22].

Peter Hutchings' (1999) analysis of the *Quatermass* serials is precisely concerned

with exploring how these tales of alien invasion are used to metaphorically engage

with the social anxieties of post-war Britain, both in their ambivalent attitude towards

science, in which Quatermass is depicted 'as someone who deals with a mysterious

power that is both wonderful and immensely destructive' (Hutchings 1999, 40), and in

their deconstruction of the pervasive wartime concept of the national collective

(Hutchings 1999, 40-41). However, the contemporary relevance of the *Quatermass*

serials goes beyond the exploration of social anxieties and functions as a powerful

textual strategy that reinforces the socio-cultural verisimilitude of these fantastic tales.

Although these serials deal with science beyond the capabilities of their time of

production, the fantastic events represented are clearly situated in a fictional world

that is written and shot to resemble 1950s Britain. All three serials use contemporary

costumes and sets, with visual and narrative references to current events, such as the

extension to London's underground system, which forms the setting for *Quatermass*

and the Pit.

Furthermore, although the use of filmed inserts was limited in 1950s television drama,

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[22] The representations of invasion and social disintegration in the *Quatermass* stories have been examined in relation to the anxieties of the Cold War and the changing notions of national identity in post-war British society (see Brosnan 1978, 113, and Hutchings 1999, 39-41).

all three of the *Quatermass* serials use filmed sequences of location footage. While Jason Jacobs sees this as part of Cartier and Kneale's attempt to expand television drama out of the television studio (2000, 130-38), it also functions to situate these narratives within a fictional world that is grounded in the 'real' world of the contemporary viewer. In *The Quatermass Experiment* a filmed sequence of St James's Park in London is combined with studio sets of the park to reveal the devastation left by an almost fully mutated Carroon. In *Quatermass II* filmed inserts of the Shell Haven refinery in Essex are mixed in with studio sets to represent the experimental plant taken over by alien invaders. *Quatermass and the Pit* begins with the filmed sequence of a construction site in London's Knightsbridge before cutting to the studio set of the dig in which an alien space ship is unearthed. The relative lack of such filmed location material in early television drama, combined with the skill with which Cartier overcame the difficulty of matching the filmed inserts to the studio footage (see Jacobs 2000, 131), would have heightened the sense of realism and contemporaneity in these serials by combining fantastic images with recognisable locations.

These visual references to contemporary 1950s Britain are further reinforced by a narrative emphasis on the impact of the alien invasions on the everyday lives of ordinary people. In *The Quatermass Experiment* an elderly woman's home is destroyed by the returning space rocket and the infected Carroon brutally kills an innocent chemist. This focus on the everyday is reinforced in the second and third serials. Sequences such as the killing by armed guards of the working-class family picnicking next to the secret installation in *Quatermass II* emphasise the threat of the

events depicted to ordinary people and their everyday pleasures. In the climax of

Quatermass and the Pit the unearthed alien craft triggers a repressed memory in

humans that results in a violent riot that sweeps across London. The action cuts from

the disturbed dig to a local pub and represents the rapid descent of the customers from

communal camaraderie to violent destruction, reinforcing the impact of the fantastic

events on the familiar routines of the everyday.

The reactions of ordinary people ground the events within the norms of 1950s British

society, visually and narratively situating the fantastic within the socio-cultural

verisimilitude of everyday life. This is reinforced through narrative explanation,

primarily in the form of scientific discourse, which functions to reassert the

plausibility of the fantastic events portrayed. Although scientific enterprise is

responsible for the disastrous consequences in the first two *Quatermass* serials, it is

only through science that the alien invasions can be overcome. Here the character of

Quatermass is central. As a leading scientific innovator, Quatermass is invested with

a scientific and moral authority, which is reinforced through the narrative authority he

carries as the primary protagonist and the only character to recur in all three serials. In

the final episode of *The Quatermass Experiment*, Quatermass makes a broadcast

across Europe and the US where he takes moral responsibility for the disastrous

consequences of his experimental rocket and provides a full explanation for the

fantastic events of the previous five episodes.

> What came out of the rocket was not a man. It had been ... men. A human
>
> amalgam, possessed by the ... being that had entered some 400,000 miles

away and transformed them. It still has their faculties, their knowledge. In these three days, it has found the means of adapting itself to existence on this Planet – means to ensure that it *only* shall exist. It has assumed an organic structure that you will now see for yourselves.

The action then cuts from Quatermass to a model shot of the monster in Westminster Abbey as Quatermass continues his monologue. The spectacular display of the monster and the narrative explanation provided by Quatermass function together here to reinforce the socio-cultural verisimilitude of the alien creature by utilising the narrative and scientific authority invested in Quatermass as a character, and the power that the serial has placed in sight as a source of belief and science as a source of explanation.

This is further emphasised by the representation of this speech as a television broadcast within the fictional diegesis. Although within the fictional diegesis this monologue is transmitted on both sound and vision frequencies, it is only through the television that the public is able to witness images of the creature threatening their planet. Furthermore, it is through a television camera that knowledge is originally gained of Carroon's location and mutated form. During a live outside broadcast from Westminster Abbey, a pan up Poet's Corner reveals the monster's enormous tendrils slowly descending into the building. After the programme is abandoned and the Abbey is evacuated, the deserted camera transmitting to the scanner van remains the only means by which information can be gained of the creature's activities.

It is particularly significant that the alien is shown in Westminster Abbey, the site of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation just a month before. The televising of this historic occasion indicated the full potential of the new medium, as outside broadcast cameras transmitted the event live to receivers across the country, watched by over half the nation[23]. Peter Hutchings sees the use of this location in the climax of *The Quatermass Experiment* as 'a kind of iconoclasm [...] a furtive pleasure in seeing the Queen supplanted by a deadly alien monster about to reproduce' (Hutchings 1999, 38). However, there is also a commentary being made here on the relative roles and pleasures of television. While the Coronation of Elizabeth II may have demonstrated the potential for television as a realistic medium capable of the live relay of significant events, the climax of *The Quatermass Experiment* suggests its capacity for a different kind of spectacle - the visual representation of fantastic events within an exciting and dramatic narrative.

There is a self-consciousness apparent in this use of the Abbey, which is further reiterated in the scenes depicting the technical and organisational background of live television. At the end of episode five, a producer, his secretary, and a television engineer are shown in their scanner van preparing for the live outside broadcast from the Abbey. They discuss the potential difficulties of the programme and rehearse various camera movements. Finally they go on air, and as they do so, the action moves between the producer selecting camera shots within the van, and the actual

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[23] The BBC's research indicated that 53 per cent of the adult population of Britain watched the procession to Westminster Abbey on the television, while 56 per cent viewed the actual service (Briggs 1979, 458).

broadcast. In doing so this sequence reiterates the aesthetic of liveness that pervaded

early television at a time when the majority of television was broadcast live. As this

sequence deconstructs the production processes of live television just moments before

the monster is revealed within the Abbey (to both the fictional characters and the

actual audience), it offers a powerful reminder that the spectacular images witnessed

by the viewer are being relayed live from a television studio. By emphasising the

sense of co-presence created by the liveness of early television drama, this sequence

heightens the sense of realism. The viewer is seeing an image that actually exists at

the moment of transmission, albeit in a different location. However, by drawing

attention to the technical processes of television production, this sequences also

heightens the sense of spectacle. The viewer is invited to marvel at the technical

sophistication of the production of *The Quatermass Experiment* itself[24].

The fictional representation of television within *The Quatermass Experiment*,

therefore, has a dual function. Firstly, in highlighting television's role in relaying

significant events live to the public it heightens plausibility and grounds the fantastic

events depicted within a strong sense of socio-cultural verisimilitude. Secondly,

through inviting comparison with the recent televising of the Coronation, it draws

attention to the new and daring nature of what is being represented within the serial,

and by doing so it displays the potential for television's fictional dramatic forms to

depict images of an exciting and spectacular nature.

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[24] Steve Neale (1990) makes a similar argument about the use of special effects in John Carpenter's *The Thing*.

The self-consciousness with which *The Quatermass Experiment* represents both

cinema and television within its fiction emphasises its production at a time when there

was no consensus as to the precise nature and role of television as a medium. These

aesthetic debates find particular currency in Kneale and Cartier's differentiation of

television from film within the diegesis of *The Quatermass Experiment*, and in their

discussion of the production of all three serials. Kneale and Cartier use the fantastic

premise of the *Quatermass* serials to explore the potential of television in a particular

way. In attempting to challenge a conception of television as a medium whose value

lies in the relay of adaptations of pre-existing high cultural forms or live events of

historic significance, they use the propensity for spectacle in fantasy narratives to

display *television's potential to deliver visually exciting forms* of popular fiction.

However, in producing the *Quatermass* serials Kneale and Cartier were not simply

attempting to create more expansive and spectacular drama. Their desire to expand

television's intimate screen involved a recognition of the particular formal features of

early television - live production, domestic reception, small screen, serial narrative -

as exemplifying the possibilities, rather than the limitations, of the medium. What is

striking about Cartier and Kneale's approach to creating the *Quatermass* serials is that

they attempt to expand the scope of television drama into the action and spectacle

afforded by fantasy narratives, while simultaneously recognising and exploiting the

continuity, immediacy and intimacy created through the transmission of the extended

narrative of the television serial into the viewer's domestic space.

Kneale and Cartier's desire to expand *and* exploit the aesthetic of early television

drama is facilitated by the particular demands of the representation of the fantastic.

The central premise of each serial relies on the representation of non-verisimilitudinous creatures, that is, beings that go against culturally constructed notions of what is believed to be true, such as the alien form that can transform humans into a large organic organism in *The Quatermass Experiment*. Yet for this non-verisimilitudinous creature to be intelligible as such, it must be constructed in relation to generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude. In *The Quatermass Experiment* this occurs through the placement of generic elements such as space rockets within a fictional world that corresponds to the social reality of the viewer, the denigration of science fiction cinema to emphasise the complexity and plausibility of the television narrative, the investment of authority in a scientific discourse that provides narrative explanation, the exploitation of the 'liveness' aesthetic of early television, and the metaphorical treatment of contemporary anxieties. These generic and aesthetic elements function in relation to viewer expectation to construct a story that is recognisable and interpretable as both 'fantastic' (in that the events depicted go against socially constructed notions of reality) and 'real' (in that these fantastic events are made plausible and relevant to the contemporary viewer). What I want to explore now is the relationship between these generic and aesthetic concerns and the particular narrative demands of serial television drama.

Serial Structure and Narrative Form

Each *Quatermass* serial is a self-contained story consisting of six 30-35 minute episodes. The primary narrative thrust of each serial is towards uncovering and understanding the alien threat to earth. As such, the basic premise of the serials is much like that of the detective story in which the viewer acquires clues with the

'detective' (Quatermass), who is able to showcase his skills by piecing them together to solve the mystery. As a consequence the threat is defeated and the story is brought to a clear resolution[25]. Franco Moretti argues that 'Detective fiction, through the detective, celebrates the man who gives the world a meaning' (1988, 155). In the finale of each Quatermass serial, it is Quatermass, who, through his scientific explorations, is able to explain the events of the narrative, and through this understanding, averts catastrophe and brings about narrative resolution.

However, in these serials the acquisition of 'clues' (through scientific analysis) also corresponds to the increase in fear and tension through the gradual revelation of the potential danger of an alien threat. The gradual build up of tension is exacerbated by the narrative structure of these serial dramas, which places an emphasis on disruption, suspense and uncertainty through the use of cliff-hangers at the end of each episode. Within each episode the narrative drive towards resolving the mystery is thus combined with the gradual increase of the alien threat, which builds in intensity towards the cliff-hanger. The cliff-hangers therefore tend to have two related functions: the revelation of a scientific discovery that extends our knowledge of the alien threat; and the increase in fear and suspense as the danger becomes more palpable. For example the narrative thrust of Quatermass II concerns the attempts by Quatermass and his colleagues to investigate the appearance of unusual objects on earth and their link to an experimental government project to develop synthetic food.

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[25] Quatermass II could be considered an exception to this as although Quatermass destroys the alien, the final shot of him returning to earth in his experimental rocket was ambiguous enough to cause a number of viewers to write to the BBC, anxiously inquiring after the fate of their hero (WAC, T5/2, 540/1).

By episode four, Quatermass has witnessed these strange objects bursting and emitting a gas that appears to take over and control its human host. Having conjectured that these objects are alien organisms sent to earth, Quatermass goes to the plant where the synthetic food process is being engineered disguised as a guard. His suspicions about the plant are confirmed in the final shot of the episode, as he inspects a vast chamber that should contain synthetic food, and a point of view shot reveals a writhing alien monster living within the chamber. The gradual build up to the revelation of the alien functions to unite spectacle and plausibility by providing a tense and visually exciting cliff-hanger that also offers visual proof of the alien threat.

The narrative structure of the serial form functions here with the aesthetics of television to ground viewer expectation. For the regular viewer the *Quatermass* serials would become integrated into their weekly routine, their extended serial narratives offering a particular kind of intimacy between the viewer and the cast of recurring characters over the six weeks of transmission. The episodic serial form is based in part on repetition, providing a familiar narrative structure that offers repeatable pleasures. The integration of this narrative form into the routines of everyday life reinforces the intimacy and continuity of the television aesthetic. As Martin McLoone suggests in relation to early television Westerns,

> the continuity of the television series or serial, the recurring characters, locales and situations [...] become part of the habituated viewer's domestic experience. [...] In this way, [television] managed to achieve a paradoxical situation as far as the Western was concerned. It revitalized the genre and

successfully brought its epic sensibilities on to the small screen and yet, at the

same time, it domesticated the Western (McLoone 1997, 89)

This generic domestication is also apparent in the *Quatermass* serials. In each serial

there are familiar elements associated with both science fiction and horror: space

travel, alien invasion, visual spectacle, scientific discourse, destruction, suspense.

However, these generic elements are bound together through the narrative structure of

the serial drama and used specifically in relation to the aesthetic debates concerning

television production in the 1950s. As I have argued, the exploitation of the close-up

in the creation of an horrific cliff-hanger functions precisely in relation to the intimate,

domestic location of television. Furthermore, while the use of spectacular display in

the climax of each serial expands the 'intimate' screen, it also reinforces Quatermass's

narrative authority established through the intimate relationship created between

viewer and protagonist over the continuing narrative.

The form of this intimacy and expectation shifts from the first *Quatermass* serial to its

two sequels. *Quatermass II* was produced within the context of the success of its

predecessor, at a time when the *Quatermass* format was known to both viewers and

programme-makers, and within a new era of competition for the BBC, following the

introduction of ITV in September 1955. The consequences of competition for the

BBC made a serial such as *Quatermass II* an attractive proposition. In a memo

written in 1954, Cecil McGivern, Controller of Television Programmes, argues for the

expansion of the Television Script Unit in the face of competition, in order to rectify

the general low quality of television scripts. McGivern makes reference to *The*

Quatermass Experiment as an illustration of the potential for television drama in the

new era of competition:

> H.D.Tel. [Head of Television Drama, Michael Barry] took on a young writer
>
> [Nigel Kneale] at £5,5.0 a week. [...] Soon after that he gave us the serial, *The*
>
> *Quatermass Experiment*. Had competitive television been in existence then,
>
> we would have killed it every Saturday night while that serial lasted. We are
>
> going to need *many* more "Quatermass Experiment" programmes and series
>
> but the outlook on scripts and the script unit is still too much like it was when
>
> we could spare only £5,5.0 a week.[26]

The powerful endorsement McGivern gives *The Quatermass Experiment* and Kneale

here suggests that this serial was considered to be exemplary of the potential for BBC

television drama both aesthetically and industrially with the arrival of competition

from ITV.

Jacobs notes that the introduction of competition necessitated the differentiation of

BBC programming from ITV, leading to the routinisation of the schedules and an

increase in the production of serial drama (2000, 115). The organisation of the

schedules into regular patterns was already occurring in the early 1950s, as television

began to establish a place in the daily lives and routines of its viewers. In a typical

Saturday in 1953, the BBC transmitted sport during the day, two hours of children's

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[26] WAC, T31/141/1, 10 November 1954.

programmes during the early evening (5.00 – 7.00pm), and a drama serial, a selection

of variety programmes and news in the evening (7.00 – 11.00pm). *The Quatermass*

Experiment was produced to fill a gap in this schedule, and although the transmission

time for this first *Quatermass* serial varied, it was consistently aired between 8.15pm

and 9.30pm over six consecutive Saturday evenings, in a slot that was regularly used

to screen 30-minute serial drama[27].

However, the scheduling for *Quatermass II* and *Quatermass and the Pit* was further

formalised with each episode transmitted at the same time every week. The

standardisation of the scheduling of serial drama becomes particularly important in a

competitive environment as it situates each episode in a regular slot in the schedules.

As Jacobs argues,

> Until this point, scheduling of Saturday night serials had been variable, with
>
> episodes of the same serial shown perhaps half an hour later or earlier from
>
> one week to the next. Now that the BBC schedule was in competition with
>
> ITV this inconsistent approach to transmission times was inappropriate:
>
> *Quatermass II* was always shown and repeated at the same times (Jacobs 2000,
>
> 115)

The increase in the production of serial dramas after 1955 and the development of

regular scheduling patterns reflected the value of serial production to the BBC as a

---

[27] Jason Jacobs briefly discusses the development of the Saturday night serial in relation to the consolidation of the television schedule in the early 1950s (2000, 111-12).

form of drama that was both cheaper to produce than the single play and gained a

regular audience over a number of weeks. The BBC's viewing figures for the three

Quatermass serials all indicate similar viewing patterns in which the audience

numbers remain consistent with a gradual increase for the final instalments[28]. In the

audience research reports conducted by the BBC on a sample audience over 75% of

viewers had viewed five or six episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment*, while this

figure grew to 90% for *Quatermass II* and 79% for *Quatermass and the Pit*. What

these figures indicate is the potential for serial drama to attract regular audiences over

an extended period of time. The serials' cliff-hanger narratives contribute to this,

enticing viewers to watch the following week's instalment.

As a sequel produced in a newly competitive environment at a time when the

television audience had grown by over 50 percent[29], *Quatermass II* needed to maintain

the appeal of the original *Quatermass* serial while not alienating new viewers. This

problem is further complicated for a serial whose appeal lay largely in its originality.

In an article in *Radio Times*, Kneale says of *The Quatermass Experiment*, 'Part of the

impression it made was perhaps due simply to being the first of its kind' (Kneale

1955, 7). Yet Kneale is at pains to assert that *Quatermass II* 'has no direct connection

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[28] The listening and viewing barometer produced by the BBC used a sample viewers to estimate the percentage of the adult civilian population in the UK which viewed each programme. For *The Quatermass Experiment* the audience percentage rose from 9.4% for episode one, to 13.6% for episode six (WAC, 9/35/2). When *Quatermass II* was transmitted the increase was less significant, rising from 21% to 24% between the first and final instalments (WAC, 9/35/4). The viewing percentage for *Quatermass and the Pit* rose from 20% for episode one, to 29% for episode six (WAC, R9/35/7).
[29] Between 1953 and 1955 the number of combined sound and vision licences grew from 2,142,452 to 4,503,766 (Briggs 1979, 240).

with its predecessor' (ibid.)[30]. In a memo to Cecil McGivern defending the quality of

the script for *Quatermass II*, Kneale asserts,

> I have tried to make this serial as effective as its predecessor, but in quite a
>
> different way: a logical extension. Given the publicly-expected components of
>
> the dogged professor, rocketry and things from space, in terms of
>
> (substantially) live production, the possibilities are not infinite; but I
>
> eventually worked out a story that seemed more than a mere repetition.[31]

Kneale refers here to the public expectations of certain repeated elements that make

up the *Quatermass* format, 'the dogged professor, rocketry and things from space'

(ibid.). While this differs from Cawelti's notion of formulas as 'universal story

archetypes' (Cawelti 1976, 6), it retains a similar relationship to audience expectation.

Cawelti argues that formulas create their own field of reference and are judged by

audiences in relation to previous examples of the type itself. Formulas therefore

function by 'intensifying an expected experience' (Cawelti 1976, 10). Here Kneale is

situating his construction of *Quatermass II* precisely in relation to this need to fulfil

and intensify audience expectations of the *Quatermass* format. This sense of

expectation is further enhanced for the production of the third serial *Quatermass and*

the Pit. According to the BBC viewer research report for the first episode of this

serial, 'even those viewers who were a trifle lacklustre about the first part of

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[30] The desire to disassociate *Quatermass II* from *The Quatermass Experiment* in this publicity stems partly from Kneale's disappointment with the film version of the original serial, which was released almost simultaneously with the television transmission of *Quatermass II* (Kneale 1955, 7).

[31] WAC, T5/2, 540/1, 5 November 1955.

Quatermass and the Pit wanted to see further episodes, some supporting a Manager's

point that this was "not primarily because of today's instalment but because of

previous serials" (which were remembered with pleasure)'[32].

The expectation encompassed in the *Quatermass* format shifts the terms by which we

can understand the function of plausibility and spectacle, intimacy and expansion,

within these serials, as the original *Quatermass* serial itself (and the discourses

surrounding it) become part of the generic verisimilitude through which the sequels

are understood. One of the primary ways in which spectacle is created in *The*

Quatermass Experiment is through the representation of images and techniques not

common to television production in 1953, for example the use of model shots to

represent the mutated Carroon inside Westminster Abbey, and the integration of

filmed inserts with studio sets in the use of St. James's' Park as a location. Yet at this

time, television's capacity for visual spectacle was limited by the technological

restrictions in television production and the low definition of the receivers. By 1955,

BBC television production had moved to the superior facilities at Lime Grove, and

television budgets had begun to increase[33]. The most striking difference between *The*

Quatermass Experiment and its sequels is the increase in location shooting and crowd

scenes, which responds in part to the technological improvements in television

production and receivers[34], and to the need for 'something different in atmosphere and

---

[32] WAC, T5/2, 302/1, 7 January 1959.

[33] *Quatermass II* cost £7,308 to produce, £1,908 over its allocated budget of £5,500, and £3,308 more than the £4,000 budget allocated to *The Quatermass Experiment,* while *Quatermass and the Pit* was allocated a budget of £15,000.

[34] Briggs notes a general increase in the size of receivers from the original 12 inch tubes between 1952 and 1955 (1979, 245), while Cartier refers to viewers watching a television screen 'rarely more that 17 or 21 inches in size' in 1958 (Cartier 1958, 10).

story' (Kneale's promotion of *Quatermass II* in the *Radio Times*, Kneale 1955, 7). In particular, these two developments display the expansion of the television screen that *The Quatermass Experiment* had been particularly noted for. In episode five of *Quatermass II*, the workers at the plant that Quatermass suspects has been overtaken by aliens, mount a riotous attack. Although this filmed sequence makes regular use of close-ups that pick out individual characters, these are rapidly edited with long shots of the crowd of workers as they engage in an armed struggle against the guards. While part of the impact of this scene comes from the representation of such a violent working class uprising, this is reinforced by the use of a rapidly edited filmed sequence that displays television's ability to represent spectacular crowd scenes without compromising its intimacy.

The use of spectacle to display television's propensity as a visual medium is further exploited through the increasing presence of special effects in *Quatermass and the Pit*, where the unearthed space ship unleashes a wave of paranormal occurrences that recur over the serial. By this time, the BBC had a special effects team who were responsible for dealing with the effects requirements within all television dramas, and supervised the creation of all the effects for *Quatermass and the Pit*. Episode four ends with an extended sequence in which a workman causes a frenzy of telekinetic activity. While this scene focuses on the workman, frequently cutting to close-ups of his anguished face, it combines these shots with a series of spectacular special effects in which planks of wood and cups and saucers fly independently through the air and cables violently lash of their own volition (see figs. 2.1 – 2.6). These sequences both fulfil and intensify the expectation for the aesthetic and technical experimentation of

Fig. 2.1 In episode four of *Quatermass and the Pit* a workman unleashes a wave of telekinetic activity in the alien craft as a lamp begins to rock violently.
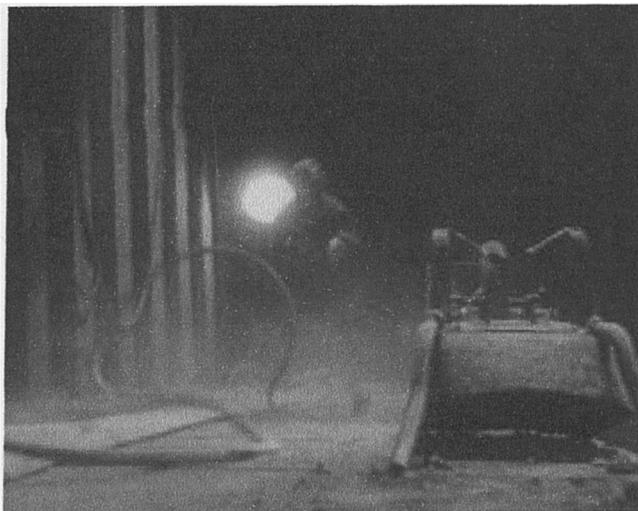
Fig. 2.2 A long-shot depicts cables lashing around him as he tries to escape, displaying the series' special effects.
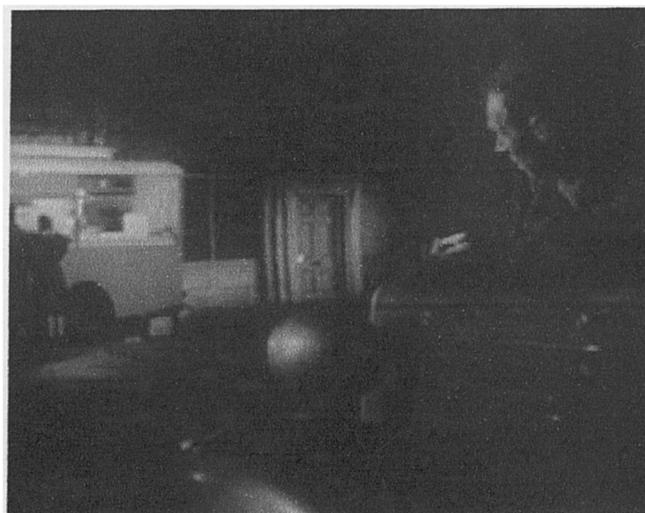
Fig. 2.3 There is a pause in the action as the man seeks refuge at a nearby food stall.

Fig. 2.4 A close-up depicts the workman's anguished face as he tries to ask for help.

Fig. 2.5 However, the telekinetic activity returns as cups and saucers begin to move of their own volition.

Fig. 2.6 While the workman moves out of shot, the camera remains focused on the special effects sequence, as cups and saucers fly across the screen.

The Quatermass Experiment, and the generic and narrative expectations for exciting cliff-hangers and a suspenseful narrative.

While part of the viewer expectation of the *Quatermass* serials was for spectacular sequences that exploit the developments in television production and the narrative device of the cliff-hanger, there was also a need to retain a consistency in the central character and the themes explored. All three serials deal with the theme of alien invasion and scientific exploration. In the sequels, the intimacy created between viewer and narrative through the character of Quatermass is reinforced and by the third serial, Quatermass is invested with greater moral authority. No longer responsible for the alien threat, Quatermass is forced to fight for the integrity of his scientific mission against interference from the military. After the dramatic riots through the burning streets of London in its final episode, *Quatermass and the Pit* concludes with a monologue delivered by Quatermass directly to the camera (which is later revealed to be a television broadcast) that overtly draws out the moral behind the story. The reliance on dialogue in this ending differs from the previous serials, which concluded with visual set pieces, and led to conflict between Kneale and Michael Barry, Head of Television Drama. On reading the script for *Quatermass and the Pit*, Barry felt that this was 'an avuncular homily strangely out of place' as the finale to the serial[35]. In a letter to Kneale endorsing Barry's criticisms, the television script supervisor Donald Wilson expressed concern about the shift in address from a dramatic sequence which is structured to draw the viewer into the action, to the

---

[35] This quotation comes from a hand-written note by Barry to Rudolph Cartier on the last page of the script for *Quatermass and the Pit* (WAC, T5/2, 306/1, 20 December 1958).

moralistic tone of this direct address that changes the character of Quatermass from 'a

central character at one blow from somebody we have known and suffered with, into

an admonitory uncle'[36]. In a later letter to Kneale, Barry wrote of this conclusion,

> The astonishing thing is that two such knowledgeable and experienced
>
> practitioners as Rudi [Rudolph Cartier] and you are resorting to a device which
>
> is so unscreenworthy. Technically, there is nothing about this scene that
>
> belongs to television or the screen. The need for a swift ending to avoid an
>
> anticlimax is, I agree, absolutely necessary. Surely it should be visual.[37]

Kneale defended his ending to Wilson as a necessary moral that needed pointing out if

the viewer is not 'to get drowned in a welter of (we hope) exciting special effects'[38],

and it is retained in the final transmitted version.

The conflict between Barry and Kneale raises again the debates around television

aesthetics, with Barry this time arguing for the importance of visual devices to

television story-telling, and Kneale resorting to the narrative device of a 'big verbal

display' in order to clarify the moral underlying his story. However, this debate also

relates directly to the generic verisimilitude of the *Quatermass* format at this time.

Having averted the destruction of humanity for a third time, Quatermass as a character

is now invested with a great deal of moral authority that is reinforced in this final

---

[36] WAC, T48/357/1, 23 December 1958.
[37] WAC, T48/357/1, 2 January 1959.
[38] WAC, T48/357/1, 28 December 1958.

serial as he carries no responsibility for the alien threat to earth. Having this character deliver an address directly to the audience, whereby the fictional camera of the television news studio within the diegesis is conflated with the real camera filming the drama, is a visual device which makes use of the representation of television and the character of Quatermass over the three serials. For Barry, however, this 'un-visual' device lets down a serial that has primarily located its narrative drive in visually exciting sequences and has been constructed to encourage viewer identification with Quatermass. This conflict between a 'visual' or 'verbal' ending, is therefore not only a replication of the on-going debates about television aesthetics, it is also grounded in a sense of expectation based on a familiarity with the previous serials. The argument between Kneale and Barry concerning the conclusion to *Quatermass and the Pit* in many ways highlights the complex collusion of the expansive and intimate, spectacular and character-driven, fantastic and socially relevant that takes place within the three *Quatermass* serials.

Conclusion

In exploring the representation of the fantastic in the *Quatermass* serials, it is apparent that Kneale and Cartier used the particular possibilities offered by the fantastic in relation to the specific demands of television production at this time. The production discourses surrounding these series reveal how an understanding of the representation of the fantastic as a production and a textual strategy cannot be divorced from the broader debates circulating about the aesthetics of television. However, the fantastic raises these debates in quite specific ways. In representing the fantastic, the *Quatermass* serials negotiate the demands of depicting events and characters that are

plausible and intelligible to the audience whilst simultaneously being recognisable as fantastic. The combination of a dependence upon and disruption of socio-cultural verisimilitude in the representation of the fantastic is exploited in the *Quatermass* serials to create dramas that are equally concerned with displaying the fantastic as spectacle *and* asserting the plausibility and relevance of these fantastic events. It is through this dichotomy between confounding and asserting socio-cultural verisimilitude that we can understand the ways in which the *Quatermass* serials expand and exploit the aesthetic potential of early television.

The representation of the fantastic within these serials provides particular possibilities through which Kneale and Cartier challenged the 'intimate' tendency in early television drama. Moving away from the notion of a transparent television aesthetic, they used the representation of the fantastic to experiment with the potential for visual display in television drama. However, while Siegel (1984) argues for science fiction television that exploits the *intimacy, continuity and immediacy of television as a medium* instead of aspiring to the spectacle and action of cinematic science fiction, the *Quatermass* serials demonstrate that spectacle can function precisely in relation to the intimate. Spectacular moments, such as the revelation of the monster in the Abbey in *The Quatermass Experiment*, the workers' uprising in *Quatermass II* and the telekinetic activity in *Quatermass and the Pit* are constructed to combine visual display with a concern for the human reactions of individual characters. Not only does this challenge the dominant aesthetic of early television drama as inherently intimate, it also questions an aesthetics of television which situates the intimate in opposition to the spectacular.

The combination of spectacle and intimacy in these serials functions in relation to the specific demands of early television and the generic expectations associated with science fiction at this time. Keen to differentiate the *Quatermass* serials from what he saw as a crude and unimaginative cinematic genre, Kneale emphasises the possibilities of television to use fantasy to metaphorically explore contemporary issues. For Kneale the immediacy of television production and the extended narratives of the serial form enabled him to address contemporary anxieties through the fantastic narratives of the *Quatermass* serials with a seriousness and complexity not found in cinematic science fiction.

For Kneale and Cartier, therefore, these fantastic stories have two primary (and related) functions: to explore the stylistic canvas of television drama; and to expand the thematic range of television drama by metaphorically addressing contemporary anxieties through new generic forms. The thematic concern with exploring contemporary anxieties in these serials functions with the formal concern with exploring contemporary television aesthetics to create drama that is both expansive and intimate, spectacular and character-driven, fantastic and socially relevant. Therefore, while as Jason Jacobs argues, fantasy offered Kneale and Cartier 'a faster tempo and a broader thematic canvas ... in order to get out of the dominant stylistic trend of television intimacy' (2000, 134), the formal and thematic experimentation in the *Quatermass* serials is equally embedded within an understanding of television as an intimate medium that relays live images into the domestic space. The three serials exploit the dominant aesthetic of liveness and intimacy in early television to reinforce

the plausibility and relevance of these fantastic tales and to heighten the spectacular

and frightening nature of what is represented.

Therefore, while the representation of the fantastic opens up the possibility for visual

display and thematic experimentation, this is a production and textual strategy that can

only be fully understood in relation to the dominant aesthetic model of television

drama in the 1950s which it both relies upon and expands. However, what this

analysis does suggest is a set of discourses and production strategies that arise

specifically in relation to the representation of the fantastic that raise particular

questions about the aesthetics of television. What the next chapter goes on to explore,

is whether the same discourses recur in the representation of the fantastic in *The*

Prisoner, and how they are negotiated within this different historical context of

production.

Chapter 3

'Serious Entertainment': *The Prisoner* (ITC, 1967-8) and Discourses of

Quality in 1960s British Television

Introduction

Over the 1960s, British television continued to expand, with the consolidation of the

commercial television network at the beginning of the decade, and the introduction of a

second BBC channel, BBC 2, in 1964. In this chapter I want to explore the use of fantasy

as a production and a textual strategy in this different historical context by examining *The*

Prisoner (ITC, 1967-8), a 17-part series produced in 1967 for the commercial British

independent television network, Associated Television (ATV). In *The Prisoner* an

unnamed spy (known only as Number Six) is kidnapped after resigning from what

appears to be a British Government position and taken to a bizarre location termed the

Village. Unable to escape, Number Six (Patrick McGoohan) is subjected to a series of

increasingly surreal physical and mental tests to uncover the information that he conceals.

This description of the basic narrative format of *The Prisoner* immediately highlights the

difficulty in dealing generically with fantasy. If we consider genre as a form of

classification, *The Prisoner*'s tales of kidnap and interrogation would seem to be quite

different from the *Quatermass* serials' stories of alien invasion. However, both of these

series are premised upon the representation of 'fantastic' events that go against culturally

received notions of 'reality'. By moving away from approaching fantasy in terms of

what *kinds* of stories are told, to exploring *how* these stories are told, we can ask whether

these series share any production and/or textual strategies in the representation of the
fantastic.

This chapter therefore asks what production and textual strategies *The Prisoner* used in
its representation of the fantastic, and how they can be understood in relation to the
particular discourses surrounding the aesthetics of television at this time. *The Prisoner*
was produced in an industrial environment in which the impact of commercial television
on the UK television industry was pivotal. This was a period in which the commercial
imperative of independent television came under frequent criticism as anathema to the
moral and cultural responsibilities of public service broadcasting. Criticisms of the
increasing trivialisation of television broadcasting with the introduction of competition
were bound up with concerns about the social effects of television, as the medium
became increasingly integrated into everyday life. What impact did these debates have
on the use of fantasy as a production and a textual strategy in *The Prisoner*? What does
this analysis add to our understanding of television fantasy and television aesthetics? In
answering these questions I want to explore how the use of fantasy in *The Prisoner* can
be understood in relation to the negotiation of the commercial and aesthetic demands
faced by the independent broadcasters at that time.

Competing Television: ITV, Commercialisation and the US Market
Although established within a public service model regulated by the Independent
Television Authority (ITA), independent television introduced competition and a
commercial imperative into British television broadcasting. Initially, ITV struggled to

compete with the BBC, in part because of the technical restrictions on the new service[1].

At the end of 1955, only 30.8 percent of television-owning homes (12.5 percent of all

homes) were capable of receiving ITV programming. However, the ITV network

expanded rapidly with the installation of new transmitters and by the end of 1965, this

figure had grown to 94.4 percent of television-owning homes and 82 percent of all

homes[2]. However, as early as 1957, the ITV's audience share in those homes capable of

receiving both services was at around 70 percent, with the BBC audience share at only 30

percent[3]. The sharp decline of the BBC audience in favour of the new ITV channel

raised problems for the justification of the BBC's licence fee. Huw Weldon (Managing

Director of BBC Television, 1968-75) suggests that the 'seriously diminishing audiences

put the very financial foundation of the BBC at risk' (Weldon 1971a, 4). The BBC's

position was further problematised by the sharp increase in the operating expenditure for

television, from £7,033,044 in 1955-6 to £13,988,812 in 1958-9[4]. The Corporation

responded by shifting its programming practices in line with those of the ITV network.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the BBC rationalised its schedules, creating certain weekly

'landmarks', such as the Tuesday documentary, the Wednesday Play, and Saturday night

variety to provide viewers with recognisable and high profile BBC programmes at regular

---

[1] In 1956-7, the BBC's television coverage was to over 96 percent of all 15 million homes. ITV's
television coverage extended to only 1 million homes in 1956, but expanded rapidly to 5.25 million in 1958
and 9.75 million in 1960 (Briggs 1995, 30).
[2] Figures obtained from *ITV 1967: A Guide to Independent Television*.
[3] The ITA claim that at the end of 1955-56, the weekly audience in those homes capable of receiving ITV
and BBC television divided 60:40 in ITV's favour (*ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1955-56*, HMSO
1956, 13). The 'Tamratings' (audience figures produced for the ITA) reveal that as early as the week
ending October 7 1956, ITV was gaining an average of 71 percent of the audience in homes capable of
receiving both services.
[4] The BBC's operating expenditure for television continued to rise steeply over the 1960s, to £59,447,503
by 1969-70 (see Briggs 1995, 1007).

points throughout the week (see Fox 1969, 8). The BBC also adopted a more competitive

scheduling practice, placing similar programmes against those being shown by ITV.

These competitive strategies were further enabled with the arrival of a second BBC

channel, BBC 2, in 1964. With a remit to offer minority interest programming, BBC 2

provided the Corporation with a site within which to schedule programmes with a more

specialised appeal, as well as to offer alternatives to the programmes provided by both

BBC 1 and ITV (see Curran, in Bakewell and Garnham 1970, 216; and Weldon 1971, 17-

8). By 1968, ITV had lost its ratings domination over the BBC and the audience ratio for

BBC 1 and ITV stabilised at around 50:50 (Fox 1969, 9).

In television drama in particular, the 1960s also saw a shift in production practices and an

increasing dependence on the commercial foreign export market to offset the growing

expense of television production in the UK. Technologically, the introduction of Ampex

magnetic recording in 1959-60 led to the decline of live studio drama as television

images could now be recorded onto videotape. In this period there was also an increase

in the amount of filmed drama, both in terms of filmed inserts in studio productions, and

in terms of dramas originated on film itself. These technological developments increased

the costs of television production but also facilitated the export of television programmes

abroad, creating an additional market where programme costs could be recouped. In

1961, BBC Television Enterprises was established as a commercial wing of the BBC's

Television Service, and was largely responsible for the sale of BBC television

programmes abroad. In 1966, BBC Television Enterprises exported 11,492 programmes,

mainly to the Commonwealth[5]. As early as 1962-63, ITV exported around 14,000

programmes overseas, primarily drama series and light entertainment[6].

At this time, the US television industry was becoming increasingly important for British

television. While the US imported more television programmes to the UK than any other

foreign country, for the UK broadcasters the US market offered a potentially lucrative

site for British television exports. Lew Grade, (managing director of the ITV network

ATV[7]), was particularly keen to infiltrate the US market.

> My whole effort, as far as I'm concerned, is in television, production of television
>
> programmes and sales of programmes overseas, because what I found when I
>
> really went into the selling business was nobody knew that British television
>
> existed. And everybody looked upon America as *the* country in television. I said
>
> "This is going to stop. We're going to sell all there is." (Grade, in Bakewell and
>
> Garnham 1970, 275)

Grade's television production company, the Incorporated Television Company (ITC), co-

produced *The Adventures of Robin Hood* with the US company Sapphire Films, which

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[5] *BBC Handbook 1967*, 33.

[6] Out of the 14,000 programmes exported by ITV in 1962-63, around 5,000 programmes were sold to the Commonwealth, around 3,000 to colonial territories or protectorates, nearly 2,300 to Latin American countries and nearly 1,000 to the US (*ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1962-63*, HMSO 1963, 11). By 1963-64 this figure had risen to almost 22,000 (*ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1963-64*, HMSO 1964, 23).

[7] Lew Grade was Deputy Managing Director of ATV from 1955 to 1962, when he became Managing Director.

was sold to the US network CBS in 1955, and went on to find similar success in the US

with *The Buccaneers* (CBS, 1956) and *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot* (NBC, 1957). In

1958, ITC was taken over by ATV, and in 1961 the company purchased the British

National Studios (renamed Elstree Studios) for the production of television series (see

Osgerby, Gough-Yates and Wells 2001, 18-19). Over the 1960s, ATV developed an

increasingly successful export strategy, recognised in 1967 by the Queen's Award to

Industry for outstanding achievements in the field of exports. The company focused on

exporting to the lucrative US market through the production of filmed drama series[8].

This was the primary form of television programme imported from the US to the UK, and

also made up the largest part of the US networks' primetime schedules[9]. Although the

British broadcasters restricted the amount of foreign television imported into the UK (to

around 15 percent of programmes aired[10]), the presence of US dramas in the UK

schedules affected both the production and scheduling of British television. The US

television programmes imported to the UK were primarily filmed series whose episodes

were either 25 or 50 minutes long, the standard timings required in the US to fit

programmes into 30 minute and one hour scheduling slots with the addition of

advertisements. These timings were gradually replicated in the BBC and ITV schedules,

to accommodate both US programmes and British programmes produced for the UK and

---

[8] ITC also produced the 1960s Gerry Anderson puppet series, *Super Car*, *Fireball XL5*, *Stingray*, *Thunderbirds* and *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*, all of which were sold to the US (see Chapter 4).
[9] The definition of 'primetime' in the US at this time varied from state to state but tended to refer to the hours between 7.00–11.00pm and indicated the period in which television gained its largest audiences. The production and scheduling practices of US television will be explored in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.
[10] The *BBC Handbook* for 1967 notes that over 85 percent of BBC programmes are produced by the BBC, so that in nearly 100 hours of BBC television, only 15 hours consists of programmes from the US or other foreign countries (1967, 25). In 1957-58, the ITA stipulated that the amount of foreign material should not exceed 14 percent. Their discussion centres primarily on the inclusion of US programmes in the UK ITV schedules (*ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1957-58*, HMSO 1958, 19).

US markets. As Paul Fox states of the rationale for planning the BBC 1 schedules in the late 1960s, 'we usually work in 25 and 50 minute segments [...] that is a key requirement: these are the only acceptable lengths for export; they are also the running time of programmes we import from the United States' (Fox 1969, 7). The US television industry also favoured the production of long-running series produced in 'seasons' of around 26 episodes that were transmitted between September and June with repeats scheduled over the summer months. As the US market became increasingly attractive to British television producers, British television dramas were produced in this series format, and the British television schedules began to adopt a similar pattern of 'seasons'. As Paul Fox explained in relation to scheduling BBC 1, 'The season – a term we are using more and more – runs from September to the beginning of June. The remaining three months are the summer season: this is the time when audiences are on holiday, artists are in summer shows, and television programmes feature repeats' (Fox 1969, 6).

However, this is not to suggest that over the 1960s British television simply adopted the scheduling and programming practices of US television. Over this period British television continued to function within a public service remit, with a mixed schedule of programming and a strong commitment to the social and cultural responsibilities of public broadcasting. However, it is to argue that the presence of foreign, particularly US, programmes in the British television schedules, combined with the increasing practice of exporting British programmes to the lucrative US market, had a direct effect on the organisation of the British television schedules and on the types of programmes produced and transmitted. In the area of drama, this was most apparent in the development of

filmed television series structured in seasons and running over a number of months.

While the drama serial had been present on British television from its early days, over the

1960s we see the development of British filmed series that largely adopt the form and

genres of the US filmed series imported into the UK. ITC was at the forefront of this

move, producing filmed action-adventure series such as *Danger Man*, *The Saint*, *The*

Baron, *Court-Martial*, *The Prisoner*, *Man in a Suitcase*, and *The Champions*[11]. While

drama serials develop one over-arching narrative that runs across all the episodes, these

are all series that broadly adopt the action-adventure format of the US filmed series, with

a narrative formula that enabled the depiction of recurring characters in a different

perilous situation each week with little or no continuous narrative over the series as a

whole[12].

Despite its early success with *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, ITC had difficulty in

exporting British series to the US. In 1961 the US network CBS transmitted ITC's spy

drama *Danger Man* for a short six-month run[13]. However, it was not until ITC reworked

Danger Man specifically for the US market in 1965 (under the new title *Secret Agent*),

extending its half-hour episodes to 50 minutes and shooting in colour film, that the

company made a significant impact on the US market. *Secret Agent* was transmitted by

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[11] Osgerby and Gough-Yates' edited collection (2001) explores the development of action television in the US and the UK, and includes an article on *The Saint* (Osgerby 2001).

[12] Nick Lacey explores in more detail the differences between the narrative structure of the serial and the series (2000, 30-39). However, his rather schematic differentiation of the series and the serial does not account fully for the historical shifts in the narrative form of the series (see Chapter 5). It also fails to address series such as *Dr Who* which, as Tulloch and Alvarado (1983) argue, adopts a hybridised serial narrative structure.

[13] *Danger Man* ran on CBS between 5 April 1961 and 13 September 1961.

CBS for two seasons between 1965 and 1966, while also running on the ITV network in

the UK under its original title. In 1965, *Secret Agent*, along with *The Saint*, were singled

out by *Variety* as British series that 'firmly nailed a once-predominant notion that British

production values are too sluggish for the US "big-league" broadcaster' (quoted in Miller

2000, 42)[14].

The success of *Secret Agent* and *The Saint* facilitated the export of a number of other

British action-adventure series to the US networks, such as *The Baron* (ABC, 1966) and

Court-Martial (ABC, 1966). *Secret Agent* also made a star of its lead actor Patrick

McGoohan both in the US and the UK, and by 1967 McGoohan was the highest paid

actor on British television, reportedly earning over £2,000 a week (Davis 1967, 30). It

was primarily in response to McGoohan's success as the spy John Drake in *Secret Agent*

that CBS purchased his next series *The Prisoner* (see Rogers 1989, 132; and Carrazé and

Oswald 1990, 210). As with the other ITC productions of this period, *The Prisoner* was a

commercial project produced simultaneously for the UK domestic and the US export

markets. The series was expensive to produce, with each episode costing around £75,000

and was shot at the MGM studios in Borehamwood on 35mm-colour film. The decision

to shoot the series on colour film is particularly indicative of the importance of the US

market to the ITC at this time. When *The Prisoner* was first transmitted in the UK in

October 1967, it was done so in black and white. By contrast, the series was transmitted

---

[14] See Miller (2000) for an analysis of the reception of *Secret Agent* and *The Prisoner* in the US. Miller argues that the success of these British spy series needs to be understood in relation to the growing success of James Bond in the US and their adoption of the fast-paced action-adventure format typical of US television drama series in the 1960s.

in colour on the US network CBS. Although the first colour television transmissions

occurred in Britain in 1967, these were restricted to BBC 2, and it was not until 15

November 1969 that BBC 1 and ITV followed suit (see Briggs 1995, 858-60). In the US,

colour television transmissions occurred as early as 1954, although it was not until the

mid-1960s that the price of colour receivers had fallen enough to make them

commercially attractive to viewers and the US networks began to heavily invest in the

promotion of colour television broadcasting. The increasing importance of colour

broadcasting in the US led to the production of a number of British series, such as *The*

Prisoner, that were shot on colour film and transmitted in colour in the US while being

aired in black and white in the UK[15]. As the *ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1966-67*

suggests,

> Filmed drama series are being produced increasingly in colour. In part this is in
>
> preparation for Independent Television's own colour service, in part it is an
>
> inevitable result of rising costs within the industry. It is increasingly difficult to
>
> recover the costs of a major filmed series within the United Kingdom: but at the
>
> same time the most important overseas markets demand colour. (1967, 13)

At this time, therefore, the filmed series offered a double bind to television producers in

the UK, at once offering the possibility of increased revenue from overseas sales, whilst

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[15] For example, *The Avengers* shifted to colour production for its fifth season in 1967 despite being transmitted in the UK in black and white, to facilitate the continued sale of the series to the US network ABC (see Chapman 2000, 44), and *The Saint* moved to colour for its third season in 1966 before being picked up by the US network NBC (see Osgerby 2001, 37).

simultaneously increasing costs in order to meet the demands of the export market.

Despite the importance of overseas sales to the production of *The Prisoner*, it was also a

significant production for the ITV network at the time. In the UK, *The Prisoner* was

competitively scheduled across the ITV network on Sunday nights at 7.25pm[16], a key slot

in the British television schedules. Audience research in the 1960s indicated that '50 to

60 percent of the audience for most programmes come from the programme immediately

before on the same network' (Fox 1969, 11). Dubbed the 'inheritance factor', this

research suggested the 7.30pm slot as a pivotal point in the schedules for attracting an

audience that would be likely to remain for the rest of the evening's viewing (see Weldon

1971a, 6)[17]. Therefore, the placement of *The Prisoner* at this point in the schedules

suggests that the series was produced as part of a competitive *domestic* strategy to draw a

large audience for the rest of the evening's programming on the ITV network, as well as

being produced to appeal to the international (and specifically US) export market.

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[16] *The Prisoner* consisted of seventeen 50 minute episodes aired weekly between 1 October 1967 and 4 February 1968. On the Southern network, the series was screened at 7.25pm for the first twelve episodes and was then moved to a later slot of 10.05pm until the transmission of the final episode, which was once again at 7.25pm. In fact, the screening of the series was so varied across the ITV regions that it prompted Anthony Davis to comment in his 'Ad Lib' column for the *TV Times*, 'if all the regions decide to take a series – as they did with *The Prisoner* – it is difficult to see why they must not only show it at a different time on different days but in different weeks.' (1968b, 11). The problem for the ITV schedules lay in its regional structure, with different networks having responsibility for the production of a regional service.

[17] The ITA's audience research indicated that the television audience grew from around 65 percent between 6.00 and 8.00pm to around 80 percent between 8.00 and 10.00pm (*ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1961-62*, HMSO 1962, 15). Therefore, although *The Prisoner* was scheduled to begin at 7.25pm, it offered a lead into the peak viewing time in the middle of the evening.

Competing Values: Pilkington, Commercialism, and 'Serious' Television

Produced by a commercial television network at a time when the success of ITV and the

impact of both US programmes and the US export market introduced a competitive

element to British television, it would seem that *The Prisoner* is exemplary of an

increasingly commercial imperative in British television production in the 1960s. The

introduction of such a commercial ethos had been criticised at the start of the decade with

the publication in 1962 of the *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting 1960* (commonly

referred to as the Pilkington Report, after the chairman of the Committee Sir Harry

Pilkington). The Report argued that the responsibilities of a public service broadcaster

could not be reconciled with the profit motive upon which independent television had

been established in the UK.

> The [Independent Television] Authority's task is to reconcile the two objects for
>
> which independent television is constituted and organised: two objects which do
>
> not coincide and which are, in a greater or lesser degree, opposed to one another.
>
> Because the incidental object – the sale of advertising time – is the commercial
>
> interest and duty of companies, the natural inclination will be to pursue it as the
>
> main purpose. Their product is desirable advertising time. As commercial
>
> organisations they exist to create and sell that product; it is in their interest and
>
> duty as commercial undertakings to do so as successfully as they can [...]. This
>
> private objective does not coincide with the primary and essential objective, the
>
> best possible service of broadcasting. (quoted in Garnham 1978, 23)

Having established a dichotomy between the commercial incentive of independent

television (a *private* objective) and the quality of provision expected of a *public* service

broadcaster, the Report went on to cast its primary criticisms against the ITV

broadcasters. The Report established two main criteria through which to categorise the

criticisms of television received in its submissions: disquiet and dissatisfaction.

> The disquiet arrived from the view that the power of the medium to influence and
>
> persuade is immense; and from a strong feeling, amounting often to conviction,
>
> that the power was often being used as to suggest a lack of awareness of or
>
> concern about the consequences. [...] Dissatisfaction derived from the view that
>
> there was something lacking in programmes as such: a lack of programme items
>
> of this or that kind or a more general lack of quality.[18]

In both regards, 'the disquiet about and dissatisfaction with television are, [...] justly

attributed largely to the service of independent television'[19], which was criticised for

failing to recognise the full effect of television on its viewers, and not providing a fair

and reflective balance of programmes. In particular, ITV was criticised for the 'triviality'

of its programming, a term that is used in the report to refer less to the subject matter

itself than to 'the way a subject matter is approached and the manner in which it is

presented'[20]. The report opposes 'triviality' to 'serious' programming. In the late 1950s,

the BBC Secretariat had established a definition of 'serious' television as a programme

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[18] *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting 1960*, HMSO 1962, 14.
[19] ibid., 68.
[20] ibid., 34.

'whose primary intention is informational, educational or critical' (Fox 1971, 20), a

category that excluded all television drama. In the first year of commercial television in

the UK, ITV came under attack in the press for the 'retreat from culture' in its

programming, although it was gaining a larger audience share than the BBC in homes

capable of receiving both services[21]. For the BBC, 'serious' television was an important

term by which the Corporation could justify its audience loss to ITV through recourse to

the public service emphasis on the value of intellectually edifying programming over

audience ratings. The Pilkington Report largely adopts this view, examining the

percentage of peak viewing hours devoted to 'serious' programmes (excluding drama) by

the ITV and BBC, and concluding from the greater percentage on the BBC a higher

quality of service provided by that broadcaster[22]. By using the criteria of 'serious'

programming as one of the ways in which the provision of broadcasting is evaluated, the

Report is here dismissing audience ratings as an assessment of the value of a broadcasting

service. This is reiterated in the rhetoric by which it explores the 'dissatisfaction'

expressed in the submissions received by the committee.

> The themes common to nearly all those submissions which expressed
>
> dissatisfaction was that programme items were far too often devised with the
>
> object of seeking, at whatever cost in quality or variety, the largest possible
>
> audience; and that, to attain this object, the items nearly always appealed to a low

---

[21] See the *ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1955-56* for an account of the ITA's response to these criticisms (1956, 13).
[22] See Caughie (2000, 82-3) for a discussion of the Pilkington Report's criticisms of the notion that television broadcasting should 'give the public what it wants'.

level of public taste. This was not, of course, to say that all items which attracted

large audiences were poor. But in far too many the effect was to produce a

passively acquiescent or even indifferent audience rather than an actively

interested one. There was a lack of variety and originality, an adherence to what

was "safe"; and an unwillingness to try challenging, demanding and, still less,

uncomfortable subject matter.[23]

While not dismissing the possibility of producing 'quality' programming that attracts a

large audience, the Pilkington Report is here criticising a broadcasting ethos based

primarily (and above all other considerations) on seeking 'the largest possible audience'.

In doing so, the Report makes a series of value judgements: that seeking a large audience

often leads to an appeal to 'a low level of public taste'; that in doing do, such

programmes produce a passive and indifferent, rather than an active, viewer; and that this

ethos leads to undemanding, unchallenging and comfortable programming. In doing so,

the Report casts the responsibilities of the public service broadcaster in terms reminiscent

of the political avant garde, advocating a television service that creates an active, critical

and engaged viewer through the production of challenging and experimental

programming. As John Caughie argues,

> [The Pilkington Report] echoed in liberal form the appeal of the political avant
>
> garde in theory and practice for Brecht's "active spectator" who had not left his

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[23] *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting 1960*, HMSO 1962, 16.

brain with his hat at the door. For Pilkington, this imperative was tied to the moral responsibilities of citizenship, of a citizen who has the rights of choice but also the responsibilities of judgement (Caughie 2000, 83).

Caughie goes on to argue that the discursive rhetoric of the Pilkington Report gave the broadcasters a 'licence to controversy' (2000, 86) that facilitated the rise of a 'Golden Age' of British television[24]. For Caughie this is a Golden Age of television that can be situated directly in relation to the developments in European modernist theatre, literature and cinema over the 1950s and 1960s, and that was epitomised by the politically motivated and formally experimental drama documentaries of Ken Loach and Tony Garnett. In the plays that they produced for the BBC's *Wednesday Play* strand, Tony Garnett and Ken Loach challenged the dominant form and subject matter of television drama at the time. They shot on film and made extensive use of location shooting, while plays such as 'Up the Junction' used both actors and real people in its fictional portrayal of working class life in Clapham Junction. Madeleine MacMurraugh-Kavanagh argues that these dramas stem from the recognition that the power of television as a medium to affect its viewers made it a powerful political tool through which social change could be enacted.

Increasingly, the perception was growing that if television as a medium was an instrument custom-made for the transmission of direct or subliminal propaganda,

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[24] The 'Golden Age' of British television is generally understood to run from around 1965 to 1975.

then television drama was its chief agent. (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 1997a, 369)

For MacMurraugh-Kavanagh, central to this development was a re-articulation of the BBC's legal requirement as a public service broadcaster to retain from expressing an opinion on matters of current affairs.

A number of writers, producers and directors within the Corporation began to perceive that objectivity was an impossibility given the realities of television transmission and reception: the neutral image could not exist (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 1997b, 247-8)

In these discourses, the 'serious' dramas of Ken Loach and Tony Garnett are placed at the centre of a 'Golden Age' of television, in which the aesthetic and social responsibilities of television broadcasting are united through series intended to 'rivet the audience with disturbing truths, reflect a society in crisis, shatter form and redefine content' (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 1997a, 375). This is what Caughie terms 'serious' television drama[25], legitimated by and responding to Pilkington's call for an aesthetically and socially responsible form of television broadcasting in the UK, which as Caughie suggests,

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[25] Caughie's definition of 'serious' television differs from that discussed earlier in that it is a theoretically elaborated term that centres on television drama. However, in using the term, Caughie recognises its associations with a *legitimate* form of television within public culture (2000, 4).

leaves us in no doubt that the values and responsibilities which are being laid down for broadcasting are not simply cultural or aesthetic; they are profoundly moral. This is the burden of responsibility, and it cannot be fulfilled with material which is safe and comfortable. Broadcasting is serious, and to be serious it must be challenging, controversial, and even transgressive. (Caughie 2000, 84)

For Caughie it is the 'serious' dramas of Tony Garnett and Ken Loach that engage directly with the relationship between the aesthetic and moral responsibilities of television broadcasters, both in their subject matter (dealing with social deprivation, abortion, homelessness) and in their formal construction (experimenting with the relationship between form and subjectivity).

In reconnecting an analysis of television drama with the cultural history of modernism and the avant garde, Caughie is keen to complicate the dichotomies between 'high' and 'low' culture. The serious drama with which he is concerned has occupied a difficult position in British television studies, which has tended to focus on popular forms. As Caughie suggests, 'for television studies, "serious drama" was [...] uncertain territory, caught between the validation of "low" culture and an edginess around television's particular forms of participation in "high" culture' (2000, 5). The problematic position for 'serious' drama, which as Caughie points out 'is an area of television drama which is already taken seriously within public culture' (2000, 4), stems in part from a suspicion within television studies of traditional systems of value. While Caughie may be correct in asserting that for television studies 'television drama came to mean popular drama'

(2000, 6), in the same move there remains a general reluctance within the discipline to engage with questions of value[26]. Yet by reasserting the division between 'popular' and 'serious', Caughie in some ways re-articulates the aesthetic divide between these two terms, implying that it is serious drama that can be situated within an aesthetic tradition of modernism and the avant garde, and that it is in serious drama that we can trace the response to the call for formal and political experimentation in television in the 1960s.

While Caughie is pertinent in his insistence that the terms 'serious' and 'popular' still hold cultural currency despite the suspicion within which these terms might be held within television studies itself, I want to suggest that in the 1960s, it is around the very definition of these terms that the debates surrounding the production of television were enacted. In doing so, I want to argue that the wider debates about modernity and the avant garde within which Caughie places the 'serious' television of the time are also central to an understanding of a 'popular' television series such as The Prisoner, and in particular the series' use of the fantastic. The term 'popular' is as problematic here as the term 'serious' is to Caughie. I do not wish to re-assert the aesthetic divide that the use of the term threatens, yet, as Caughie suggests, it is necessary to recognise that the plays of Tony Garnett and Ken Loach occupy a different position from a series like The Prisoner, both in terms of their context of production, and in terms of the academic and cultural discourses within which they have been understood since.

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[26] Jason Jacobs (2001) has recently addressed this issue in an article that argues for the aesthetic value of mid-1990s US television series such as ER, The X-Files and Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

This difficulty stems from the complex historical relationship between modernism and mass culture. Andreas Huyssen argues that 'modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture' (Huyssen 1988, vii). It is this division between modernism ('high') and mass ('low') culture that, Huyssen suggests, is central to understanding the culture of modernity. Far from consistently upholding this divide, Huyssen argues that the culture of modernity has presented a challenge to the established dichotomies between high and low culture, particularly at the turn of the 20th century and during the decades following World War II (1988, viii). In exploring this blurring between high art and mass culture, Huyssen turns to the historical avant garde. Challenging the conflation of avant gardism and modernism, Huyssen argues that in contrast to the modernist critique of mass culture, 'the historical avant garde aimed at developing an alternative *relationship between high art and mass culture' (1988*, viii). The distinctions that Andreas Huyssen draws between modernism, modernity, and the historical avant garde are particularly valuable here in allowing us to explore the differences between the 'popular' form of *The Prisoner* and the 'serious' drama of Loach and Garnett. As Caughie convincingly demonstrates, the legitimate form of 'serious' television can be usefully situated within a tradition of *modernism*. Yet at the same time, in responding to the call for thematically and formally challenging television drama, both these 'serious' dramas and the more 'popular' form of *The Prisoner* can be located within a broader culture of *modernity* concerned precisely with negotiating the relationship between 'high' and 'mass' culture. By situating *The Prisoner* within this historical and

theoretical context I want to explore how this negotiation can be understood within the commercial environment of independent television production.

Serious Entertainment: Redefining 'Serious' Television

The primary impact of the Pilkington Report, in effect, was to set the tone of the debate about broadcasting for the next decade; a debate that went on to have a significant impact on the production of British television over the 1960s. Joan Bakewell summarised the crux of these discourses for the two British broadcasting institutions succinctly when she wrote in 1970,

> the issues of television that concern the broadcaster are related to the structures of
> the two organisations: the BBC is too big, its schedules are as concerned with
> ratings are those of ITV, it is sacrificing the old Reithian values of public service
> to business streamlining, and so losing its sense of purpose. The ITV structure is
> wasteful, uncoordinated and lacking in any philosophy at all other than pleasing
> its public (Bakewell, in Bakewell and Garnham 1970, 308)

For the ITV broadcasters in particular the difficulty lay in negotiating the call to experimentation in the Pilkington Report with the need to attract audiences in order to sell advertising space within its schedules. Tom Margerison, Chief Executive of London Weekend Television states of the ITV network,

we are automatically the popular service. We have to be in order to get the

audience to attract the advertisers. If we don't, we have no money to make

programmes. There is no other source of revenue. Therefore people like me have

always to look at ratings. What we hope to be able to do, [...] is to improve the

standard of programmes that achieve high ratings. (Margerison, quoted in

Bakewell and Garnham 1970, 273)

Here Margerison articulates the key problematic for ITV broadcasters in the 1960s: the

need to combine 'standards' and 'ratings'. Although the recommendations in the

Pilkington Report for the restructuring of ITV were largely rejected in the subsequent

1963 Television Act (see Sendall 1983), the discourses set up by the Report about the

relationship between ratings and quality continued to be central, particularly for the ITV

broadcasters. The ITA responded to the criticisms of the Pilkington Report by adopting

its evaluative criteria of 'serious' television, and between 1961-62 and 1965-66, the *ITA:*

Annual Report and Accounts included a section devoted to 'The Development of Serious

Programmes' across the ITV network[27].

However, although the ITA conformed to the definition of 'serious' programmes in the

Pilkington Report, the *ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1961-62* indicates some

dissatisfaction with the term, and with the exclusion of drama from the classification of

'serious' television.

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[27] The *ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1965-66* notes an increase in the number of hours devoted to serious programmes from 19 percent in October 1956 to 35 percent in March 1966 (1966, 13).

The classification of television programmes into "informative" and "entertaining", or "serious" and "light", presents its difficulties, and the terms certainly cannot be taken to correspond with "valuable" and "worthless". A play is "entertainment", but it may have a purpose more serious and a value more significant than, for instance, a poor political discussion.[28]

Here the ITA Report is engaging precisely with the relationship set up in the Pilkington Report between 'serious' television and aesthetic and social value. Using television drama as an indicative example, the ITA here suggests that entertainment and a serious purpose and value can be contained within one programme. Such an argument is taken up almost a decade later by Paul Fox (Controller of BBC 1) in an article in the *Listener* responding to criticisms of 'popularity' in BBC 1's programming (Fox 1971). In defending the BBC 1 schedules, Fox challenges the established definition of 'serious' television, arguing that it should be re-evaluated to include television drama. Fox goes on to criticise the generally lower cultural status afforded to drama series (as opposed to plays) claiming that 'were *Softly, Softly* not a series, then most of its episodes would be acclaimed by the critics' (Fox 1971, 22).

While suggesting the increasing recognition of television drama (including television series) as a site of aesthetic and social value in television programming, these debates

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[28] *ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1961-62*, HMSO 1962, 13.

also reveal the conflicting position occupied by the ITV broadcasters in aligning their

commercial imperative with their social responsibilities as public service broadcasters.

This is apparent in the *ITA: Annual Report and Accounts 1967-68*, which states,

> it became increasingly obvious, too, that the distinction made in the past between
>
> "plays" (to which great prestige attaches) and series and serials (which are
>
> thought of as the bread-and-butter of television) is often unrealistic. The "single
>
> play" may present one of the greatest challenges to the writer, the producer, and
>
> the director, but it is by no means clear that the audience derives the greatest
>
> satisfaction from it. Three of the most interesting ventures of the year fell outside
>
> the ambit of the conventional play. Rediffusion's *A Man of our Times* showed
>
> that there is no inherent conflict between the drama of ideas and character, and the
>
> serial form. In *Inheritance* Granada married skill in creating historical
>
> atmosphere to a technique that enabled television cameras to capture the sweeping
>
> horizons of the Yorkshire moors. ATV's *The Prisoner* provoked more critical
>
> controversy than is usual for a genre series of this kind: both devotees and critics
>
> were united in praise of the production, and it is regrettable that it had to be
>
> shown here in monochrome, rather than in the original colour in which it was
>
> made. (1968, 23)

The ITA here attempts to validate the position of commercial television within the terms

of aesthetic value adopted by the Pilkington Report. Yet in doing so, the ITA complicate

these very criteria by challenging the aesthetic distinction between plays and series, and

valuing the 'satisfaction' of the viewer over the challenge presented to the producer. In

the case of *The Prisoner*, the aesthetic value placed in the 'critical controversy' provoked

by the series (which implies that the series challenged viewers), is seen to be in conflict

with its identification as a 'genre series'. The need to distinguish *The Prisoner* from

other 'genre series of this kind' in order to assert its aesthetic value is indicative of the

difficult position that the independent broadcasters were attempting to negotiate at this

time. As both a 'genre series' and a critically controversial drama, *The Prisoner* straddles

the conflicting aesthetic and commercial demands on independent television, and in

doing so, the series occupies a position that cannot be easily reconciled within traditional

criteria of aesthetic value.

Marketing *The Prisoner*: Challenging/Formulaic Entertainment

The Prisoner was therefore produced in an environment within which the relationship

between *standards* and *ratings*, *seriousness* and *entertainment* were central to the

production of television, and in which the cultural and social responsibilities of the

television broadcaster could not be understood as separate. These debates had a

particular resonance for independent television, which had come under criticism for

neglecting the powerful role of television and pandering to a 'mass' audience with

'trivial' programming. However, the difficulty remained for the ITV broadcasters, who

relied on the sale of advertising (and increasingly, the sale of programmes abroad) for

their funding, to negotiate a position between the criticisms of the Pilkington Report and

the financial viability of their television service. Television drama occupied a particular

place within this problematic, suggesting a potential site in which the apparently

conflicting attributes of 'entertaining' and 'serious' television could be united within one programme.

If we look at the marketing of *The Prisoner* we can see a complex dialectic of value that attempts to negotiate this difficult terrain. ITC's promotional material for *The Prisoner* integrates an address to the 'active' viewer with the familiar and pleasurable expectations of the generic action-adventure series. It describes *The Prisoner* as,

> the most challenging and unusual series ever filmed for television, devised by Patrick McGoohan himself. It is a series with depth: stories that will make viewers think, and, at the same time, will keep them on the edge of their seats in excitement as the Prisoner resists every physical and mental effort to break him. There is mounting suspense as each new dramatic story is unfolded ... stories of one man's tremendous, unflinching battle for survival as an individual in a macabre world in which every move is watched by electronic eyes and in which all his neighbours are suspect. Where is the village? Who are his captors? Who are his fellow prisoners? What country is he in? Viewing appeal which is simultaneously electrifying, controversial and gripping. (ITC's promotional material reproduced in Carrazé and Oswald 1990, 220-21).

This text is accompanied by images of McGoohan and of the unusual setting of the Village. Although McGoohan is primarily shown in action poses (running, turning, crouching) in all of these images his face displays resilience and thoughtful intelligence.

As with the text, therefore, these images function to integrate the promise of action with a depth of meaning implicit in McGoohan's facial expression. While *The Prisoner* offers excitement and adventure, it is clearly presented as 'serious' (rather than frivolous) in its address[29]. What is promoted here is a series that is both cerebral and emotional in its appeal, combining the 'excitement' of the action-adventure drama with 'stories that will make viewers think'.

The press publicity for *The Prisoner* displays a similar negotiation of 'seriousness' and 'entertainment' in promoting the series. The *TV Times'* publicity for *The Prisoner* prior to its first week of transmission constructs it as an action-adventure series that also contains 'food for thought'.

The village is the ultimate in indoctrination and the subjection of the individual. The establishment has taken over entirely. Individual freedom is dead. People no longer want to think for themselves, even if they are capable of doing so. The Prisoner of the title is the one man who is resisting. And freedom of the individual, one feels, is what McGoohan is driving at. There is a second theme: The Prisoner's efforts to escape. This provides the suspense and excitement of a physical nature that one associates with a man like McGoohan[30]

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[29] This is a key distinction between *The Prisoner* and its contemporary action-adventure spy series, *The Avengers*, whose promotional material poses its smiling central characters in playful settings.
[30] 'New on Southern this Week', *TV Times*, 30 September – 6 October 1967, 4.

The emphasis on McGoohan (both in the press articles surrounding *The Prisoner* and in

the ITC's promotional material) functions to situate McGoohan as the central creative

force behind the series. *The Prisoner* was produced by McGoohan's production

company Everyman Films Ltd for ITC[31], and McGoohan gets a sole credit as Executive

Producer, as well as starring in every episode, and writing and directing a number of

others[32]. At a time when single-authored plays were considered the aesthetic peak of

television drama, the contributions of other writers, directors and producers to the series

are overlooked in its promotion in favour of constructing *The Prisoner* as a 'single-

authored series'. In a move typical of the publicity surrounding the series at the time of

its transmission, a *TV Times* article promoting the series for its first week clearly equates

the formal experimentation of the series with the individual creativity of McGoohan.

> McGoohan believes that he is breaking into completely new television territory –
>
> in presentation and stories alike. The idea is his own. He is also the executive
>
> producer. He has taken over the direction of many of the sequences (but without
>
> giving himself a screen credit for this). He has buried himself in the cutting-
>
> rooms during the editing of the episodes. And he has worked on every script,
>
> irrespective of who may have written it.[33]

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[31] Everyman Films Ltd was formed in 1960 by McGoohan, David Tomblin (producer, writer and director on *The Prisoner*) and others.

[32] Patrick McGoohan was writer and director on the following episodes of *The Prisoner*: 'Free for All' (written under the pseudonym Paddy Fitz), 'Once Upon a Time', and 'Fall Out'. He also directed 'Many Happy Returns' and 'A Change of Mind' (both under the pseudonym Joseph Serf).

[33] 'New on Southern this Week', *TV Times*, 30 September – 6 October 1967, 4.

The construction of McGoohan as the single creative force behind *The Prisoner* is used to

validate this commercially produced action-adventure series as 'the most challenging and

unusual series ever filmed for television' (ITC's promotional material, reproduced in

Carrazé and Oswald 1990, 220-1) by exploiting the associations between individual

authorship and aesthetic value. Crucially, however, aesthetic value is here utilised as a

marketing strategy, rather than as a critical evaluation of the series. This suggests that the

discourses of value apparent in the Pilkington Report are being utilised in order to attract

a large audience. Note the similarity in language, in the emphasis on the 'unusual' and

the 'challenging' in the ITC's promotional material for the series. By using this language

to promote *The Prisoner* this marketing strategy suggests that such terms of aesthetic

value were not anathema to an appeal to a mass audience, and could actually be used to

attract viewers to the series.

However, it is important to recognise that this appeal to aesthetic value works in tandem

with a strong emphasis on the generic elements of *The Prisoner* as a series and

McGoohan as a star. The generic and the aesthetically valuable are not opposed here, but

are integrated, particularly through the exploitation of McGoohan's star persona.

McGoohan's star persona functions to integrate an appeal to the new and unusual

(promised through the promotion of McGoohan as the central creative force behind the

series) with the familiar appeal of McGoohan's previous action-adventure roles.

McGoohan's professional integrity is used to promote *The Prisoner* as a programme that

uses the form of the action-adventure series to address controversial material in a serious

manner. McGoohan came to fame through his performance as the protagonist John

Drake in *Danger Man*, a character who was a tough international spy with an unwavering

moral integrity. In an article about McGoohan in the *TV Times*, Anthony Davis writes,

> He has declared his unwillingness to play TV parts he regards as immoral and
>
> barred gratuitous gunplay and brutality from his programmes because "children
>
> may be watching" (Davis 1967, 30)

This comment picks up on the anxieties in this period concerning the effects of television,

particularly on the young[34]. The action-adventure series is central to these debates,

frequently criticised for its amoral representation of violence[35]. By referencing

McGoohan's professional integrity, this article constructs McGoohan as an 'action' star

who transcends the potential amorality of the action-adventure series by taking the effects

of television seriously. This functions to market *The Prisoner* as a drama in which the

entertainment of the action-adventure series and the intellectually stimulating address of

'serious' television are combined. It is through the integrated appeal to the generic

elements of the action-adventure series with challenging and unusual material authored

by a single creative author that this marketing strategy attempts to challenge the aesthetic

dichotomies between 'popular' and 'serious' television. Rather both of these elements

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[34] In 1958 the Nuffield Foundation published the results of the first major survey of television's effects on children, which was followed by a joint BBC and ITV committee who published their findings in 1960. In 1964 the Television Research Committee's first working paper considered *The Effects of Mass Communication, with Special Reference to Television* (Halloran, 1964), and in 1966 Mary Whitehouse's pressure group, the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, held their first convention (Whitehouse, 1967).

[35] See for example Denis Harley's article in the *TV Times* in which a psychologist gives advice on the representation of 'acceptable' violence in television action-adventure series (1967, 14), and George Melly's review articles in *The Observer* which frequently express concern about the violence in television series (1967, 25; 1968, 28).

are located within one text in a promotional strategy designed to appeal to a 'majority' audience.

Disturbing Genre: the Use of Generic and Socio-cultural Verisimilitude in *The Prisoner*

In using the action-adventure series as a basis for the production of 'challenging' and 'experimental' television drama, *The Prisoner* both relies upon and disrupts the expectations of the action-adventure/spy series. In many ways *The Prisoner* adopts the conventions of the 1960s television spy series, that had become increasingly prevalent in British and US television in the mid- to late 1960s with series such as *I Spy*, *The Man from UNCLE*, *The Avengers* and *Callan*[36]. These series pitted their spy protagonists against villainous individuals and organisations, combining elements of the detective and thriller genres in the use of intriguing narratives and action-packed denouements. As Cynthia W. Walker argues, the television spy series is extremely difficult to categorise generically because of the fluid boundaries between spy dramas and other television genres, particularly the detective and thriller genres (1997, 1563). However, she suggests that the television spy series of the 1960s tended to share three central characteristics: the presence of a government or quasi-government agency in the life of the protagonist; villains (often foreign) whose intentions are political or global; an expansion of the plot beyond the local or national (ibid.).

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[36] See Worland (1994) for an examination of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and the 1960s television spy series.

In its first episode *The Prisoner* promises to fulfil all of these generic expectations. The opening credits depict Number Six driving into London and entering a building that carries the generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude of a government office. He resigns forcefully and returns to his London apartment to pack his bags. However, before he can leave, he is gassed and awakes in the exotic and multicultural location of the Village where he goes on to be questioned for the 'information' he holds. This narrative fulfils Walker's characteristics of the 1960s television spy series, and functions alongside the associations of McGoohan with the spy drama (from his previous starring role in *Danger Man*) to suggest a particular narrative interpretation. Number Six is a British spy who is kidnapped and taken to a mysterious location by a villainous organisation intent on gaining his government secrets.

However, although *The Prisoner* sets up these indicators of generic expectation, they are consistently undercut and unfulfilled. The identity of the organisation from which Number Six has resigned, and the position he held there, is never confirmed by the series. Furthermore, while the Village is certainly populated by people from a range of different countries, the speech, apparel, and demeanour of its controllers replicates that of the established institutions of British society – the public school boy, the civil servant, the politician, even the spy. Essentially, all the references to the spy drama within the series are *implied* rather than asserted. The Village *may* be run by a villainous international organisation or by the British government itself. Number Six *may* be a spy concealing secret information. The Village *may* be set in an exotic foreign location. Yet, at the same time, none of these readings is confirmed. It is never revealed who runs the Village,

where it is located, why the Village authorities kidnapped Number Six, or what information they wanted from him. The answers to the questions that Number Six demands in the opening credit sequence – "Where am I? What do you want? Whose side are you on? Who are you? Who is Number One?" – are never offered to either the viewer or Number Six over the course of the series[37].

Part of this stems from *The Prisoner*'s inversion of the conventions of the action-adventure series. *The Prisoner* adopts the typical structure of the action-adventure series, with a narrative premise that can be repeated every week and little or no continuing story line running across the episodes. Each episode therefore follows the same narrative structure[38]. After the credit sequence, the scenario that will face Number Six is introduced, ranging from his meeting with a new and sympathetic character such as the Rook in 'Checkmate', to the development of a dream machine in 'A, B and C'. As Number Six engages in the scenario a significant event occurs that pushes him towards an act of rebellion. For example in 'Checkmate' Number Six discovers how to distinguish between the true prisoners and the disguised 'guardians' of the Village. As a consequence of this event, Number Six engages in an act of rebellion, either attempting to escape or subvert the power of the Village, that involves a number of 'physical' action sequences. Regardless of his efforts, however, each episode ends with an act of reversion, returning Number Six to his original captive state in the Village.

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[37] The final episode of the series, 'Fall Out', implies that the Village is actually run by Number Six himself. However, as I will discuss below, this is a highly surreal denouement that offers more questions than it answers.

[38] The exception to this is the last five episodes whose disruption of *The Prisoner*'s format will be discussed in detail below.

In structure, this format broadly follows the conventions of the action-adventure series

that had become increasingly prominent in British television over the 1960s. Each week

the status quo is disrupted, allowing the hero to engage in a number of exciting action

sequences. Yet in order for the series to repeat its familiar narrative pattern every week,

events must be fully resolved by the end of the episode, reverting to the status quo of the

opening[39]. What is unusual about *The Prisoner*'s series format is that it inverts the basic

premise of the traditional action-adventure narrative. Thus, rather than beginning from a

position of safety, *The Prisoner* begins and ends by entrapping its hero in a narrative

format that does not provide the space for him to escape. This disruption of the basic

heroic principle of the action-adventure protagonist particularly worried CBS executive

Michael Dann who feared that the US public would not identify with a central character

who failed each week (see Rakoff 1998, 32). Therefore, although *The Prisoner* positions

itself broadly within the narrative conventions of the action-adventure series – pitting its

skilled hero, through a series of action sequences, against a powerful organisation run by

apparently villainous individuals – each of these elements is undercut. While Number

Six displays all the physical ability and mental ingenuity expected of an action hero, he

never succeeds in his plans to escape or to uncover the location of the Village and the

identity of his captors[40].

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[39] As with be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the narrative structure of the action-adventure series alters significantly by the 1990s to allow for greater narrative continuity and character development across the series as a whole.

[40] Although Number Six does go on to subtly subvert the power of the Village in later episodes (such as in 'Hammer into Anvil', where Number Six forces Number Two to resign), this is a small victory compared to the aversion of evil regularly carried out by the protagonists in other contemporary action-adventure series.

The series format of *The Prisoner* is therefore essentially premised on the maintenance of ambiguity – Number Six must remain captive, and the location and purpose of the Village must remain hidden from him. This ambiguity is reinforced in the visual landscape of the Village in which each episode of *The Prisoner* is set. The exterior shots of the Village were shot on location in the village of Portmeirion in Wales. Built by the architect Clough Williams-Ellis as a 'living museum' (Williams-Ellis, quoted in Gray 1967, 19), Portmeirion brings together replicas and reconstructions of European architectural styles from a range of historical periods in a bricolage of historical and national cultural signifiers that appears to transcend time and space (fig. 3.1). The spatial and temporal disorientation of this exterior setting is continued across the design of the series. Number Six's house in the Village is replete with the fabrics and furnishings of a traditional English city flat, while the Village store is dressed as a typical country village shop. These differing signifiers of traditional English life are carried through into the costume design. The Village authority figures dress in the traditional clothes of the British upper class (suits, school scarves, walking sticks, bowler hats and so on), while the villagers wear colourful outfits reminiscent of the British holiday camp (a reference solidified by the public announcements regularly transmitted through the Village tannoys). These signifiers of traditional British culture are contrasted against the interiors of the Village control rooms that are full of visual signifiers of 1960s pop culture, with projected images of larva lamps and spherical curved chairs associated with futuristic technological sophistication. The traditionally furnished entrance hall to Number Two's house leads to a technologically futuristic control room, where Number Two's public school boy attire is contrasted against the curved chairs and silver surfaces (figs. 3.2-3.4).
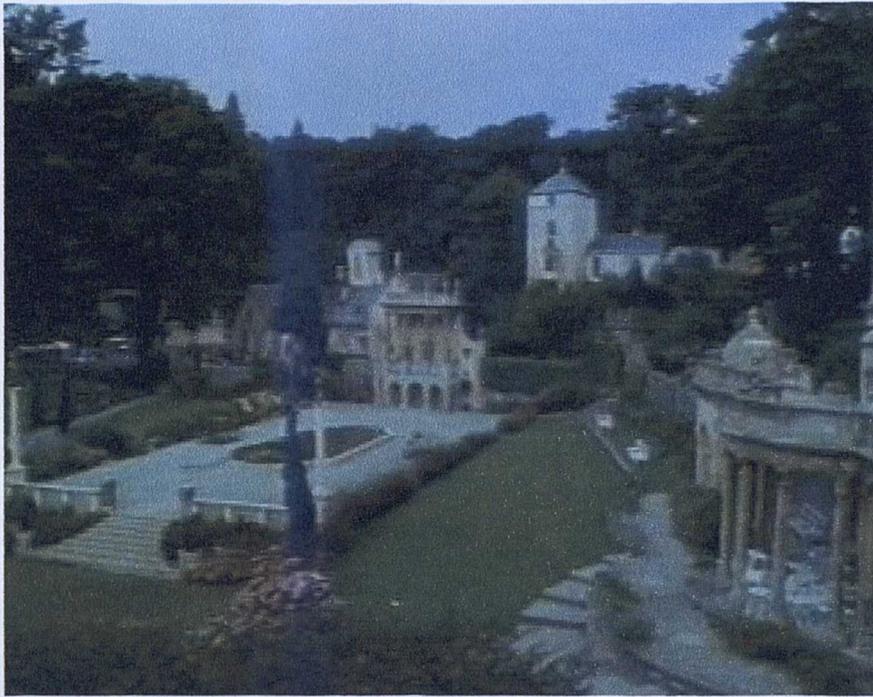
Fig. 3.1. *The Prisoner*'s exteriors are filmed in the village of Portmeirion, with its bricolage of architectural styles.

Fig. 3.2. The entrance to Number Two's house is traditionally furnished.

Fig. 3.3. However, this traditional interior leads to a futuristically designed control room.

Fig. 3.4. The futuristic interior of the control room is combined with the costuming of Number Two (Guy Doleman) in the traditional attire of the British public school boy.

These rooms are replete with technological gadgetry that defies existing scientific

knowledge: a 'mindswap' machine, a computer that controls through subliminal

messages, a spherical ball that prevents escape from the Village by rendering escapees

unconscious. No scientific explanation is offered for these technological marvels. These

objects are deliberately constructed as fantastic machines that defy the conventions of

socio-cultural verisimilitude. The combination of these contrasting signifiers imbues the

visual landscape of the Village with a pervasive sense of temporal and spatial

disorientation.

However, this stylistic device also carries a generic association with the spy series,

particularly apparent in the James Bond film series and in television series such as *The*

Avengers, which frequently combined signifies of traditional British life with a

fascination with technical gadgetry and scientific sophistication. What differs in *The*

Prisoner is the function of these futuristic elements. James Chapman argues that the use

of the 'fantastic' in *The Avengers* extends the basic concerns of the series' thriller

narrative.

[*The Avengers'*] bizarre and fantastic plots represent in extreme form one of the

underlying assumptions of the thriller genre: that chaos and anarchy may erupt at

any moment from beneath the "thin protection of civilisation" (Chapman 2000,

43)

For Chapman, therefore, rather than inverting the generic expectations of the thriller genre in its representation of the fantastic, *The Avengers* pushes them to an extreme in order to heighten the underlying assumptions of the genre. By contrast, *The Prisoner* does not merely introduce the 'chaos and anarchy' of the fantastic into the socio-cultural verisimilitude of a stable and recognisable world. Rather, it situates its bricolage of socio-cultural and generic signifiers within the culturally and historically eclectic landscape of Portmeirion to create a visual landscape in which the veneer of 'civilisation' exists only as an effect. This is a world in which the rules of socio-cultural verisimilitude and generic expectation can no longer be relied upon.

The effect here is to create the 'hesitation' at the centre of Todorov's three conditions of the literary fantastic.

> First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work [...] Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations (Todorov 1975, 33)

The Prisoner creates a fictional world 'of living persons' (we are not invited to interpret Number Six as being of another world), while not offering the reassurance of either a

supernatural or a natural explanation for what is represented. This hesitation is also experienced by Number Six, and is established as the key narrative premise of the series, in which Number Six is engaged with attempting to understand his environment. Finally, while as Chris Gregory (1997) argues, *The Prisoner* can be understood allegorically, the series does not offer a clear basis upon which this narrative interpretation can be made. In its use and disruption of generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude, *The Prisoner* creates a fictional world that invites hesitation between 'fantastic', 'generic' and 'allegorical' explanations for the events depicted.

The Dialectical Series: Form, Narrative and Subjectivity

While Caughie argues that the avant garde finds its clearest expression in television in the drama documentaries of Ken Loach and Tony Garnet, I want to suggest that it can also be traced in the disruption of narrative and socio-cultural verisimilitude in *The Prisoner*. To elaborate on his exploration of modernism in 1960s television, Caughie turns to Troy Kennedy Martin's polemical article 'Nats go home: first statement of a new drama for television', published in the theatre journal *Encore* in 1964[41]. Kennedy Martin calls for a television drama that 'contains a new idea of form, new punctuation and new style. Something which can be applied to mass audience viewing' (Martin 1964, 18). He focused his criticisms on what he saw as a prevalent and institutionalised naturalism in British television drama, characterised by the centrality of dialogue to story-telling, the use of natural time (in which studio time equates with drama time), and a visual style in

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[41] All references here are to the reprint of Troy Kennedy Martin's article in *Screenwriter* in Spring 1964.

which the close-up dominates (1964, 19). For Kennedy Martin, this is a naturalism that visually evolved from the techniques of Hollywood filmmaking premised on using the close-up to emotionally involve the viewer with the predicament of the character. What Kennedy Martin argues for is a new drama in which the director exploits mise-en-scene, lighting, design and montage (and he is particularly aware here of the potential for shooting television drama on film) 'to exploit the total and absolute objectivity of the television camera' (1964, 19). Here, Kennedy Martin is not opposed to audience involvement, but argues that it must 'stimulate mind and imagination' and 'directly disturb the senses' (1964, 23), and that to achieve this, the director must exploit the possibilities of montage. He states, 'real montage demands total viewer interest and if it is good enough obtains total involvement of an emotional kind' (ibid.).

In his elaboration of what an 'experimental' television drama might look like, Kennedy Martin's concern for the impact of form on the subjectivity of the viewer seems to pick up precisely on the debates raised by Pilkington about the relationship between the aesthetic and moral responsibilities of television broadcasters. Essentially, the television drama that Kennedy Martin proposes here is one that recognises that form and affect are intricately related, and that consequently frames its call for a formally experimental 'new television drama' in terms of engaging an audience intellectually and emotionally. While we might question the clear association made by Kennedy Martin between form and affect (see Caughie 2000, 106-8 for a discussion of these debates in cultural studies), what Kennedy Martin's polemical article reveals is an engagement with the political project of the historical avant garde. As Andreas Huyssen points out, the avant garde can

be historically linked to political radicalism, positioning art as 'crucial to the transformation of society' (1988, 7). In attempting to reinvigorate art as a political force that offered a threat to advanced capitalism, the avant garde movements at the turn of the 20th century worked in opposition to the traditions of bourgeois art that had developed during the 19th century. In doing so, avant garde artists such as Marcel Duchamp attempted to destroy 'the traditional art work's aura, that aura of authenticity and uniqueness that constituted the work's distance from life and that required contemplation and immersion on the part of the spectator' (Huyssen 1988, 10). While Huyssen recognises that artists working within the historical avant garde developed differing strategies to achieve this objective, he argues that central to the avant garde's political project is an attempt to change the mode of reception of art (1988, 14). This is what Kennedy Martin calls for in his article: a politically engaged drama that overturns the dominant form of television drama in order to challenge the established mode of reception of television drama.

The visual style of *The Prisoner* is characterised precisely by the expressive use of mise-en-scene, composition and montage that Kennedy Martin describes. From the opening title sequence, the series showcases the narrative centrality of the montage of images and music. This rapidly edited opening condenses the narrative premise of the series into a three-minute sequence in which dialogue is absent, used only in voice-over once Number Six arrives at the Village (figs. 3.5-3.10). The sequence opens with a loud crack of thunder against the image of dark storm clouds, followed by a rapid cut to a long straight road. As an open-topped sports car drives towards the camera, the heavily syncopated

Fig. 3.5. The credit sequence for *The Prisoner* begins with a shot of clouds and a loud thunderclap.

Fig. 3.6. Cut to a long shot as a car speeds towards the camera.
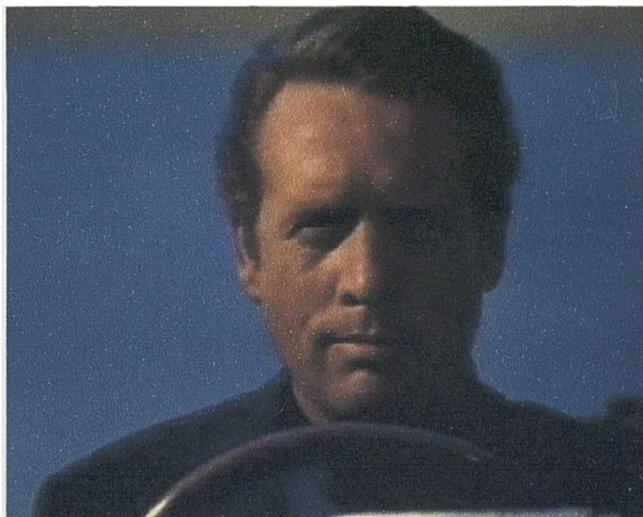
Fig. 3.7. Cut to a close-up of the driver's face.

Fig. 3.8. Cut to a low static shot as the car speeds by.

Fig. 3.9. Rapid cut to a fast panning shot over the top of the car.

Fig. 3.10. Rapid cut to a panning shot as the car speeds past the camera.

title theme gradually fades in, creating an immediate association between sound and image. What follows is a rapidly edited sequence that draws attention to the composition of the shots and the movement of the camera. This montage of shots - a close-up of the driver's face; a low static shot as the car speeds past; a panning close-up from the front to the back of the car as the car continues to speed forward; a mid-shot from the road as the camera pans to follow the passing car – functions primarily to showcase the series' visual sophistication. The rhythmic associations between image and music, the use of unusual camera angles, and rapid editing all clearly signify *The Prisoner* as a series in which composition and montage play a primary narrative function. From its opening episode *The Prisoner* establishes a visual style in which mise-en-scene and montage carry as much narrative and emotive significance as dialogue and plot. When Number Six first arrives in the Village in episode one, 'Arrival', a sequence of shots depicts him climbing to the top of a bell-tower to survey his new surroundings. Here jump cuts of McGoohan's concerned face are combined with shots of the Village in a rapidly edited sequence that expresses the character's frustration and entrapment. Such sequences appear to fulfil Kennedy Martin's call for a drama in which the camera is freed from shooting dialogue and the structure is freed from natural time, and offers the potential for viewer involvement by mirroring Number Six's emotional state of mind.

However, while *The Prisoner* is certainly constructed to involve the viewer emotionally in the predicament of its protagonist, it also consistently threatens the ontological security of the audience's viewing position by conflating subjective and objective points of view. The Village is a site in which nothing is secret. Hidden cameras survey every area

relaying the images to large screens in the Village control rooms. These screens by which the Village authorities monitor the activities of the prisoners are repeatedly equated with the television screen upon which the viewer is watching. As Chris Gregory suggests, 'the use of screens-within-screens represents a commentary on the relationship between the viewer and the television screen itself' (1997, 48). For example, in episode 11, 'It's Your Funeral', the conventional shot-reverse-shot pattern as a woman enters Number Six's house is subverted as the camera zooms out to reveal the Supervisor and Number Two watching the image on a screen in the control room. After a rapid cut to a close-up of the Supervisor watching the woman, the scene reverts to the conventional shot pattern until once again the camera zooms out to reveal the watchers half way through the scene. This blurring of the viewer's screen and the control room's screen implicate the viewer in the voyeuristic activities of the Village authorities by undermining the objectivity of the camera.

While this moment of disruption is contained within the narrative (shifting the subjective identification from the character being watched to the watcher), there are other moments throughout the series that completely undermine the conventions of narrative story-telling. For example in the second episode, 'The Chimes of Big Ben', Number Six is shown escaping from the Village. His journey back to Britain locked inside a large crate is conveyed by a montage of shots of the crate being loaded onto planes and boats, interspersed with shots of Number Six from within the crate. However, when Number Six arrives in what he believes to be Britain, it is revealed that he is still inside the Village. For the viewer this raises a number of questions: did Number Six ever leave the

Village? If not, how are the images of his journey to be interpreted? The visual

narrative, upon which the series relies so heavily for its story telling, is drawn into

question here as a potentially deceptive device. In doing so the series challenges the

conventional dramatic narrative of television drama which enables the viewer to

construct meaning from a set of visual and narrative clues. In *The Prisoner* there are

many clues, but the meaning behind them is deliberately offset. *The Prisoner* is formally

constructed to disorientate the subjectivity of the viewer, robbing its audience of a stable

'objective' position from which the drama can be viewed. What this does, is to draw

attention to the conventions of the television series and invite the viewer to actively

engage in a process of interpretation and deconstruction.

By drawing attention to its own construction *The Prisoner* displays an engagement with

the politics of form associated with the historical avant garde, and would appear to

respond to Kennedy Martin's call for a television drama that disturbs traditional modes of

representation in order to emotionally and intellectually engage the viewer. Yet, while

we can recognise avant garde strategies within *The Prisoner*, they serve quite a different

function to the social realist plays of Loach and Garnett. Centrally, Loach and Garnett

are concerned with exploring and exposing contemporary social issues, and with

representing subjects that had been previously absent in British television drama. The

avant garde strategies used within these series have a clear political purpose in exposing

the typicality of these social problems and refusing to provide the viewer with easy

resolutions for them. By contrast, *The Prisoner* denies the existence of the social by

constructing a fictional world in which the veneer of reality is revealed as an effect. The

avant garde strategies of *The Prisoner* therefore lose their political edge and the series verges on the existential by positioning its alienated hero in a fictional world devoid of meaning.

These textual strategies reveal a playfulness with form reminiscent of 1960s pop art. As Andreas Huyssen points out, pop art and the historical avant garde share a common engagement in insisting on the integration of art and life and the elimination of the high/low aesthetic divide (1988, 143). In challenging conventional modes of artistic representation pop art revelled in a playful disruption of form, often engaging with popular cultural commodities.

> Pop artists exhibited commodities or declared that serial productions of Coca-Cola bottles, filmstars or comic strips were art works (Huyssen 1988, 142)

This playfulness with contemporary commodity forms is echoed in *The Prisoner*'s integration of disruptive avant garde strategies into the popular generic form of the action-adventure spy drama. However, the disruptive avant garde strategies within the series are ultimately contained within the generic expectations of the action-adventure/spy drama. By making the viewer aware of the dramatic conventions of the series, and inviting an active engagement in the process of interpretation and deconstruction, these avant garde strategies actually replicate and reinforce the dramatic premise of the series, which is based on a set of narrative puzzles – Where am I? What do you want? – that need to be solved but remain unanswered. To take the above example

from 'The Chimes of Big Ben', the disruption of conventional narrative construction in the montage of Number Six travelling to London equates the viewer's position with that of the prisoner. The sequence does not invite the viewer to engage with broader social and political issues, but functions to replicate the internal logic of the series, by posing an enigma that remains unresolved.

Serialising Disruption: Familiarity and the Extended Series Structure

In order to fully understand the way in which these textual strategies function in *The Prisoner*, it is necessary to recognise that this formal experimentation is contained within a repeatable series format that is premised on the creation and maintenance of ambiguity. As I argued in the previous chapter, in the production of serialised narratives, where a number of episodes extend over a period of time, the text itself creates its own expectations. Central to *The Prisoner*'s format is a disruption of generic and narrative conventions in the creation of a fantastic fictional world, which although initially disorientating and destabilising becomes part of the *familiar* address of the series as it is repeated over a number of weeks. *The Prisoner* ran for 17 episodes, entering the homes of regular viewers over 17 consecutive weeks. Over this period of time, the narrative format and visual terrain of the series would become familiar to the regular viewer, providing certain expectations and offering repeatable pleasures. This sense of familiarity is actually facilitated by the creation of an unusual visual landscape and narrative premise in *The Prisoner*. Firstly, the use of striking visual symbols in the series makes the 'look' of *The Prisoner* recognisable at a glance, creating a self-contained, distinctive, and instantly recognisable fictional world. Secondly, the episodic format of

the series (although premised on the disruption of expectation) is repeated each week offering a set of familiar and repeatable narrative expectations that are always fulfilled. Each week the struggle for power between the Village controllers and Number Six will be told through a set of narrative conventions that function to disorientate and destabilise the subjective viewing position of the audience, whilst also fulfilling a number of the generic expectations of the action-adventure series.

It is common practice for a long-running series to emphasise and exploit the narrative expectations of its basic format in order to maintain an audience over time. For example, once *The Avengers* began the successful pairing of the aristocratic John Steed (Patrick Macnee) with the intelligent Cathy Gale (Honour Blackman), the series developed to emphasise the particularity of these elements. As Moya Luckett argues, 'Steed became more upper-class, dressed in increasingly dandified Edwardian fashion, while Gale represented a new vision of the strong intelligent, active, and equal woman' (Luckett 1997, 134). However, rather than exploiting the dialectical position between the fulfilment and disruption of generic expectation, *The Prisoner* developed an increasingly disruptive strategy in which its own visual and narrative rules were undercut. Over the first 12 episodes *The Prisoner* established and maintained a clear narrative and visual format. However, in the last five episodes, this format was gradually challenged as the series built to a surreal narrative denouement that bore little resemblance to the format established in the series' early episodes.

Each of the first 12 episodes of *The Prisoner* begins with a visually striking title sequence

in which Number Six is shown resigning, being gassed and arriving at the Village. With

the exception of the first episode, in which the narrative begins when Number Six awakes

in the Village for the first time, each subsequent episode depicts Number Six running

through the Village, and introduces Number Two, who was played by a different actor

each week[42]. This highly dramatic and exciting opening to the series would have become

an integral part of its established format by the thirteenth episode, a means by which the

viewer could identify that it was watching *The Prisoner* and gain pleasure from its

familiarity. However, for the thirteenth episode, 'Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling',

this format is disrupted, as the episode begins with a pre-credit teaser and contains a

shortened title sequence. The following episode 'Living in Harmony' removes the

majority of the action from the Village. After a shortened credit sequence that ends with

Number Six being gassed in his London home, the story opens in a setting with all the

generic verisimilitude (in terms of costume, setting, dialogue, music) of the Western (fig.

3.11). For the majority of the episode there is nothing apart from the similarity of the

narrative (in which McGoohan is depicted attempting to escape the powerful Judge's

desire for him to become Sheriff), and the presence of McGoohan, to suggest that this is

an episode of *The Prisoner* at all. This disruption of the narrative and visual expectations

of *The Prisoner*'s series format continues in the following episode 'The Girl who was

Death' (fig. 3.12). Here McGoohan is depicted chasing a beautiful but deadly young

woman through a series of increasingly bizarre and extravagant set pieces, including a

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[42] The exception to this is Leo McKern, who played Number Two in episode two, 'The Chimes of Big Ben' and then reprised the role for the final two episodes, 'Once Upon a Time' and 'Fall Out'.

Fig. 3.11 'Living in Harmony' adopts the visual iconography of the Western.

Fig. 3.12 'The Girl that was Death' is a bizarre pastiche of the fantasy/spy genre, with scenes in which Number Six, dressed as Sherlock Holmes, pursues a young girl through a fairground.

scene in which McGoohan is dressed as Sherlock Holmes, replete with Victorian deerstalker and cape, in a playful parody of the fantasy/spy genre.

While 'The Girl Who Was Death' and 'Living in Harmony' conclude by providing a narrative explanation for their formulaic disruption (the Western setting of 'Living in Harmony' is revealed to be Number Six's hallucination brought about through experimental drugs, while 'The Girl Who Was Death' is the visual representation of a bedtime story told by Number Six to the Village children), the final two episodes of *The Prisoner* abandon the series' narrative conventions altogether. In episode 16, 'Once Upon a Time', Number Six engages in a surreal battle against Number Two, which as Chris Gregory points out follows the structure of Shakespeare's 'Seven Ages of Man' (1997, 157). This is a highly theatrical episode shot almost entirely on one set and focusing on the relationship between Number Two and Number Six. The setting is sparse, littered with a series of 'props', which are used as Number Six is regressed through various stages of his life. Having won his battle, the final episode, 'Fall Out' enacts a bizarre trial in which it is revealed that it is Number Six who controls the Village, and ends with a highly stylised violent uprising choreographed to the Beatle's 'All You Need is Love'.

While the previous disruptions in *The Prisoner* were contained within a series format that inverted but still maintained the basic narrative structure of the action-adventure series, these closing episodes completely abandon the generic, socio-cultural and narrative expectations established over the course of the series. After the screening of the final

episode the switchboard at ATV House was jammed with calls from viewers 'protesting

at the incomprehensible final episode of the serial' (Knight 1968, 13). Although

audience reaction to *The Prisoner* as a whole was mixed – as journalist Anthony Davis

writes just before the screening of the last episode, 'people have liked it. They have also

been confused, baffled, bewildered and irritated' (1968a, 5) – it was this final episode

that caused most controversy. Having established a number of key questions over the

previous 16 episodes – Why has Number Six resigned? Who runs the Village? Where is

the Village? Who is Number One? – 'Fall Out' failed to fulfil the generic expectations of

its series format by refusing to provide adequate answers to any of these questions.

While the *TV Times* records a range of positive and negative responses to this episode in

its letters page[43], press reaction was stronger. Peter Knight's review in the *Daily*

Telegraph described 'Fall Out' as,

> as baffling as its predecessors with no solutions given to any of the problems [...]
>
> despite all the production gloss, sophisticated writing and fine acting, the lasting
>
> impression was a heap of hokum carried off with the smoothness of a confidence
>
> trick (1968, 13)

McGoohan reportedly left the country because of the negative response to the series. In a

1984 documentary on the series screened on Channel 4, he states,

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[43] These responses range from one viewer who argued that 'if the whole action was seen as an allegory on life it clicked into place' to another who complained that the final episode lacked any 'semblance of a story' ('Viewerpoint', *TV Times*, 17-23 February 1968, 16).

People may say "Let's see something original" but basically people like a good

story that ends up the way it should. This one didn't, of course. There was an

outcry – I nearly got lynched and had to go into hiding. They thought they'd been

cheated (quoted in Rogers 1989, 139)

The hostile reaction gained by the series stems primarily from its failure to fulfil the

expectations upon which it established its series format. *The Prisoner's* format is based

on a set of questions that establish a narrative mystery that essentially replicates the

conventions of the action-adventure/spy series. Closely linked as it is to the detective

genre, the spy series offers a mystery to be explored and resolved by the end of the

narrative. While the episodic format of *The Prisoner* denied the space for such answers

within the weekly episodes, the series' use of the conventions of the action adventure/spy

series created a strong expectation that the final episode would provide the narrative

resolution to the questions posed within the series[44]. The finale to *The Prisoner* was

controversial because the series was established upon the conventions of the action

adventure/spy series whose expectations it ultimately failed to fulfil.

The negative response gained by the final episode can be understood, therefore, in

relation to the way in which the series attempts to resolve the conflicting demands placed

on commercial television at this time. In attempting to attract and to challenge viewers,

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[44] See for example Anthony Davis' article published in the *TV Times* on the week in which 'Fall Out' was transmitted, which questions McGoohan about the narrative resolution of the series (Davis 1968a, 5).

The Prisoner inverted the conventions of the action-adventure series (rather than

rejecting them) and built hesitation into its narrative format by posing a series of

questions that Number Six consistently attempts (but fails) to answer. However, the

expectations of narrative closure made it increasingly difficult for the series to continue

the dialectical position that it had previously established between generic familiarity and

narrative disruption. In the final two episodes of *The Prisoner*, the hesitation previously

maintained between a natural and supernatural explanation for the events depicted is

overturned to create a fictional world that defies socio-cultural and generic verisimilitude.

In order to maintain the integrity and authenticity of *The Prisoner* as a challenging drama

(rather than one that 'gives the audience what they want'), McGoohan is compelled to

emphasise disruption. In doing so, he removes hesitation by posing surreal answers to

the questions posed in the series format (Number Six is Number One, the whole world is

the Village, and so on) that ultimately suggest an allegorical reading of the series[45].

Conclusion

The use of fantasy in *The Prisoner* is quite different to that explored in the *Quatermass*

serials in Chapter 2. In the *Quatermass* serials, the fantastic is situated within a fictional

world that largely corresponds to the socio-cultural reality of the 1950s' viewer to

metaphorically explore contemporary social tensions. By contrast, *The Prisoner* creates a

fictional world that can ultimately only be understood as fantastic, where socio-cultural

verisimilitude is completely undercut rather than being a norm against which the fantastic

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[45] Gregory (1997) provides such an analysis of *The Prisoner*, arguing that its central dramatic conflict can be understood as an allegory for the eternal struggle between the rebel/individual and the establishment/authority.

is introduced and can be understood as such. Yet both series use similar textual strategies to represent the fantastic as that which confounds culturally constructed notions of what is believed to be 'real'. It is only through the evocation *and* disruption of socio-cultural and generic verisimilitude that the fictional world of *The Prisoner* can be suggested as fantastic. Therefore, as with the *Quatermass* serials, in representing the fantastic, *The Prisoner* is centrally engaged with negotiating a dialectical position, in which generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude must be simultaneously maintained and disturbed.

The possibilities opened up by the fantastic for visual display and thematic experimentation that were apparent in the *Quatermass* serials are also used in *The Prisoner* to explore the dominant aesthetic model of television drama. Yet the form that this experimentation takes differs within this specific historical context. *The Prisoner* uses the fantastic to fulfil the call for 'challenging' television for a mass audience by situating its experimental strategies within the familiar form of the action-adventure/spy series. Premised as it is on the evocation and disruption of generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude, the fantastic here offers the possibility of both familiar pleasures and the expectation of difference within one text. *The Prisoner* fulfils the expectations of the action-adventure series by providing a repeatable dramatic narrative in which the protagonist is engaged in an exciting adventure each week. Yet *within* this formula, the conventions of narrative story telling are disrupted through visual and narrative strategies that conflate subjective and objective points of view and undermine the reliability of the image. However, the series is unable to maintain this position, and in the final episodes, pushes its disruption of generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude into the realm of the

surreal. In doing so, the series loses its appeal to a 'majority' audience by failing to fulfil the expectations established in its use of the conventions of the action adventure/spy series and thus removing the point of comprehensibility for its viewer.

Partly due to the suspicion of traditional criteria of aesthetic value in television studies, and partly because of its association with 'cult' television, historically *The Prisoner* has fallen outside discussions of the aesthetic[46]. However, by situating *The Prisoner* in terms of the discourses within which it was produced, it is apparent that the aesthetic is central to understanding the series. *The Prisoner* is constructed to fulfil the conflicting commercial and public service demands on independent television in the 1960s. The combination of the formal experimentation of the avant garde and the familiarity of the genre series in *The Prisoner* is used to promote the series to a 'mass' audience and to assuage the criticisms of triviality in commercial television programming. In its experimentation with form and narrative, *The Prisoner* does not replicate the political project of the avant garde or the conventions of the action-adventure/spy drama, yet it is clearly embedded in both. It is through the maintenance of this dialectic between generic familiarity and formally disruptive textual strategies that *The Prisoner* negotiates its conflicting position as 'serious entertainment'. In doing so, the series challenges the dichotomies apparent in the Pilkington Report, which opposed commercial television (associated with entertainment that appealed to a low level of public taste by offering familiar pleasures) and public service broadcasting (associated with a responsibility to

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[46] Helen Wheatley (2002) makes a similar observation in her discussion of the use of German expressionist techniques in the Gothic anthology series *Mystery and Imagination*, which she also argues stems from the pressures on commercial television in the 1960s to produce 'quality' programming.

provide formally experimental material that challenged its viewer). The aesthetic

judgements through which *The Prisoner* was produced are not singular, but are precisely

concerned with satisfying traditional criteria of aesthetic value (single authorship,

creativity, challenging material) and appealing to a large enough audience to fulfil the

commercial demands of television production[47]. In attempting to negotiate this position,

The Prisoner is neither 'popular' nor 'serious' television, but occupies a seemingly

contradictory position between the familiar pleasures of generic entertainment, and the

formally disruptive strategies of the avant garde, a position that ultimately came into

conflict in its final episodes.

Therefore, although the representation of the fantastic in the *Quatermass* serials and *The*

Prisoner functions textually through a dependence upon and disruption of the

representational norms of generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude, the fantastic occupies

quite a different role as a production strategy in relation to each series. In both series the

use of fantasy offers the possibility of formal and narrative experimentation. However,

the form and purpose of this experimentation is historically and industrially specific. In

The Prisoner, the dialectical position that the representation of the fantastic opens up in

terms of the dependence upon and disruption of generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude,

functions at an aesthetic level in offering both familiar and unexpected pleasures to fulfil

the call for 'serious entertainment'. Here, the possibility for experimentation with form

and content offered by the representation of the fantastic cannot be understood either as a

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[47] As the analysis of the marketing of *The Prisoner* demonstrates, these two functions were not considered to be in opposition, but traditional criteria were actually used alongside generic expectation to promote the series to the viewer.

purely aesthetic or a purely commercial strategy, but functions to enable *The Prisoner* to

occupy a complex position between generically familiar and formally and thematically

experimental material, a position which can be understood directly in relation to the

debates in the 1960s surrounding the value and purpose of television as a medium.

Chapter 4

'Regulated Innovation': *Star Trek* (NBC, 1967-69) and the Commercial Strategies of 1960s US Television

Introduction

In 1966, the year before *The Prisoner* first aired in the UK, *Star Trek* was transmitted for the first time in the US[1]. Over three seasons, *Star Trek* depicted the adventures of the USS Enterprise, a starship in the 23rd century undertaking a five-year mission to explore uncharted space. While the *Quatermass* serials introduced fantastic events into a contemporary 1950s world, and *The Prisoner* created a fictional world that invited the viewer to hesitate between fantastic and natural explanations, *Star Trek* depicted a self-contained futuristic world that projected humanity into the 23rd century. In doing so *Star Trek* can be more readily generically classified as science fiction. The series' extrapolation from current scientific knowledge to present a speculative account of future space travel can be easily aligned with Vivian Sobchack's definition of science fiction as a narrative that places its emphasis on 'actual, extrapolative, or speculative science' (1987, 63). Despite of, or perhaps because of, the apparent ease with which *Star Trek* can be generically categorised, most of the academic analyses of the series are not primarily concerned with exploring the series' use of genre. Rather, the majority of the academic work on *Star Trek* has attempted to account for the intensity and longevity of the series'

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[1] All references to '*Star Trek*' here refer to the 79 episodes of the original television series, rather than to the *Star Trek* franchise as a whole.

appeal[2]. Although the original series ended on NBC in 1969, it went on to run regularly

in syndication in the US over the 1970s and 1980s, was sold across the world and has

generated numerous spin-offs in film, television, computer games, books and toys[3].

While *Star Trek* was relatively unsuccessful in the ratings when it was first transmitted,

the series' initial loyal audience has grown into a large, active and international fan

community, and *Star Trek* has now become widely recognised as a cult phenomenon.

Much of the academic work on *Star Trek* is concerned with understanding the

unprecedented appeal of this commercially produced series, often by emphasising the

series' uniqueness or by deconstructing its 'utopian' rhetoric.

The early work on *Star Trek* focused primarily on an exploration of the series' themes

and characters. Karin Blair, writing in 1979, constructs *Star Trek* as a progressive

television series through an analysis of its thematic and narrative concerns. She argues

that the series combines mythic archetypes with contemporary issues to provide new

paradigms with which to tackle the consequences of the sexual revolution (Blair 1982,

183). As such, *Star Trek*'s appeal is seen to reside in its function as a contemporary

myth. Jane Elizabeth Ellington and Joseph W. Critelli apply Jungian theory to the series

to argue that its construction of the four leads (Kirk, Spock, McCoy and Scotty) acts as a

metaphor for the union of opposites (1983, 243). The attraction of the series is thus

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[2] There is an extensive amount of written material on *Star Trek*. For a comprehensive guide to the material produced before 1991, refer to Gibberman (1991).

[3] The *Star Trek* franchise includes nine spin-off films (with a tenth film currently in post-production), an animated series (NBC, 1973-75), four spin-off television series (*Star Trek: The Next Generations* (Syndicated, 1987-94), *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (Syndicated, 1993-99), *Star Trek: Voyager* (UPN, 1995-2001) and *Enterprise* (UPN, 2001-), and numerous toys, computer games, books, models and so on.

attributed to its symbolic representation of wholeness. This focus on narrative and the

construction of characters recurs in April Shelley's comparison of *Star Trek* with *The*

Deerslayer, in which the series' appeal is located in its similarity to the US literary

romance (1986, 102).

In these studies *Star Trek*'s unprecedented appeal to its viewers is understood as a

consequence of science fiction's metaphoric treatment of contemporary anxieties, which

is equated with the 'high' cultural forms of archetypal mythic structures, Jungian theory,

and classic literature. These progressive accounts of the series have been critiqued,

particularly by feminist academics who address the often sexist representation of women

in *Star Trek*'s 'utopian' future. While earlier studies emphasise the subversive

possibilities opened up by *Star Trek*'s repositioning of contemporary concerns within the

new paradigms offered by its futuristic setting, these studies argue that despite its basis in

the future, *Star Trek* remains tied to the dominant ideologies of its period of production[4].

For example, Anne Cranny-Francis examines the relationship between the 'sexual

ideology' (1985, 274) of *Star Trek* and its continuing appeal to women. She analyses

what she claims to be the focus of this female fan attention – the characterisation of

Spock and Kirk – to argue that far from advocating a subversive ideology, the series is

highly conventional in its construction of sexual stereotypes (1985, 282). More recently

this critique of gender in the series has been complicated by attempts to consider the

ways in which the series presents an ambivalent or conflicting representation of both

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[4] A similar argument is put forward by Joy Leman (1991) in relation to 1950s and 1960s British science fiction and fantasy television series.

male and female stereotypes (see for example, Henderson 1994, and Helford 1996). Over

the 1980s the academy became increasingly interested in audiences and in the early

1990s attention turned from using the text of *Star Trek* to account for its appeal, to

analysing the fans of the series themselves. These analyses challenged earlier academic

studies of *Star Trek* fans as infantile and pathological dupes, and worked with fan

communities to offer ethnographic accounts of the lived experiences of media fans[5].

Studies such as Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* (1992) attempted to rectify the negative

characterisation of fandom by arguing for the subversive re-appropriation of texts by fans

focusing particularly the creative activities of *Star Trek* fans. Camille Bacon-Smith

(1992) undertook an ethnographic analysis of *Star Trek* fans, focusing on its

predominantly female fan community, and Constance Penley (1991a and 1992) explored

the 'slash' fiction that develops a sexual relationship between the two male lead

characters, Kirk and Spock, produced by female *Star Trek* fans.

All of these studies are primarily concerned with the social function of *Star Trek* as a

series. From Karin Blair's exploration of the series as a contemporary myth and Cranny-

Francis' deconstruction of this 'myth' through an analysis of its representation of gender,

to Jenkins', Bacon-Smith's, and Penley's analyses of the relationship between *Star Trek*

and its fans, the emphasis lies in understanding the series as a social phenomenon[6]. What

is relatively absent from the academic work on the series is a consideration of *Star Trek*

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[5] See Jenkins and Tulloch (1995) for an analysis of the historical development of studies of media fandom.
[6] Penley actually admits that her primary interest is in the fans rather than the text of *Star Trek*. However, she does explore what the science fiction genre offers to the writers of slash fiction and argues that a basic attribute of the genre is an interest in questions of sexual difference and sexual relations (1991a, 138).

as *television*. This is not to suggest that these studies do not take into account (to varying

degrees) that fact that *Star Trek* is a television series. However, the emphasis on

understanding the series as a 'cult' phenomenon tends to abstract the series from its place

in the television schedules and television history. Recent attempts to redress the

comparative absence in academic studies of a consideration of the series' representation

of race (see for example Bernardi 1998, and Pounds 1999) do take their analyses of the

series beyond an exploration of its narrative and thematic terrain. For example Bernardi

combines an examination of the series' narrative with a consideration of the central

elements which make up its narrative format (such as the Prime Directive[7]), while Pounds

introduces an analysis of the series' production history to his study of its representation of

race.

While I do not want to deny the cult status that *Star Trek* has come to occupy, or down-

play the significant and valuable role it plays in the lives of its fans, my concern here is to

examine the discourses within which *Star Trek* was originally produced. In doing so, I

want to explore the demands that were placed on the development of *Star Trek*'s format

and to ask what impact this had on the final series, focusing particularly on its

representation of the fantastic. By asking what the representation of the fantastic offered

in this particular context, this analysis also complicates the generic categorisation of *Star*

Trek as science fiction. This approach allows an exploration of *Star Trek* as a series

produced within the specific demands of commercial US television production in the

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[7] In *Star Trek*'s fictional universe, the Prime Directive is the dictum laid down by the United Federation of
Planets forbidding interference in the natural evolution of an alien civilisation.

1960s, and asks what this can add to our understanding of television fantasy and

television aesthetics.

Regulated Innovation: Commercial US Television in the 1960s

By the 1960s, the three US television networks (NBC, CBS and ABC) had developed as

powerful vertically integrated companies with some involvement at each level of

television production and distribution. Each network owned holdings in television

stations in the most profitable markets, and by 1960 the three networks had around 200

affiliated stations each, giving approximately 60 percent of their airtime to network

programmes (Brown 1998, 147). In particular the networks dominated primetime

programming, the evening hours between 7.00pm and 11.00pm when television gained

its largest audience[8]. This was the most profitable time in the television schedules in

terms of sales to advertisers, and network programming occupied approximately 75

percent of the available hours during primetime, frequently attracting 85-90 percent of

the available primetime audience. About half of the profits from television broadcasting

in the US went to the three networks and their 15 owned and operated VHF stations, and

by 1964, the three networks owned or had property rights in 93 percent of all primetime

network programming (MacDonald 1990, 147).

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[8] Cantor argues that the precise definition of primetime was regionally specific, with midwest and Rocky Mountain states situating it between 7.00pm and 10.00pm and Eastern and far Western areas placing it between 8.00 and 11.00pm (1980, 23). However, Newcombe claims that in the Eastern and Pacific time zones, primetime is between 7.00 and 11.00pm while in the Central and Mountain zones it is between 6.00 and 10.00pm (Newcombe 1997b, 1290).

In the mid- to late 1950s, the networks also established greater control over the

production of television programmes. While in the late 1940s and early 1950s

programme production was largely sponsored by advertisers and subsequently sold to the

networks or stations, with the gradual move away from live television production towards

originating programmes on film and the subsequent increase in television production

budgets over the 1950s, programme production became an increasingly risky investment

for a sole sponsor[9]. Television production shifted from a system of full sponsorship to

the increasing practice of joint sponsorship and participation advertising (in which

sponsors bought airtime within a network's schedules). This reduced the financial risk

for advertisers, while providing the networks with more power over creative and

scheduling decisions[10]. Film also increased the potential revenue from one production as

filmed dramas could be sold abroad and in syndication to UHF stations. The increased

use of film saw the shift of television production from New York to Hollywood, and by

1960 40 percent of network programmes were produced by the major Hollywood studios,

20th Century Fox, MGM, Paramount, Warner Brothers, MCA Universal, and Columbia

Screen Gems (see Hilmes 1990, 166, and Anderson 1994). By the late 1950s in the US

television programme production was centred in Hollywood, largely financed by the

networks, and primarily originated on film.

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[9] Brown indicates that in the first two decades of television production in the US, the NBC network largely relied on buying its programming from sponsors, while the CBS network had a more active programme department (1998, 149).

[10] This was partly a response to the quiz show scandals in the late 1950s, in which the networks were held responsible for the rigging of televised quizzes. The shift from sponsorship to participation advertising gave the networks more control over the production of the programmes they transmitted.

Although the networks retained a large about of control over the production and

distribution of programmes, the interests of advertisers continued to have an impact on

the content of television programmes (see Boddy 1993, 244-47). The objective for

national network programming was to deliver the largest possible audience to the

advertisers. The network schedules were constructed around the ability to sell airtime

slots to advertisers based on existing and projected ratings provided by the A. C. Nielsen

Corporation. These ratings were based on sample households and measured the number

of viewers tuned to a particular programme at any one time. Ratings also affected the

value of the television networks on the stock market. In the mid-1960s, Wall Street

began correlating the stock values of the networks with the monthly Nielsen ratings

reports. As a consequence the network that came top of the average ratings could make

$20-30million more than its closest competitor (Brown 1998, 154).

By the early 1960s, television broadcasting was a successful and profitable commercial

business in the US. Between 1962 and 1968, the gross profits for the US television

industry rose from $1.3 billion to $2.5 billion (MacDonald 1990, 147). However, during

the late 1950s and 1960s the industry came under attack as a series of scandals raised

questions about the viability of the regulatory and commercial structure of US television

broadcasting. In 1957-58 the House of Representatives undertook a special investigation

of the FCC following reports of misconduct in television licensing, leading to the

resignation of one commissioner and the commission's chair. A year later, a New York

grand jury began investigating allegations of irregularities in televised quizzes, and the

House of Representatives special sub-committee on legislative oversight began to call

witnesses to investigate charges of fraud and other unethical practices in network

television broadcasting (see Boddy 1993, 216-19, and Barnouw 1990, 243-48). In 1961

Newton Minouw, the recently appointed chairman of the FCC under Kennedy's newly

elected Democratic administration, launched a direct attack on the US television industry.

Addressing the National Association of Broadcasters in his first public speech since

taking up the position, Newton characterised US television broadcasting as 'a vast

wasteland'[11]. Minouw attacked both the violent content of programmes, and the

dominance of 'formulaic' genre shows. He argued that although these programmes

attracted high ratings they did not necessarily represent an accurate reflection of public

taste.

> Your obligations are not satisfied if you look only to popularity as a test of what
>
> to broadcast. You are not only in show business; you are free to communicate
>
> ideas as well as relaxation. You must provide a wider range of choices, more
>
> diversity, more alternatives. It is not enough to cater to the nation's whims – you
>
> must also serve the nation's needs. (reprinted in Kahn 1984, 212)

Centrally, Minouw's criticisms address the difficulty in balancing the dual objectives

upon which television broadcasting was established in the US, as a private industry and a

public utility. Adopting public utilities legislation, the Communications Act of 1934

stipulated that television channels must operate 'in the public interest, convenience and

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[11] 'Address by Newton N. Minouw to the National Association of Broadcasters, Washington, D.C. May 9 1961', reprinted in Kahn 1984, from which all quotations here are taken.

necessity'. However, the FCC's ability to enforce this requirement of the Act was

complicated by the First Amendment of the Constitution, safeguarding the right to free

speech and thus limiting government regulation of broadcast programming. As the

FCC's 1960 Programming Policy Statement claims[12],

> Although the [Federal Communications] Commission must determine whether the
>
> total program service of broadcasters is reasonably responsive to the interests and
>
> needs of the public they serve, it may not condition the grant, denial or revocation
>
> of a broadcast license upon its own subjective determination of what is or is not a
>
> good program. To do so would "lay a forbidden burden upon the exercise of
>
> liberty protected by the constitution" (reprinted in Kahn 1984, 197)

Yet despite this, the FCC recognised the need to ensure that both the commercial and

public interests of television broadcasting were fulfilled.

> The regulatory responsibility of the Commission in the broadcast field essentially
>
> involves the maintenance of a balance between the preservation of a free
>
> competitive broadcast system, on the one hand, and the reasonable restriction of
>
> that freedom inherent in the public interest standard provided in the
>
> Communication Act, on the other. (reprinted in Kahn 1984, 195)

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[12] *Report and Statement of Policy re: Commission en banc Programming Inquiry*, 25 Fed. Reg. 7291; 44 FCC 2303, 29 July 1960, reprinted in Khan 1984, from which all quotations here are taken.

What this suggests, is an admission on the part of the FCC that the commercial interests of the broadcasters may not always be in line with the public interests of the audience whom they are entrusted to serve. Yet the FCC goes on to argue that the ability of the broadcast stations to administer their responsibility to act in the public interest is only possible if they are given the opportunity to exercise independent judgement free from government interference. While the Commission is not proposing any direct involvement in programming decisions, it does state that 'the Commission may not grant, modify or renew a broadcast license without finding that the operation of such station is in the public interest' (reprinted in Kahn 1984, 196). It therefore argues that while the responsibility for fulfilling the public interest clause of the Communications Act lies with the station broadcasters, they will be required to prove that their programming meets the needs and interests of their viewers through meetings and surveys within their local community.

Minouw concludes his criticisms of US television broadcasting by reinforcing the FCC's 1960 Programming Policy Statement, advocating public hearings to gain local opinion about the television service provided by individual stations. Emphasising his ideological opposition to government censorship, Minouw does not propose that the FCC intervene in programme production or radically alter the structure of the industry. Rather he claims that the regulation of broadcasting in the public interest will be achieved by extending competition through the development of UHF frequencies to provide a greater diversity of programming to the viewer. Minouw is aware here of the limits to the FCC's regulatory power, particularly in the area of programming, and appeals to the

broadcasters' integrity claiming, 'what the Commission asks of you is to make a conscientious good-faith effort to serve the public interest' (1984, 213).

What Minouw's speech and the FCC's 1960 Programming Policy Statement reveal are the particular difficulties in reconciling the FCC's responsibilities for maintaining both the private and public interests of US television broadcasting. Roy Huggins, in his critique of Minouw's speech, sums up the essential dichotomy in the establishment of television broadcasting in the US.

> the word "entertainment" does not appear in the Communications Act, and
> perhaps rightly so. The Congress was doubtless confident that entertainment
> would take care of itself, but feared the public interest might not. However, the
> Act also failed to define the public interest, avoided any language relating to the
> imponderables of programming for a mass audience, required the Commission to
> make judgements on program quality, but added a section (326) forbidding the
> Commission to censor or to interfere with freedom of speech. (Huggins 1962, 8)

As early as 1946, William S. Paley (head of the CBS network) had attempted to reconcile this difficulty by arguing that the public interest is served by providing popular $\mathcal{AB}$ programmes that attract large audiences.

> First we have an obligation to give most of the people what they want most of the
> time. Second, our clients, as advertisers, need to reach most of the people most of

the time. This is not perverted or inverted cause and effect, as our attackers claim. It is one of the great strengths of our kind of broadcasting that the advertiser's desire to sell his product to the largest cross section of the public coincides with our obligation to serve the largest cross section of our audience. (quoted in Boddy 1998, 24)

However, despite recurrent attempts by the broadcasters to argue that the commercial imperative was not anathema to the provision of broadcasting in the public interest, the industry as a whole (and the programmes they scheduled in particular) continued to come under repeated criticism over the 1960s. Extensive examples of this debate can be found in the first issues of *Television Quarterly*, a journal set up by National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 1962 to 'take a serious look at television' (statement from the editorial board, 1962, 4). For example, in 1962, Hubbell Robinson complains that 'it is in its almost total refusal to cope with themes of depth and significance that television entertainment reduces its audience to the ranks of the emotionally and mentally underprivileged' (1962, 36). The industry also came under pressure from public organisations, such as the civil rights groups NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and CORE (Congress on Racial Equality) who attempted to improve the employment opportunities and cultural representation of ethnic minorities in US television (see Pounds 1999). Yet while public criticism of US television continued over the decade the financial position of the three networks (and particularly CBS and NBC) remained strong.

The understanding of the US television industry in the 1960s as financially secure but aesthetically impoverished pervades the first published account of *Star Trek*'s history, written by Stephen Whitfield with Gene Roddenberry in 1968 while the series was still in production. Whitfield and Roddenberry characterise *Star Trek* as an unusual networked series that went against the dominant network strategy of producing formulaic programmes designed to appeal to the lowest common denominator[13].

> *Star Trek* has proved that it really does matter to the viewer what he sees on television. Contrary to what the networks may believe, people *do* care about television programming. And they do not at all mind learning while being entertained. Learning implies believing. Learning also implies intelligence – the ability to see relationships, in a Vulcan, a Gorn, or a Horta. The response to *Star Trek*'s message is irrefutable proof of the totally inaccurate network concept of the viewer as a clod. (Whitfield and Roddenberry 1991, 351)

The ability for *Star Trek* to go against the tide of 'formulaic and mindless' programming on the US networks is attributed to Roddenberry's creative use of the science fiction genre to develop television drama that is intellectually stimulating and addresses contemporary social issues.

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[13] Whitfield and Roddenberry's account of the production of the series is widely adopted by histories of the series. See for example, Gregory, 2000.

Roddenberry was determined to break through television's censorship barrier and do tales about important and meaningful things. He was certain television's audience was not the collection of nitwits that the networks believed it to be. By using science fiction yarns on far-off planets, he was certain he could disguise the fact that he was actually talking about politics, sex, economics, the stupidity of war, and half a hundred other vital subjects usually prohibited on television (Whitfield and Roddenberry 1991, 19)

Here Whitfield situates the idealistic Roddenberry against the constraints of the networks who deliberately refrained from the intellectual treatment of meaningful contemporary issues. In creating a network series with a social conscience, Whitfield argues that Roddenberry used science fiction to disguise from the networks the fact that the series tackled contemporary social issues.

Tulloch and Jenkins have critiqued Whitfield's characterisation of the production of *Star Trek* for failing to recognise that the production of the series reflects many of the changes to the television industry over the 1960s (1995, 8). They explore the production of *Star Trek* in relation to Vance Kepley Jr.'s history of the NBC network. Kepley Jr. argues that as the television industry matured over the 1950s the NBC network abandoned its initial policy of experimentation designed to attract new audiences to the medium. He claims that the early period of innovation (characterised by the programming strategies of Pat Weaver at NBC between 1949-55) gave way under the management of David Sarnoff and Robert Kintner to an era concerned primarily with creating stability from 'a program

schedule with predictable daily and weekly offerings' (Kepley Jr. 1990, 55). This,

Kepley argues, led to a network strategy at NBC in the 1960s based on predictability

rather than innovation with a programming policy which would 'continue to cultivate

habit viewing with "least objectionable" series fare' (Kepley Jr. 1990, 58). Tulloch and

Jenkins situate *Star Trek* within Kepley Jr.'s industrial history of NBC and argue that the

series occupied a difficult position within this new 'Sarnoff and Kintner' era of network

production that emphasised audience quantity over audience quality. However, while

Tulloch and Jenkins do complicate Whitfield and Roddenberry's account of the

production of *Star Trek* by claiming that the series reflected the industrial changes of the

'Kintner era', they ultimately agree with Kepley's characterisation of network television

in this era as concerned primarily with maintaining its ratings through the provision of

'bread and butter' programming (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 8). As a consequence they

retain a characterisation of *Star Trek* as an innovative and experimental series that

conflicted with the production strategies adopted by NBC in the 1960s to produce

formulaic and conventional programmes.

This is a dominant and pervasive understanding of 1960s US television. Typically,

historians have argued that as a consequence of the relatively unregulated commercial

domination of the television industry by the three networks, US television in the 1960s

was characterised by repetitive, formulaic and homogenous programming. Les Brown

claims that by the mid-1960s, 'scores of pilots for new series were produced each year,

and nearly all were mere variations on proven formulas' (1998, 154). He goes on to

claim that the ratings war that ensued as the financing of production shifted from full

sponsorship to participation advertising seriously stunted creative programming, so that 'networks lost virtually all ability to be boldly venturesome in programming' (ibid.).

However, a commercial network strategy that emphasises audience quantity with predictable schedules dominated by filmed genre series cannot be understood de facto to produce formulaic and homogenous programming. Barry Litman argues that in order to maintain an effective oligopoly, the three networks functioned in a '"spirit of cooperation", featuring common industry-wide pricing, with rivalry and individual firm success limited to how well one does in the nonpricing areas of product differentiation (that is, differences in product quality, advertising, and packaging)' (Litman 1990, 116). Litman here suggests that it was in the area of production that the competitive battles between the three networks were fought. The production of programmes therefore provided the primary area through which the networks could increase their profits by increasing their audience share.

Mark Alvey argues that product differentiation is a particularly important commercial strategy during periods of great change and is therefore central to understanding television production in the 1960s.

> No industry is fraught with more such tensions than the television industry, and no period in the medium's history is more apt an example of such an environment than the late 1950s and early 1960s. As *Variety* reported in late 1959, networks and producers were busily seeking alternatives that would free them from the

"quiz-violence-western hook". In the prevailing climate of the television industry

as the 1960s began, the calls for innovation could not be ignored. This

atmosphere of change and differentiation established a tenor that would

characterise the evolution of programming throughout the decade (Alvey 1997,

150)

Alvey goes on to argue that the independent studios were central to this period of change

and innovation[14]. With the market for network programmes monopolised by the three

networks, and the increasing prevalence of deficit financing as network policy (in which

the networks projected the overall profitability of a series, including potential foreign and

ancillary sales, and reduced their financial investment accordingly), the financial situation

of the studios was particularly precarious. However, far from concluding that this lead to

stagnation in programming, Alvey argues that the studios, particularly the independents

that lacked the financial infrastructure of the majors, turned to a strategy of innovative

production in order to survive.

The independent producer had to differentiate to survive, had to distinguish his

product from the competition. Granting that independent production is an

avowedly commercial enterprise, concerned with producing popular texts for a

---

[14] Alvey broadly retains the traditional definition of independent studios in the television industry as firms who only produced television programmes or who did not own a studio facility and hired their facilities from the Hollywood majors. While he accepts that this definition becomes complicated over the history of television production, he maintains that the significant role played by the independents in television production reflected the increasing decentralisation of production in Hollywood in line with the decline of the studio system (1997, 143).

large audience, the evidence suggests that the independents were testing the limits

of convention and expanding the horizons of popular television entertainment,

albeit within fairly circumscribed formal limits. (Alvey 1997, 152)

Alvey's conception of the US television industry in the 1960s as a period of 'regulated

innovation' (1997, 154) in which the independent studios played a major part, is useful in

approaching *Star Trek* as a series, particularly as the series was produced by the

independent studio Desilu for NBC. Rather than simply equating the economic security

of the networks in the 1960s with the production of formulaic programming, Alvey and

Litman offering a more complex understanding of the industry, as one in which product

differentiation was central for the networks and for the independent production

companies that made many of their programmes. By situating *Star Trek* within this

understanding of 1960s network television production as a period of 'regulated

innovation', I want to move away from understanding the series as a unique programme

enabled by Roddenberry's ingenious use of science fiction, to ask how the production of

the series responded to the needs of commercial television at the time.

Commercial Television Production and the Generic Expectations of Science Fiction

Star Trek was produced by the independent production company Desilu as part of a

commercial strategy to reinvigorate the studio's declining presence in the television

production market. Desilu had entered television production in 1951, four years before

the motion picture majors entered the industry in the mid-1950s, and had become the top

supplier of telefilms to the networks by the early 1960s. Desilu began by producing *I*

Love Lucy on a rented sound stage, a series that became a hugely successful and

important production for the CBS network in the 1950s, rating consistently in the top

three of the Nielsen ratings between 1951 and 1957[15]. However, after the divorce of its

two founders, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez, the studio began to falter. It produced a

number of unsuccessful pilots and by the mid-1960s was only surviving through the

continuing success of *The Lucy Show* and the rental of its studio facilities. CBS, who had

established a long-standing relationship with Desilu through *I Love Lucy* (and later *The*

Lucy Show), intervened by creating a development fund for the studio to produce new

series (see Solow and Justman 1996, 5). The studio hired Oscar Katz (who had been

Vice President of Network Programmes for CBS) to run Desilu, and Katz brought in

Herb Solow (who had been working for NBC as Director of Daytime Programmes) as

Vice President with responsibility for instigating the development of new programmes.

Solow employed a number of writers to create pilots for filmed television series that

could be sold to the networks. One of these writers was Gene Roddenberry, who had

been working for the major Hollywood studio MGM as a writer/producer.

With a reputation for three-camera half-hour sitcoms, Desilu was keen to prove that it

could move into the production of hour-long filmed drama series. Over the late 1950s the

filmed series developed as the primary form of drama in the primetime network

schedules[16]. After the quiz show scandals and with the success of filmed series such as

---

[15] In 1957 Desilu bought RKO's studio facilities where it continued to produce a number of successful
television programmes.
[16] Eric Barnouw claims that 'by the end of 1957 more than a hundred series of television films – *telefilms* –
were on the air or in production. Almost all were Hollywood productions, and most were of the episodic-
series type.' (Barnouw 1990, 213).

the western *Cheyenne*[17], telefilms became the main battleground for network ratings (see

Barnouw 1990, 261). Preferred by sponsors, the filmed episodic series enabled

identification with a cast of recurring characters, which, as Barnouw points out, had

merchandising advantages as stars could be used to promote sponsor's products

(Barnouw 1990, 166). Filmed series were also generally cheaper to produce than single

plays, using a recurring range of sets, actors and props, and originating on film facilitated

the sale of programmes abroad and in syndication. By the 1960s, filmed series, most of

which adopted the action-adventure format, dominated the primetime network

schedules[18]. Desilu's desire to produce hour-long telefilms was therefore a commercial

strategy that was designed to move the studio into the most competitive and financially

rewarding area of television production.

Star Trek was therefore produced by Desilu as part of a commercial strategy to

reinvigorate the studio's declining production outlet. The series' outline produced by

Roddenberry to sell *Star Trek* to the networks pitched the series as a programme that

offered 'regulated innovation' by associating it with and differentiating it from existing

science fiction television series.

> *Star Trek* will be a television "first" ... A one-hour science fiction series *with*
>
> *continuing characters*. Combining the most varied in drama-action-adventure
>
> with complete production practicality. And with almost limitless story potential.

---

[17] Anderson (1994) provides an extensive account of Warner's production of *Cheyenne* in the 1950s.
[18] Osgerby, Gough-Yates and Wells briefly chart the rise of the action-adventure series in the US (2001, 14-18).

Star Trek is a new kind of television science fiction *with all the advantages of an*

anthology, but none of the limitations (quoted in Whitfield and Roddenberry

1991, 20)

In 1964, when Roddenberry produced this story outline, there were two types of series

that could be broadly understood as science fiction or fantasy on US network television.

Firstly, there were continuing series aimed primarily at children and family audiences,

such as Irwin Allen's family-orientated series *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (ABC,

1964-68), and Gerry Anderson's puppet series *Fireball XL-5* (ITV, 1962-63; NBC, 1963-

65), which was imported from the UK onto the NBC network in 1963[19]. Secondly, there

were the anthology series, such as *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-62, 1963-64) and *The*

Outer Limits (ABC, 1963-65), which tended to deal with more adult themes or contain

stronger references to horror[20]. These anthology series offered a greater range of stories

but, without a recurring cast, did not incite the same audience identification as the

continuing series. Roddenberry sells *Star Trek* here by differentiating it from existing

science fiction television as a series with the range of stories possible in the anthology

series, but with the audience identification of the continuing series. *Star Trek* provides

product differentiation by offering a type of television drama that has not been done

---

[19] A number of other fantasy puppet series created by Gerry Anderson, such as *Thunderbirds, Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons, Supercar,* and *Stingray* were also shown in syndication in the US over the late-1960s.

[20] See Jeffrey Sconce (1997 and 2000) for a discussion of *The Outer Limits* and *The Twilight Zone*.

before, a continuing science fiction series with the audience appeal and story latitude of the anthology series[21].

The terms within which Roddenberry differentiates *Star Trek* from existing television science fiction are particularly significant here. The most valuable series for the US networks at this time were those that ran over 100 episodes, the minimum number of episodes for a series to be considered viable for sale to syndication. A long-running series that could be sold to syndication was likely to be significantly more profitable for both the network and the studio producing the programme. Roddenberry here pitches *Star Trek* as a series that overcomes the potential barriers to creating a long-running primetime science fiction series. In differentiating *Star Trek* from extant television science fiction he stresses its potential to fulfil the three primary criteria in producing a long-running network series: production practicality, audience identification and story latitude. It is these three elements, rather than the series' generic associations with science fiction, which are emphasised in this outline, and they are central to the discourses surrounding the production of the series. Indeed, as I will go on to argue, the generic categorisation of *Star Trek* as science fiction was particularly problematic for the network.

---

[21] By the time *Star Trek* was actually transmitted in September 1966, the number of science fiction and fantasy series on network television had vastly increased. Irwin Allen had produced two more family orientated continuing series, *Lost in Space* (CBS, 1965-68), *The Time Tunnel* (ABC, 1966-67), and a range of domestic fantasy sitcoms had been developed, such as *The Munsters* (CBS, 1964-66), *The Addams Family* (ABC, 1964-66), *Bewitched* (ABC, 1964-72), and *I Dream of Jeanie* (NBC, 1965-70), which were also aimed primarily at a family audience (see Spigel, 1991).

Roddenberry pitched *Star Trek* to NBC and CBS, and in May 1964 the NBC network

provided Desilu with money to develop three story outlines for *Star Trek* and then chose

one story to be developed into a pilot episode[22]. After a mixed response when testing the

first pilot with audiences, NBC commissioned a second pilot of the series. Stephen

Whitfield argues that the reasons for this highly unusual step stemmed from the first

pilot's 'cerebral' treatment of intellectual issues, stating that, 'The overall reason given

for the rejection [by NBC] was that the pilot was just "too cerebral". NBC felt the show

would go over the heads of most of the viewers, that it required too much thought on the

part of the viewer in order to understand it.' (Whitfield and Roddenberry 1991, 107-8).

However, Whitfield's account of NBC's opposition to the more 'cerebral' aspects of the

first pilot (which reiterates the dominant conception of 1960s network television as

conventional and unintelligent) does not fully explain why the network commissioned a

second pilot instead of rejecting the series outright. Oscar Katz argues that the network's

difficulty stemmed from the initial choice of episode to be developed into a pilot. He

claims that NBC had selected a story outline for development into the first pilot that

would test the production practicality of the series. According to Katz, NBC

commissioned the most technically complex story for development into a pilot to verify

Desilu's capabilities to produce such a technically sophisticated drama as a weekly series

(Katz, quoted in Alexander 1994, 224). Having satisfied themselves that Desilu was

---

[22] CBS rejected *Star Trek*, in part because they were in production with their own science fiction series *Lost in Space*, but did purchase *Mission: Impossible*, a gadget filled spy series, from Desilu.

capable of producing the series, NBC ordered a second pilot from a new selection of

story outlines that was chosen specifically to sell the series to advertisers.

Furthermore, the document produced by NBC Sales for *Star Trek* ahead of the 1966-67

season does not shy away from the series' 'cerebral' treatment of its narrative themes.

> In the manner of every successful piece of speculative fiction from the classics of
>
> Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Aldous Huxley to the works of such current masters
>
> of the art as Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov and Kingsley Amis, the *Star Trek*
>
> storylines will stimulate the imagination without bypassing the intellect. While
>
> speculating in a fascinating way about the future, the series also will have much to
>
> say that is meaningful to us today. (quoted in Solow and Justman 1996, 202-3)

In this document, the associations of *Star Trek* with the 'intellectual' narratives of literary

science fiction are actually emphasised, suggesting that far from opposing the potential

for intellectually stimulating stories in *Star Trek*, the network actively promoted this

aspect of the series' format.

However, despite the references to authors of literary science fiction in this promotional

document, the use of the term 'speculative fiction' in favour of 'science fiction' points to

the anxieties the network had about the generic expectations associated with science

fiction. Herb Solow and Robert Justman claim that NBC's audience research suggested

that while women in their 20s and 30s were not opposed to action-adventure series, they

were definitely not fans of science fiction (Solow and Justman 1996, 64)[23]. NBC were

particularly keen not to alienate this section of the audience, who were considered an

attractive demographic by advertisers because of their perceived control over family

spending. The newspaper advertisements for *Star Trek* placed by the network prior to its

initial transmission on NBC in September 1966 indicate the possibilities and difficulties

offered by the series' associations with science fiction (fig. 4.1). The full-page

advertisements claim that *Star Trek* was going where 'no programme has ever gone

before...'. This tag line, which makes use of the series' opening narration to emphasise

the novelty of its futuristic format, suggests that *Star Trek*'s generic difference from other

television drama was understood as an important element in attracting viewers to the

series. The bulk of the advertisement consists of a drawing reflecting the key elements of

the series' format. A large dark planet dominates the centre with a small sketch of the

starship Enterprise flying across it, leaving in its wake the words *Star Trek* in large print.

The dynamism of the distinctive space ship is indicated but relegated to a small section of

the background. Underneath and dominating the foreground are artist's sketches of the

faces of William Shatner 'as Capt. James T. Kirk (Earthman)' and Leonard Nimoy 'as

Science Officer Spock (from the planet Vulcan)' in front of a group image of officers on

the bridge of the Enterprise. The sketch of Kirk, emphasising his youthful attractiveness

dominates the page, while Spock's unusual features are much less prominent in the

background. The advertisement signals the series' unusual elements which associate *Star*

---

[23] Herb Solow was Vice President of Desilu Studios, Vice President of Paramount Television (when Paramount took over Desilu in 1967) and Executive in Charge of Production of the *Star Trek* series. Solow resigned for his position at Paramount later in 1967 and moved on to be Vice President of Television Production at MGM. Bob Justman was Associate Producer on *Star Trek* for its first two seasons and Co-Producer in its final season.

Fig. 4.1. NBC's advertisement for the first episode of *Star Trek*, which ran in *The Los Angeles Times* (8 September 1966) and in the *TV Guide* (fall preview edition, September 1966), places the youthful human hero Kirk (William Shatner) in the foreground (reproduced from Solow and Justman 1996, 264).

Trek with science fiction – a space ship, an alien co-star, interplanetary travel – but relegates them to the background, allowing the character of the youthful human hero to dominate.

The emphasis in this advertisement on the characters is also apparent in Roddenberry's series' outline for *Star Trek*, which places a stress on the series' use of identifiable characters and situations.

> *Star Trek keeps all of science fiction's variety and excitement, but still stays within a mass audience frame of reference* ... By avoiding "way out" fantasy and cerebral science theorem and instead concentrating on problem and peril met by our very human and very identifiable characters. Fully one-third of the most successful of all science fiction is in this "practical" category. Tales of exotic "methane atmosphere worlds with six-headed monsters" are rare among the science fiction classics. The best and most popular *feature highly dramatic variations of recognizable things and themes.* (quoted in Whitfield and Roddenberry 1991, 23).

The 'cerebral' aspects of science fiction are here associated with scientific theorem, rather than the exploration of intellectual themes or contemporary concerns, and Roddenberry is keen to stress that despite the generic associations of science fiction with technically and scientifically complex narratives, *Star Trek*'s stories will remain within the viewer's frame of reference.

These documents appear to challenge the notion that in producing *Star Trek* Roddenberry

used the science fiction genre to 'disguise' the series' address to contemporary social

concerns. Rather than indicating that the networks aimed to produce television drama

that overtly avoided contemporary issues, these documents suggest that NBC's major

concern was to produce a long-running series that would attract regular, large audiences.

Their primary anxiety in promoting *Star Trek* is not that it may tackle socially relevant

issues, but rather that its futuristic setting may make its narratives too remote and

removed from the viewer's frame of reference. Consequently stress is placed in the

promotion of the series on the relevance of the stories and the centrality of the characters

to the series' format. Here the series' generic associations with science fiction are both

valuable, by offering product differentiation and story latitude, and problematic, by

potentially alienating important audience demographics.

Narrating the Future: Story Latitude and Audience Identification

I want to go on to explore how *Star Trek*'s futuristic series' format was constructed to

combine the series' potential for story latitude and product differentiation with the need

to retain audience identification. Although set in the future and adopting elements of the

science fiction genre, *Star Trek*'s format broadly follows the conventions of the action-

adventure series, in which a cast of heroic recurring characters is placed in a different

perilous situation each week from which they must use their skill and ingenuity to

escape[24]. This format is described in the writer's guide produced for contributors to the series as follows,

> **The Teaser.** We open with action, always establishing a strong jeopardy, need, or other "hook". It is not necessary to establish all the back story in the teaser. Instead, we tantalise the audience with a promise of excitement to come. For example, it can be as simple as everyone tense on the bridge, hunting down a marauding enemy ship ... then a tale-telling blip is sighted in the screen, and the Captain orders, "All hands to battle stations". Fade out, that's enough.
>
> **The Acts.** Four acts in length. Act One usually begins with Captain's voice over, Captain Kirk dictating his log. Necessary back story should be laid in here, not in the teaser. The Captain's log should be succinct and crisp ... in ship commander "log" language. Opening Act One, we need some form of orbit, establishing, or other silent shot to give us time for both Captain's log and opening credits. We *must* have a strong ending to Act Two, something that will keep the audience tuned to our channel.
>
> **Style.** We maintain a fast pace ... avoid long, philosophical exchanges or tedious explanations of equipment. And note that our cutting technique is to use the shortest possible time between idea and execution of it ... like, for instance, Kirk decides that a landing party will transport down to a planet ... hard cut to lights

---

[24] Roddenberry is keen to emphasise this in his writer's guide produced for contributors to the series, which states 'build your episode on an action-adventure framework' (quoted in Whitfield and Roddenberry 1991, 247).

blinking on the transporter console, pull back to reveal the landing party stepping

into the transporter. (quoted in Whitfield and Roddenberry 1991, 247-78)

As this extract from the writer's guide demonstrates, although *Star Trek*'s narratives are

set in a potentially unfamiliar futuristic world, the series relies upon the familiar narrative

conventions of the action-adventure series to ground the viewer's expectations.

Focusing the exciting and fast-moving story lines on the experiences of the primary

recurring characters further enhances familiarity. The three lead characters in the series

are constructed as recognisable character types. Captain Kirk (William Shatner) is the

heroic and determined action-adventure hero, Doctor McCoy (DeForest Kelley) the

humorous and cynical country doctor, and Spock the intelligent and efficient assistant to

the Captain [25]. These familiar character types provide a recognisable point of

identification for the viewer, which is further enhanced through the narrative device of

the Captain's log. In each episode, this voice-over narration by Captain Kirk functions to

orientate the viewer[26]. The Captain's narration is always reliable and frequently provides

a privileged point of view. For example in the first season episode 'The Enemy Within',

Captain Kirk is divided into two characters, one good and one evil, by a transporter

malfunction. The teaser depicts Kirk walking out of the Enterprise's transporter room, as

---

[25] These three characters only become established as the central characters partway through the first season. Initially Kirk functions as the lead character with Spock often adopting the role of his sidekick. However, as the formula for the series becomes established, Spock and McCoy are developed to provide two counterpoints to the character of Kirk. Spock represents the rational and logical, which is contrasted with the emotional and compassionate Dr McCoy. Kirk acts as the balanced intermediary between these two positions.
[26] Occasionally, an 'acting' captain provides this narration, if Kirk is indisposed.

a second Kirk materialises in the transporter chamber. The unusual nature of this second

appearance of Kirk is enhanced through the use of strong lighting from below and the

dark background that frames Kirk's face, underscored by rhythmic drums building in

intensity. After the credits, the first act returns to this manifestation of Kirk in a tracking

mid-shot. Over this shot, Kirk's voice-over explains the situation from a privileged point

of knowledge as he narrates: "Unknown to any of us during this time, a duplicate of me,

some strange alter-ego had been created by the transporter malfunction." This explains

the story to the viewer; clarifying any ambiguity and providing the exposition absent in

the teaser's dramatic cliff-hanger.

The narrative device of the 'Captain's log' therefore allows the series to comment upon

its own story and to indicate to the audience what is 'strange' and what is 'normal' in this

futuristic world. Captain Kirk becomes one of the primary means through which the

audience gains access to the rules and conventions of this futuristic world and takes a

position upon them. The voice-over also provides a point of intimacy between the

character of Kirk and the audience. The viewer is privy to his personal thoughts and

comments on the action that is unfolding. This is reiterated through the frequent use of

'asides' in which recurring lead characters address dialogue away from the other

characters and towards the camera. These asides are moments in which the regular

characters provide their appraisal of the situation at hand, offering exposition and

narrative explanation. For example, in 'Errand of Mercy', Kirk and Spock beam down to

the planet Organia to secure it as a Federation outpost in the continuing war between the

Federation and the Klingons. The sets and costumes used to represent Organia resemble

that of medieval Earth. In a verbal exchange directed out towards the camera and away

from the Organians, Spock reveals that his scientific measurements of the planet do not

correspond with the Federation's computer records. He states, "our information on these

people and their culture is not correct. This is not a primitive society making progress

towards mechanisation. They are totally stagnant. There is no evidence of any progress

as far back as my tricorder can register." This exchange situates the visual references to

medieval Earth in the representation of Organia within the narrative context of the

episode, while also intimately drawing the viewer into the private space of Kirk and

Spock's discussion (fig. 4.2).

This 'frontality' as a visual device places an emphasis on the reactions of characters to

the unknown over the representation of the fantastic itself. Therefore, although this

intimacy is balanced by action sequences, it is not unusual for the climactic cliff-hangers

to end with a close-up of the face of a recurring character as they encounter the unknown,

rather than with a dramatic special effect or action sequence. The moments of tension

and drama in Star Trek are therefore predominantly dependent upon the representation of

the consequences of the events depicted for its main characters. For example, in 'Errand

of Mercy', acts 1 to 3 all end with a close-up of either Kirk, or Kirk and Spock. The

emphasis in these dramatic moments is on the escalated threat to these central characters.

For example, Act 2 ends with Kirk being threatened with death by the Klingons. The

camera tracks in to a close-up of Kirk's concerned face, accompanied by a dramatic

music sting (fig. 4.3). Similarly at the end of Act 3, the camera cuts to a mid-shot of Kirk

and Spock as they witness the murder of an Organian by a Klingon soldier (fig. 4.4). The

Fig. 4.2. In 'Errand of Mercy', an aside between Kirk and Spock in mid-shot, draws the viewer into the intimate space of the central recurring characters.
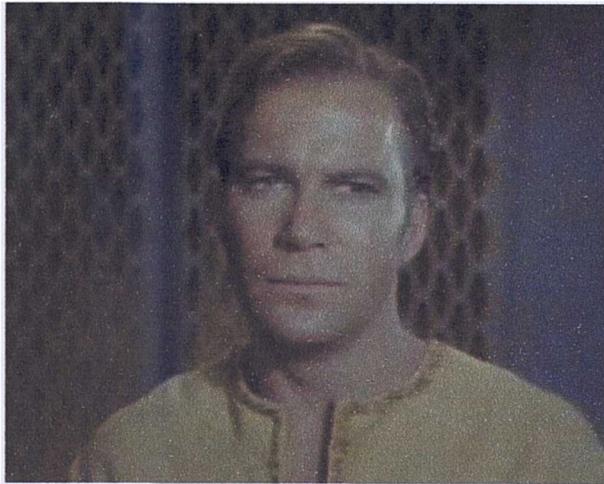

Fig. 4.3. The Act 2 cliff-hanger for 'Errand of Mercy' ends with a track into a close-up of Kirk, accompanied by a dramatic music sting, as he is threatened with death.

Fig. 4.4. The Act 3 cliff-hanger for 'Errand of Mercy' again focuses on the character, as the camera cuts to a mid-shot of Kirk and Spock as they witness the murder of an Organian.

use of close-ups here draws the viewer into an intimate relationship with these familiar recurring characters, emphasising audience identification by locating the drama in the reaction of the characters to the escalation of the threat, rather than in a fast-paced action or special effects sequence. Thus, the excitement and drama of *Star Trek* is constructed less through the depiction of alien creatures and fantastical planets than in an exploration of the consequences of the meeting of its familiar recurring characters with the threat of the unknown. *Star Trek* therefore domesticates its representation of futuristic space flight by grounding its fantastic narratives in the experiences of its familiar characters, emphasising the construction of an intimate relationship between the protagonists and the audience over the representation of alien creatures or spectacular conflict. Lynn Spigel argues that a similar process of 'domestication' is apparent in the treatment of the space race in television news and popular magazines in the 1960s, which frequently merged outer space and family life (1997, 53-4). The 'domestication' of outer space in both contexts situates the scientific and technical realm of space flight within a familiar context in order to make it more meaningful to a general audience.

However, while the series places an emphasis on enhancing audience identification with its futuristic characters and fantastic narratives, the fantastic premise of the series is also used to create extensive narrative fluidity. The result is that *Star Trek*'s world is one in which great transformations are possible, allowing it to explore the consequences of man's personality being split into 'good' and 'bad' ('The Enemy Within'), of man being given the powers of a god ('Where No Man Has Gone Before'), or of man's natural restraint being removed ('The Naked Time'). As with *The Prisoner*, the fluidity of the

format is also used to enable the series to play with its own narrative format, turning the rational Spock into an emotional being ('This Side of Paradise'), or creating an alternative 'evil' version of the starship Enterprise ('Mirror, Mirror'). This fantastic premise also enables *Star Trek* to reference a range of different generic expectations. For example, 'The Devil in the Dark' makes use of the generic expectations of the crime mystery as the Enterprise is called in to investigate mysterious deaths in a mining colony. 'Assignment: Earth' references the spy genre, 'Spectre of the Gun' is set in the Wild West, and 'A Piece of the Action' is clearly indebted to the gangster genre as the Enterprise visits a planet reminiscent of the US in the 1920s. These generic references expand the story potential of the series, while still functioning within the narrative expectations of the series' action-adventure format. They also function to combine the dual demands of story latitude and audience identification, offering a wide range of different stories within one format and enhancing audience identification by drawing on familiar generic expectations.

However, despite the seemingly limitless possibilities opened up by this use of the fantastic, the series never wavers from the action-adventure format. At the end of each episode, the narrative disruption is overcome and equilibrium is re-established. Following the expectations of the action-adventure format, the viewer can be assured that every week the crew of the Enterprise will be placed in a perilous position from which they will inevitably escape. Each episode ends with the restoration of 'normality', ensuring that the basic elements of *Star Trek*'s format remain consistent from week to week. The stories never refer to other episodes and the characters, procedures and basic

elements of the series do not substantially change over the course of its three seasons. As

Ilsa J. Bick points out,

> A large portion of *ST*'s [*Star Trek*'s] psychological agenda is invested in the
>
> maintenance of sameness, most explicitly in the fact that the Enterprise, as
>
> symbolic of this self-enclosed, hermetic stasis, opens and closes every episode of
>
> the original series except one. (Bick 1996, 45)

Therefore, while *Star Trek*'s basis in fantasy enables extensive story latitude, allowing

the series to disrupt its own narrative conventions and to draw on a wide range of generic

expectations, this is ultimately contained within the expectations of the action-adventure

format, in which the status quo is resumed at the close of each episode. *Star Trek*

therefore constructs a fictional world in which the central recurring elements with which

the viewer is encouraged to identify (the Enterprise and her crew) remain unchanged,

while simultaneously allowing the series to explore a wide range of stories and to disrupt

its own conventions.

Visualising the Future: Audience Identification and Socio-Cultural Verisimilitude

Despite the possibilities for story latitude in *Star Trek*'s narrative premise, the series'

ability to represent space as 'a place of infinite variety' (Roddenberry's series outline,

reproduced in Whitfield and Roddenberry 1991, 23) was severely limited by the financial

restrictions under which it was produced. *Star Trek* was budgeted at $200,000 per

episode, with NBC contributing $160,000 per episode, and Desilu making up the

deficit[27]. While the average cost for a comparable action-adventure series at this time

was $160,000, this higher budget was necessary to fund the series' special effects, and in

particular the extensive use of optical effects (between 15 and 20 per episode), within the

series. As a consequence of *Star Trek*'s financial limitations, only four types of alien

planet are represented in the series: a generic rocky planet set; a lush green 'paradise'

planet shot on location; a planet which equates with earth, either through the use of back-

lots or location shooting; Federation planets which allowed the re-use of permanent

Enterprise sets. However, the series was premised in part on the expectation that it would

take the viewer 'where no man has gone before'. In order to fulfil this expectation within

its budget, the series turned to the use of colour. Roddenberry stressed the importance of

shooting the series in colour in a memo to Grant Tinker at NBC in July 1964.

Further research and preparation on *Star Trek* has so convinced me of the

necessity of color photography that I felt I owed you this early note on the subject.

It is important to effectively meet the challenge of giving continuing variety to the

new planets we visit from week to week – plus that extra "something" which

suggests the mystery and excitement of other worlds. Color solves many

problems here. For example, the occasional converting of our blue sky to violet

or other hues can be accomplished via filters, mats, and other methods. Along the

same line, color can also convert even common vegetation into something new

and exciting. Whereas fabricating entirely new vegetation can be quite a budget

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[27] For its third season *Star Trek*'s budget was cut to $185,000 per episode (see Solow and Justman 1996, 374).

factor, the spraying of an occasional bush and tree to a new tint can be economical

and highly effective. Costumes which might seem rather Earthly in recognizable

colours can take on an entirely different identity in the same way. And without

expensive changes in form and configuration, a vegetable-dyed green woman can

be at once very attractive and still highly alien. It also permits the occasional use

of such effects as "back light" and other unusual luminescence. I am told also

that color consultants can come up with shades of makeup for our Earth cast

which will keep their skin tones normal while camera filters are creating unearthly

effects in the set or location around them. (quoted in Alexander 1984, 201)

Star Trek's extensive reliance on colour to represent the fantastic future of space travel

made it an attractive product for NBC, a network financially invested in the sale of colour

receivers. In the mid-1960s, NBC was engaged in a campaign to become the first 'all

colour' network in the US. NBC was owned by RCA who in 1954 won the battle for

colour television against CBS with the adoption of their three-colour-gun system by the

FCC. However, it was not until 1960, when the market for black and white receivers was

reaching saturation, that RCA made a profit from the sale of colour receivers for the first

time (see Barnouw 1990, 100, and Bilby 1986, 210). Over the 1960s the market for

colour receivers gradually increased. By 1965, 20 companies were manufacturing colour

sets and all three networks had begun to transmit in colour. When, in 1966, RCA

commissioned the A. C. Nielsen company to study the popularity of networked colour

television series, the research revealed that *Star Trek* was the highest rated colour

television series on the air at that time. RCA went on to use *Star Trek* in a promotional

campaign to encourage viewers to purchase colour receivers (fig. 4.5). Herbert Solow

argues that this research was a factor in the network's decision to renew the series for a

second season despite its relatively poor performance in the ratings (Solow and Justman

1996, 307)[28]. Furthermore, RCA actively associated its colour sets with the technical

advancements of the space race through a promotional campaign that claimed, 'Color TV

custom-engineered the Space Age way' (quoted in Spigel 1997, 56).

Colour is used extensively in *Star Trek*, in the design of the recurring elements, such as

the Enterprise and her crew, and in the representation of alien planets and creatures. In

the design of the Enterprise, colour is used to signal the futurism of the spaceship and her

crew, and to enhance audience identification by offering a distinctive and intelligible

representation of futuristic space travel. For the interiors of the Enterprise sets, set

designer Matt Jeffries used bold primary colours (particularly red and yellow), doors that

open automatically, and banks of flashing lights, to create a futuristic looking

environment (fig. 4.6). The distinctive use of colour in the sets is reinforced through the

lighting design, which uses pools of primary colours throughout the Enterprise,

frequently back-lighting the stars with strong colours in close-up (fig. 4.7). However,

these futuristic sets are also made intelligible through references to contemporary socio-

cultural verisimilitude. The interior design of the Enterprise has a contemporary nautical

feel with curved walls and visible trunking, complimented through the use of

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[28] Solow is arguing against the dominant historical account of *Star Trek's* renewal, which focuses on the letter writing campaigns from fans of the series (see Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 8-10, and Roddenberry and Whitfield 1991, 345-47). It is likely that both the Nielsen report and the fan letters were contributing factors to the series' renewal.

Fig 4.5. RCA used *Star Trek* in a promotional campaign in *TV Guide* to encourage viewers to purchase colour receivers (reproduced from Solow and Justman 1996, 306).
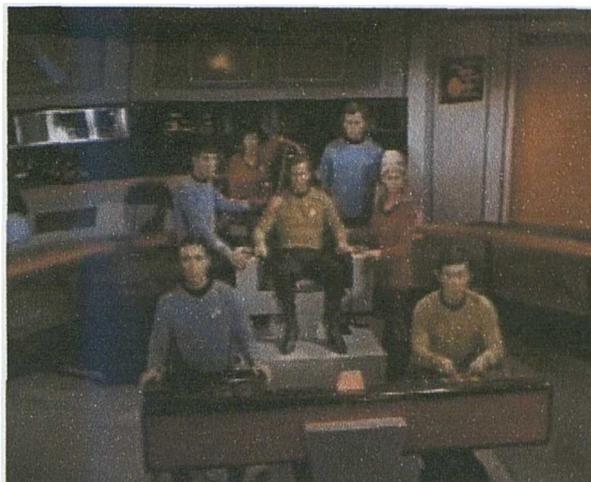
Fig. 4.6. The interior design of the Enterprise used bold primary colours (particularly red and yellow) and banks of flashing lights, to create a futuristic looking environment.

Fig. 4.7. The use of primary colours is also apparent in the lighting design, which frequently back-lights the stars with strong colours in close-up.

Fig. 4.8. The Enterprise crew is dressed in uniforms that use strong colours to indicate their relative departments, and to give the costumes an intelligible, yet futuristic, appearance.

contemporary sailing terms such as port, starboard, captain, crew, ship, and so on. The

crews' uniforms bear little resemblance to 20th century military dress, but they follow a

similar logic in their conception. The arms of each tunic are adorned with gold wavy

bands which indicate rank – one for a lieutenant, two for an officer, three for a captain –

and all uniforms carry a Federation insignia on the chest. The colours of both the male

and female crew costumes indicate their relative departments (blue for science; red for

engineering and security; yellow for the captain, helmsmen and so on) while also

complementing the use of colour in the set and lighting designs (fig. 4.8). This

regimentation in the costumes takes 20th century concepts about dress and transposes

them into the future, enabling them to be both futuristic and believable.

The construction of the recurring setting of Enterprise as futuristic and intelligible can

also be understood in relation to the contemporary discourses surrounding space flight in

the representation of the space race in the 1960s. Much of the visual iconography of

futuristic space travel in the design of the Enterprise, such as the curved console chairs,

drew on contemporary designs associated with space travel. However, as Lynn Spigel

points out, in the 1960s, such designs were mass marketed for consumption in the

domestic space of the suburban home (1997, 55-6). Such visual elements signal the

Enterprise as both futuristic and familiar, and draw a link between the private domestic

space of the home and the public/private spaces of the Enterprise sets. *Star Trek* not only

takes you into space and into the future from the comfort of your own home, it does so in

a ship and with a crew that whilst recognisably futuristic, are also reassuringly familiar.

However, this is a suburban domesticity that was predominantly only open for

consumption by white middle-class Americans, suggesting that the familiarity offered by the recurring elements of the series' design might be more open to certain audiences than others.

This is also apparent in the casting of the recurring crew of the Enterprise. *Star Trek* represented an integrated cast on the Enterprise, in which both women and ethnic minorities have positions of responsibility in the Federation's voyages into space. Such multiculturalism was particularly significant at a time when NASA was criticised for its marginalisation of women and ethnic minorities in its space project (Spigel 1997). However, despite putting an African woman, a Japanese-American man, and a Russian man on the bridge of the Enterprise, these characters are all relegated to supporting roles. The familiarity offered by this integrated cast is one in which women undertake traditionally gendered roles, such as Uhura's role as communications officer and Christine Chapel's role as the ship's nurse, and ethnic minorities take supporting roles and rarely feature as primary characters in the series' narratives (see Bernardi 1998, 39-42).

Meanwhile, the 'otherness' of the aliens encountered by the Enterprise is indicated by contemporary socio-cultural signifiers of racial difference. As the series could not afford to regularly commission expensive effects to create vastly different creatures, the alien beings that the Enterprise meets are primarily humanoid[29]. To rationalise this, the series

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[29] One of the exceptions to this was the alien Horta in 'The Devil in the Dark', which was a silicon-based life form, looking much like a large rock. However, the episode required only one of these creatures, making it a relatively cost-effective special effect.

drew on the notion of 'parallel evolution', which, as Bernardi points out 'allowed the

creative decision makers to construct alien societies with which both the audience and the

network could identify' (1998, 56). Costume and make-up are frequently used to suggest

the alien through reference to contemporary visual codes associated with the 'exotic'.

For example, the enemies of the Federation, the Klingons, are differentiated through

make-up and skin colour, which as Bernardi points out,

> include cosmetically darkened skin and sinister goatees cut in the fashion of
>
> stereotypes of the Chinese. In fact, Klingons in the original Trek bear a striking
>
> resemblance to the diabolical Fu Manchu character made famous by Warner
>
> Oland in the early 1930s and revived in both the serials of the 1940s and in such
>
> 1960s film as *The Vengeance of Fu Manchu* (1968) (Bernardi 1998, 63)

The series therefore used contemporary racial signifiers to make the Klingons not only

identifiable as alien, but also as the enemy.

However, these signifiers could also be used to confound audience expectation. The half-

human and half-alien character of Spock (Leonard Nimoy), for example, was a point of

contention between NBC and Desilu because of his satanic looking pointed ears. NBC

Sales feared that the association of pointed ears with the devil would not only make

audience identification with Spock impossible, but would actually affect sales of the

series to the Bible belt of America[30]. However, their fears were misplaced as Spock

came to be one of the most loved members of the crew of the Enterprise. Although

Spock's ears certainly carry demonic associations, his character is far from devil-like,

with his scientific rationality and propensity for logic. The disjuncture between Spock's

personality and his appearance is a means for the series to comment upon racial prejudice

based on assumptions about physical characteristics. This point is actually explicitly

made in the season one episode 'Balance of Terror'. The crew of the Enterprise is called

to investigate the brutal destruction of a number of Federation outposts by a Romulan

vessel. When the physical appearance of the Romulans is revealed to be almost identical

to the Vulcans (humanoid with pointed ears) the Enterprise's helmsman, Styles, displays

racial prejudice towards Spock. The basis for his prejudice – the physical similarity

between Spock and the warlike Romulans – is condemned by Kirk, and the episode goes

on to emphasise the similarity in nature between the Romulan captain and his human

counterpart, Kirk. In the character of Spock the juxtaposition of incongruous elements –

demonic facial features on a placid and intelligent alien being – has a dual function.

Firstly, the pointed ears situate Spock in an understandable frame of reference, indicating

him as an alien by differentiating him from humans. Secondly, the juxtaposition of such

signifiers with the rational and logical character of Spock creates a cognitive

estrangement, drawing into question their association with the demonic. This disruption

of socio-cultural verisimilitude is then used by the series to comment on racial prejudice.

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[30] In the document produced for *Star Trek* by NBC Sales ahead of its 1966-67 season, Spock's 'demonic' ears and pointed eyebrows are actually air-brushed out to make him appear more human (reproduced in Solow and Justman 1996, 202-3).

The complexity of *Star Trek*'s representations of racial difference can be understood in part in relation to the complex position that NBC were attempting to negotiate at this time, between the criticisms that they had faced for their marginalisation of minorities and the need to maintain commercial profitability. Series such as *I Spy* had countered criticisms of the networks by introducing African-American actors into lead roles. However, in the 1965-66 season (the year before *Star Trek* was launched), a number of NBC affiliates in the south had refused to carry *I Spy* because of its interracial cast (see Pounds 1999, 41). While this problem was resolved by the 1966-67 season when *Star Trek* premiered on NBC, this was a period when the representation of ethnic minorities was a difficult issue for the networks to negotiate. Despite this, NBC was keen to demonstrate that its commercial imperatives did not undermine its ability to function in the public interest. A statement from Mort Werner to Desilu in 1966 directly associates the network's desire to promote racially integrated casting with its responsibilities as a national broadcaster.

> since we are mindful of our vast audience and the extent to which television influences taste and attitudes, we are not only anxious but determined that members of minority groups be treated in a manner consistent with their role in our society (reproduced in Solow and Justman 1996, 76)

Star Trek is an interesting case in point because its basis in the future raises questions as to how a policy framed in terms of representing minorities 'in a manner consistent with their role in our society' (ibid.) should be accurately implemented. On the one hand, the

series places women and ethnic minorities in positions of authority on the Enterprise at a

time when space flight was primarily the purview of the white male. On the other hand,

their roles on the Enterprise, and the use of racial signifiers in the representation of aliens,

largely reinforces contemporary racial stereotypes about the superiority of the white

male. As Bernardi argues,

> [*Star Trek*] brings extraterrestrial nations and dissimilar aliens together, yet it also
>
> marks and segregates difference as Otherness [...] The paradox of *Star Trek* is
>
> that, despite or because of its liberal humanism, it supports a universe where
>
> whites are morally, politically, and innately superior, and both colored humans
>
> and colored aliens are either servants, threats, or objects of exotic desire.
>
> (Bernardi 1998, 68)

This paradox in many ways reflects the complexity of the discourses surrounding the

space race in the 1960s, which was the focus for debates about racial and gender

discrimination, while also offering a source of inspiration and pride for US ethnic

minorities (see Spigel 2001, 141-82). The space race itself was paradoxically rooted in a

sexist and racist ideology of colonisation while being conducted in the name of

democracy and multiculturalism. As Lynn Spigel argues,

> the space race was predicated on racist and sexist barriers that effectively
>
> grounded "racially" marked Americans and women in general. This is especially

paradoxical given the fact that space exploration was conducted in the name of

democracy and a 1960s version of multiculturalism (Spigel 1997, 48)

This paradox arises in *Star Trek* primarily through its displacement into the future. In

order to create a fictional world that is futuristic and intelligible, *Star Trek* both relies on

dominant social conventions (situating Uhura in the gendered role of communications

officer) and disrupts them (representing an integrated cast of 'astronauts' at a time when

the profession was almost exclusively white and male). Such representational strategies

also fulfilled the network's desire to represent racial minorities without alienating certain

audience demographics. This paradox has opened up the space for the series to be

applauded for tackling contemporary concerns about prejudice, and critiqued for largely

relying on contemporary constructions of race and gender difference. *Star Trek*'s

representation of an integrated cast, while relegating minorities to supporting roles, did

enable questions of prejudice to be articulated in mainstream television, and its

representation of space engaged with questions of racial prejudice, even while these

narratives ultimately reasserted a Eurocentric history and future for space flight.

Familiar Space: Audience Identification and Repetition

Despite *Star Trek*'s combination of story latitude, audience identification and production

practicality, the series was not particularly successful in the ratings when it was initially

transmitted on the NBC network. *Star Trek*'s low ratings in its first season failed to fulfil

the network's expectations for the primetime slot it was scheduled in at 8.30pm on a

Thursday evening. When the series was renewed for a second season it was moved to

Friday evenings at 8.30pm after *Tarzan*, which NBC hoped would lead new audiences

keen on unusual action-adventure to the series[31]. However, *Star Trek* continued to under-

perform in the ratings, and in its third and final season it was moved to the 10pm slot on

Fridays where it would have less impact on the rest of the schedules. However, this was

also a time when the series' core audience of teens and college students were not

habitually watching television, and after a drop in its ratings the series was cancelled.

However, despite its relatively unsuccessful performance on primetime network

television, *Star Trek* went on to run successfully in syndication after its cancellation in

1969. Kaiser Broadcasting (which owned five major UHF stations: Philadelphia, Detroit,

Boston, Cleveland, and San Francisco) made a deal to buy *Star Trek* to run in syndication

in 1967, although the contract was not drawn up until the series' cancellation in 1969 (see

Solow and Justman 1996, 418). The early sale of the series enabled Kaiser Broadcasting

to negotiate a lower price and guaranteed Paramount (who had recently merged with

Desilu after Gulf and Western's purchase of their adjacent studios) a financial return

from the series. The 79 episodes that make up the three seasons of the original *Star Trek*

series would normally have been considered an insufficient number to make up a

syndication package as it fell below the usual limit of 100 episodes. However, Kaiser

Broadcasting felt that *Star Trek* would perform particularly well in syndication. Kaiser's

UHF stations were unable to compete directly with the VHF stations in their markets in

terms of audience range or size. The approach they took to scheduling was therefore

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[31] This was the slot in which *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, another action-adventure series with elements of the fantastic, had successfully run in the season before.

based on providing a different type of programming from their competitors. Rather than

scheduling *Star Trek* against other action-adventure series, they placed it against their

competitor's news programmes at 6pm, to provide an alternative form of programming.

The episodes ran in the same order as on NBC, but daily instead of weekly. After the

final episode aired, the whole series was repeated again and again. These runs were

successful on all five of Kaiser Broadcasting's stations and the series went on to find

similar success in the international export market.

The reasons for the success of *Star Trek* in syndication compared to the series' relative

lack of success on NBC are debatable. However, what it points to is the value of certain

of the series' qualities for the different production strategies involved in syndication

programming. While network television in the 1960s aimed to appeal to the largest

possible audience, the UHF stations adopted strategies closer to the niche marketing of

contemporary US network television, targeting specific audiences and adopting a

scheduling policy of differentiation (see Chapter 5). *Star Trek* performed well in this

environment because it offered a distinctive form of programming that stood up to

repeated viewing and rewarded the loyal viewer. The reasons for this stem from the way

in which the series' futuristic world is created. In order to signal the futurism of its

fictional world, *Star Trek* is premised upon a highly distinctive visual and aural style

characterised by the strong use of colour and complimented by a soundscape replete with

unusual electronic noises. This emphasis on style is akin to Caldwell's notion of

televisuality in that visual flourishes and narrative embellishments are tolerated and

expected. Caldwell argues that the construction of such 'self-contained and volatile

narrative and fantasy worlds' tends to attract fan audiences because 'Such forms,

simultaneously embellished and open, invite viewer conjecture' (Caldwell 1995, 261).

However, *Star Trek* does not only create a world that enables visual excess and narrative

transformation. It also creates a fictional world that becomes increasingly familiar over

time. Furthermore, this sense of familiarity is actually enhanced (rather than hindered)

by the futuristic setting of the series. Loyal viewers come to understand the layout of the

Enterprise, the mechanisms of the Doctor's medical kit, the procedures for engaging

another ship in battle and so on, and can immediately recognise the series' distinctive

visual style and aural landscape. These are elements that are specific to the fictional

diegesis of *Star Trek* and cannot be encountered in any other context[32]. *Star Trek*'s

seriality therefore enables it to create a world which, while accessible to the occasional

viewer, rewards the loyal devotee. A series with a distinctive visual and narrative style,

that stands up to repeated viewing and attracts a loyal audience, while not necessarily the

qualities desired for network television in the 1960s, is particularly valuable to the

strategies of product differentiation and niche marketing that characterised syndicated

television in the US at this time. As I will go on to argue in Chapter 5, these are elements

that have become increasingly valuable in US network television production over the

1980s and 1990s.

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[32] As I will go on to explore in Chapter 5, this distinctiveness becomes particularly valuable in merchandising a series.

Conclusion

Star Trek was produced at a time in the history of US television that has been

characterised as financially profitable and aesthetically impoverished, leading to a

mythologisation of Gene Roddenberry as its maverick creator who used the 'cloak' of

science fiction to disguise the treatment of contemporary socio-cultural issues. While, as

Tulloch and Jenkins have argued, *Star Trek* fandom has increasingly distanced itself from

Roddenberry (1995, 19), and academic and non-academic histories of the series have

attempted to provide a more nuanced account of its production, there remains a dominant

and pervasive understanding of *Star Trek* as an unusually intelligent and creative series

amid a decade dominated by homogenous and formulaic television series. For example,

Bernardi reiterates Stephen Whitfield and Gene Roddenberry's understanding of the use

of science fiction to disguise the treatment of contemporary issues when he states,

> The science fiction nature of the series gave Roddenberry and the rest of the
>
> creative decision makers the space to address contemporary issues while avoiding
>
> some network censorship. (Bernardi 1998, 37)

I do not want to argue here that the network did not attempt to censor the production of

Star Trek or influence the content and form of the programme. The network adopted the

industry-wide National Association of Broadcaster's Television Code, which regulated

the use of expletives, cautioned against 'the use of horror for its own sake' (quoted in

Alexander 1994, 207), and forbade the representation of open-mouthed kissing and other

explicitly sexual behaviour. Furthermore, the network was concerned with making a

profit, and was cautious to produce programmes that would appeal to its desired viewers and sell to its advertisers. However, if we are to fully understand the use of fantasy in *Star Trek*, we need to consider what the series offered to the network within this commercial context.

This chapter has firstly demonstrated that the generic associations of *Star Trek* with science fiction were both valuable to Roddenberry, in order to differentiate the series from other networked programmes, and problematic for the network, who were anxious about the perceived appeal of science fiction narratives. The network's desire not to alienate the female audience (a key segment of the desired primetime audience) led to an emphasis in the promotion of the series on the human characters over the elements more easily associated with science fiction, such as space ships, aliens, and interplanetary travel. However, the fantastic premise of the series did fulfil two of the key requirements in network television production at the time – product differentiation and story latitude. The basic format of *Star Trek*, in which a futuristic space ship travels the galaxy, offers a wide range of stories and the possibility for extensive narrative transformations, differentiating it from existing television science fiction and enhancing longevity. However, these narrative disruptions are clearly contained within the action-adventure format, ensuring that 'normality' is restored at the end of each episode. The story latitude of *Star Trek*'s fantastic premise is also contained by the need to retain production practicality and audience identification. Within the dramatic action, emphasis is placed on the characters rather than on the display of special effects, which both reduces production costs and invites audience identification. Furthermore, the design of the series

uses signifiers of socio-cultural verisimilitude to make its futuristic world intelligible to the viewer, although this is also a world that is premised in part on its difference to contemporary socio-cultural reality. This analysis of the function of fantasy within *Star Trek* complicates some of the myths that surround histories of the series' production. It suggests that far from being merely a 'cloak' within which to disguise the treatment of contemporary issues, fantasy actually works at the service of the action-adventure format within the demands of 1960s network television production.

It is apparent, therefore, that despite the concerns of the network about the generic associations of science fiction with science and technological gadgetry, the fantastic premise of *Star Trek* was particularly valuable to NBC as it offered story latitude and product differentiation without removing audience identification or production practicality. The very distinctiveness of *Star Trek*'s futuristic landscape means that it becomes more intelligible over time. *Star Trek*'s seriality therefore provides a point of entry for the occasional viewer (by using intelligible visual codes, and by situating its narrative within the conventions of the action-adventure series), while rewarding the loyal devotee. However, while *Star Trek* gained a loyal audience and critical success, this was not enough to keep it on the air at a time when the network's revenues were directly linked to the Nielsen ratings. However, the familiarity of the series' distinctive visual and aural landscape proved particularly valuable for the scheduling practices of syndication (where the series when on to function particularly successfully) by rewarding the loyal viewer.

As with both the *Quatermass* serials and *The Prisoner*, the representation of the fantastic

in *Star Trek* enables the use and disruption of generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude.

In the *Quatermass* serials this serves to expand the visual and thematic scale of 1950s

British television while retaining an intimate address. In *The Prisoner* this is used to

experiment with the possibility for television to be both a popular and a 'high' art. In

Star Trek, the use and disruption of generic and socio-cultural verisimilitude is also

apparent, however, here it functions at the service of the dominant aesthetics of television

production. Fantasy is used to fulfil the demands of network television production, and

its potential narrative and visual disruptions are contained within the action-adventure

format. This is not to suggest that *Star Trek* is not at all innovative. The premise of a

futuristic space ship travelling the galaxy peopled by cast of familiar and recurring

characters was certainly a television first in the US. However, this was a 'regulated

innovation', conceived to fulfil the demands of network television, providing product

differentiation by proving that such a fantastic premise could be integrated into the

action-adventure format to appeal to a primetime adult audience. Despite this, the series'

dependence upon and disruption of socio-cultural verisimilitude in its representation of

the fantastic (apparent for example in its representation of race and gender) has opened

up the space for the series both to be redeemed as a progressive drama, and critiqued for

its reliance upon racial and gendered stereotypes.