

**Between the Candle and the Star:
Babylon 5, Science Fiction and Television
Narrative**

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by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the limits and possibilities of science fiction at the level of television. It examines the narrative strategies of the television series *Babylon 5*, arguing that the programme has created a radical new sf discourse for television. In doing so, *Babylon 5* has also created a new form of television narrative.

The Introduction establishes the parameters of the study. Part One examines science fiction in context, considering how the genre may be identified, and in Part Two, examines its possible precursors and the influences of the epic, the Romantic novel (particularly the Gothic) and Sublime. It also considers the role and visualisation of the Western and the epic settlement of the frontier in American mytho-history. Part Three establishes the general criteria for an aesthetics of television, discussing television narrative, and examining episodic and serial drama, soap opera, before considering issues of authorship and industry. It also explores representations of sf on television with series such as *Star Trek*; *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager*, *Dr Who*, *The X Files*, *Space: Above and Beyond* and *Stargate: SG-1*. Part Four examines the five-season text of *Babylon 5*, arguing that in form and content it creates an ideological break with the binary ideology of the past, creating a new form of television which is both epic and novelistic, serial and episodic in nature. Part Five concludes the dissertation, proposing that *Babylon 5* offers the first television epic and creates a discourse where the ideology of the past and the values of traditional television sf are questioned and subverted, resulting in a new mythos based upon the infinite discourse of diverse humanity.

BETWEEN THE CANDLE AND THE STAR:
Babylon 5, Science Fiction and Television Narrative

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Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

(T.S. Eliot: "The Hollow Men" 1925)

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Jan Johnson-Smith
Bournemouth. January 2001.

**For Tabitha
1993 – 2000**

BOURNEMOUTH UNIVERSITY

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I declare that the following material contained in the dissertation formed a part of a submission for the award of *(state award and awarding body and list the material below)*:

The material concerning images of frontier art, notably that of Thomas Cole and Albert Bierstadt, is a revised and substantially expanded version of research originally carried out at Clark University, Massachusetts, between 1990 and 1991, and submitted as part of my MA thesis.

Signature of Candidate:..... Date:.....

INTRODUCTION

Points of Departure – Introduction & Synopsis

Points of Departure – Introduction & Synopsis

This dissertation examines the limits and possibilities of science fiction (or ‘sf’) at the level of domestic television. Science fiction has only been in existence as a recognised genre for a little over a century and I will demonstrate how the speculative fictions of the classical literary epic undoubtedly influence it, and why it also owes much to the Romantic tradition, particularly the Gothic mode. In cinema, sf’s first appearance coincided with the birth of the art, courtesy of George Méliès’ fantastic and magical journeys; likewise, with television’s *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (1949), sf has a history almost as old as the medium itself.

Science fiction’s most remarkable distinguishing generic feature, and one that facilitates its mobility between media, is that rather than attempting to offer an alternative reality by recreating a naturalistic, recognisable verisimilitude, it instead creates imaginary worlds. This is primarily achieved through three strategies. Firstly it manifests itself in what Kathleen L. Spencer identifies as a foregrounding of the background,¹ a shift away from logical causality as a primary narrative focus towards a renegotiation of environment and setting. Secondly, it is developed through the process of cognitive estrangement noted by Darko Suvin,² and thirdly, it occurs via its vocabulary – mainly through the use of neologisms identified by Marc Angenot,³ and the meta-linguistic functions discussed by Eric S. Rabkin,⁴ but also via unusual or arcane epigrammatic juxtapositions. None of these techniques is unique to sf, and I will demonstrate how examples can be found in a variety of more experimental “mundane fiction” – a term for non-sf which I shall borrow henceforth from Samuel R. Delany.⁵ Nevertheless, in combination they create the specific narrative styles and patterns of storytelling that identify the sf genre today.

It is frequently argued that television is happiest with familiar, repetitive scenarios; this dissertation examines and challenges that assumption.⁶ It questions how television narrative may be affected by the grand ambitions of sf – the least familiar and most estranging of genres – and draws on what John Caughie identifies as the potential openness of television as a medium.⁷ The focus of this investigation is the five season

American television series *Babylon 5*, initially screened in the UK by Channel 4. On a superficial level the story of *Babylon 5* is deceptively simple. After the Earth-Minbari war a space station is established in neutral territory in the Epsilon system as a sort of United Nations in space. The story is that of the station, and its inhabitants' efforts to create a new Inter-Stellar Alliance, thus ushering in a new era of peace. However, the greater arc concerns millions of years of past and future history. The voice-over to the pilot episode (Video Extract 1) sets the scene and immediately establishes the nature of the series:

I was there, at the dawn of the Third Age of Mankind. It began in the Earth year 2257 with the founding of the last of the Babylon stations, located deep in neutral space. It was a port of call for refugees, smugglers, businessmen, diplomats and travellers from a hundred worlds. It could be a dangerous place, but we accepted the risk because Babylon 5 was our last, best hope for peace.

Under the leadership of its final Commander, Babylon 5 was a dream given form ... a dream of a galaxy without war, where species from different worlds could live side by side in mutual respect ... a dream that was endangered as never before by the arrival of one man on a mission of destruction.

Babylon 5 was the last of the Babylon stations. This is its story.

Ambassador Londo Mollari.

Five main races have a presence on the station, which is run by Earth Force military. The Centauri Empire is represented by Mollari and his aide Vir Cotto; the Minbari Federation by Ambassador Delenn and her aide Lennier; the Narn by G'Kar and Na'Toth; and the Vorlons by Ambassador Kosh. Although the other races, as well as representatives from the League of Non-Aligned Worlds, have ambassadors, the humans do not – first Commander Sinclair, then Captain Sheridan (or Lt. Commander Ivanova), and finally Captain Elizabeth Lochley, occupy roles as 'EarthGov' representatives at the Council. They also perform the administrative duties concerned with running the station, such as convening the Council, take care of security (Michael Garibaldi and Zack Allen), medical needs (Dr Stephen Franklin), and oversee business arrangements if requested to do so (commercial telepaths Talia Winters and Lyta Alexander).⁸

As the story of *Babylon 5* evolves, we discover that there are other major groupings and races, people who are far from committed to the peace-building ambitions of the station. First and foremost, danger comes from the Shadows, who are initially only identified by the occasional presence of the mysterious Mr Morden. After the death of the Earth President Santiago at the end of season one, Vice-President Clark takes over: he

turns out to be a machiavellian character under the influence of the Shadows, responsible for the assassination of Santiago. His forces include the telepathic community of the Psi-Corps, represented by the Psi-Cop Alfred Bester, and a variety of organisations such as Night Watch, a Nazi-style organisation which needs no excuse to don its jackboots and dispatch terror in the name of purity and humanity. Finally there are the ancient races known only as The First Ones, most notably Lorien, *the* First One, whom Sheridan encounters on Z'ha'dum, and the Drakh, former servants of the Shadows. Following the Shadows' departure beyond the Rim and the destruction of Z'ha'dum, the Drakh become masters themselves – and bring about the downfall of the Centauri Empire.

The greater narrative concerns the structuring and development of future intergalactic relations, and from the pilot episode an epic story arc is clearly and temptingly established.⁹ To find out what happens, the viewer is committed to watching week after week, because resolution may occur seasons apart. As the series progresses, so the questions mount; possible answers are given without context, leading only to more questions. This narrative structure distinguishes *Babylon 5* from the weekly resolution and gratification of other sf television, and from short-term serials of mundane drama. Science fiction on American television is generally episodic – such as the original *Star Trek*, *The Next Generation*, or *The Outer Limits* – or episodic with linkages provided by short or occasionally long term narrative threads, such as *Stargate: SG-1*, *Millennium*, or *The X Files*. *Babylon 5*'s finite and unique narrative strategy also lies in direct contrast to the apparently infinite and redundant story lines of that mainstay of the television schedule, the soap opera.

Whilst a classical epic in the form of a poem would be impossible to create on television, *Babylon 5*'s narrative follows the appropriate Greco-Roman structure for an epic tragedy, with five acts – in this case, five seasons. This structure (see Table 1) makes clear *Babylon 5*'s story arc, poetic balance, and its overall epic nature – and despite some unevenness enforced by the lack of commitment (from Warner Bros.) and uncertainty about renewal for the final season (eventually through the Turner Network), the overall story arc remains clear. In some ways that very uncertainty demanded a tying-up of most major/cosmic threads before the end of season four, and brought about a more sustained

BABYLON 5 TIMESCALE

(Earth years)

(For cast, seasons and episodes, please see Appendix A)

(1200s – the last Shadow Conflict, Babylon 4 given to Minbari by Valen)
2246-8 Earth-Minbari War, Babylons 1-3 built and destroyed.
2254 Babylon 4 vanishes)

2257 Pilot “The Gathering”

Introduction to main characters/station. Sinclair framed for assassination attempt on Kosh.

2258 Season One - Equilibrium: “Signs and Portents”

Establishment of main characters, purpose of Babylon 5, Omens and predictions of the emerging threat of the Shadows. Babylon 4 reappears. Death of Earth President Santiago.

2259 Season Two - Disruption : “The Coming of Shadows”

Sinclair assigned to Minbar as Ambassador. Sheridan assigned to Babylon 5. Increasing threat of Shadows. War between Centauri and Narn. Sheridan introduced to Rangers. Sheridan and Delenn tested by Vorlon inquisitor. Centauri assassin attempts to kill Sheridan.

2260 Season Three - Conflict: “Point of no Return”

Shadow War, Civil War on Earth and Colonies. Babylon 5 declares independence. White Star Fleet deployed. Sinclair and Babylon 4 sent back 1000 years. New Alliance formed between Narn, Minbar, Non-Aligned Worlds and Babylon 5 to fight the Shadows. Sheridan goes to Z’ha’dum.

2061 Season Four - Repelling of Disruptive Force: “No Surrender, No Retreat”

Sheridan returns from Z’ha’dum with Lorien. Garibaldi used by Bester. The Shadows, Vorlons, First Ones and Lorien, leave for beyond the Rim. War against Clark’s Earth forces. Civil war on Minbar. Sheridan captured, tortured, finally rescued. Marcus dies to save Ivanova. Earth saved from Clark’s “Scorched Earth” attempt. Sheridan and Delenn marry. New Inter-Stellar Alliance created. Earth invited to join. Ivanova accepts deep space assignment.

2062 Season Five - Restoration of Equilibrium: “No Compromises”

Sheridan becomes President of Alliance. Captain Elizabeth Lochley appointed to run Babylon 5. Byron’s martyrdom/Telepath crisis. Fall of Centauri Prime. Londo becomes Emperor under Drakh control.. Inter-Stellar Alliance Headquarters established on Minbar. Lyta and G’Kar leave Babylon 5 to explore. Franklin becomes head of Xenobiology Division on Earth. Garibaldi and Lise Hampton take over Edgars’ Industries on Mars.

(2278 Delenn and Sheridan go to Centauri Prime to save their son David from the Drakh. Death of Londo and G’Kar. Vir becomes Emperor.

2281 – Babylon 5 decommissioned and destroyed. Sheridan passes beyond the Rim. Ivanova becomes Leader of Rangers, Delenn takes over as Leader of Alliance.

1,000,000: the collapse of the Sun and destruction of the solar system.)

Table 1.

examination of the post-Shadow War situation, and the cost of independence on a more local scale, relatively speaking, in season five. This means that the episodes appear more as groupings of narrative threads, although collectively they still contribute to the overall arc of the series – almost a mirror of the early episodes in season one, which seem discrete but which actually create the foundation for the overall arc.

This section of the dissertation forms the introduction, and primarily provides a general explanation of the study's context, aims and objectives. It also commences the review of literature, continued in Parts One and Two, illuminating the general philosophical issues arising out of this study. Accepting the irony of adhering to what Vivian Sobchack terms the “tyrannical”¹⁰ demand of defining one's terms – especially in a subject area whose *raison d'être* consistently rebels against such requirements – this section of research also offers an explanation of my own working definitions and use of terminology. The study is concerned chiefly with the three main media utilised in sf story telling: literature, film, and television. It does not focus upon art, graphic novels/comics or animation: i.e. Anime, although I acknowledge the role of these media forms in the broader scope of sf.

Any study involving the examination of a specific type or form of artefact is a mighty if not impossible task in itself. As Fredric Jameson has remarked, after an introductory study and attempts at synthesis, it generally requires either an historical approach, or a generic one, or both.¹¹ Each has its limitations. Therefore, aside from a brief and necessary examination of its origins and development, no vainglorious and detailed undertaking is attempted here regarding either a complete history or the precise generic inclusions/exclusions of sf. Either would merely be a reassertion of the conclusions of other authors. Brian Aldiss and Brian Wingrove, Kingsley Amis, Thomas Clareson, James Gunn, Edward James, John Clute and Peter Nicholls, George Slusser, Eric Rabkin and Robert Scoles have all written useful texts, most of which offer far more detail than is essential here. Most helpful of all, despite their increasing age, are Patrick Parrinder's *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*, and *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching*.¹² In combination, they offer a sense both of history and genre, as well as illuminating various pedagogical issues.

Since the publication of Claudio Guillen's *Literature as System* in 1971, the approach to literary genre study has evolved in a highly positive fashion. For decades the pursuit of genre studies meant a search for the 'purest' example of a type – it was, as Fredric Jameson suggests, a quest to “unveil, surprise and possess the ultimate ‘secret’ of the thing itself (a passion with a long history of its own *within* SF).”¹³ Guillen rightly argues that pure manifestations of genre, as with most other things, cannot be found, and that all texts emerge at the intersection of several genres from the tensions created by their very position and existence.¹⁴ Nowadays methodology has evolved so that genre theory is more a question of using genres as a means of co-ordination and location than of pure delineation and in/exclusion. According to Jameson, now for each example we locate, it is not simply that genre theory allows us to “drop specimens into the box bearing those labels, but rather ...[that we can also] ... map our co-ordinates on the basis of those fixed stars and triangulate this specific given textual movement.”¹⁵

The analogy with stars is not only aptly ironic, but perhaps more appropriate than Jameson makes explicit, since the stars themselves are of course not ‘fixed’ per se, but nevertheless remain readily recognisable objects and thus a means of navigation – with or without a trusty sextant. In film and television studies, theorists such as Steve Neale and John Caughie respectively have argued a similar case for difference in generic repetition.¹⁶ Therefore *sans* sextant I return in this study to an acknowledged and ancient means of mapping my exploration. Firstly, I use two of the oldest known generic ‘star’ forms, the Epic and the Romantic (particularly the Gothic mode), as my major literary foci, with the secondary focus of those dominant social and cultural concerns which are manifested in sf during different eras. This methodology is well suited to my allied and preferred historical categories, which roughly follow Asimov's stages of American sf. These are: adventure dominant (1926-38); technology dominant (1938-50); sociology dominant (1950-?). More importantly, I will borrow from Fredric Jameson's 1982 extrapolation, and argue that from the mid-1960s sf has become increasingly aesthetics dominant.¹⁷ I will argue later that we currently exist in an age where all stages coexist, to a degree they always have, but I will also demonstrate how one stage tends to dominance in a particular medium at a particular time. When we reach film and television, the advantage of this approach allows for open consideration of what Thomas Schatz and others identify as classical, modernist and parody representations of genre, in both the language and mise-en-scène.¹⁸ Finally, as my triangulation point, I will examine sf's

modes of discourse, notably its stylised and innovative/juxtapositional language. This methodology permits me to establish what I hope is a diachronic and synchronic study, one which necessarily facilitates the potential for overlap and coexistence within the structure and boundaries formed by this study and its subject matter.¹⁹ The questions raised by this approach are dealt with in the following sections.

Part One of this study places the genre within a number of general critical debates. It addresses the question of what we mean by 'genre', more particularly what is intended by 'sf genre' for the purposes of this study. Rather than considering the *science* of science fiction, I should stress here that this research concentrates upon the metaphysical questions arising from the genre and its specific linguistic and visual juxtapositions. This leads to the second issue, that of the social placement and cultural role of the sf genre. Drawing upon the work of Theresa Ebert, it argues that the language of sf has developed to a point where hard-core and innovative texts frequently provide more scientific discourse than other forms of narration. The icons and conventions of the literature are dispersing, becoming incoherent in places, the generic form dominated instead by its own fictivity.²⁰ This tendency illuminates the inter-relationships and intertextualities of sf, post-modernist fiction, and theory. Drawing on the work of Scott Bukatman in *Terminal Identity*,²¹ Damien Broderick in *Reading By Starlight*,²² and Fredric Jameson's seminal work on post-modernism,²³ I demonstrate this with reference to a range of works by J.G. Ballard and Samuel R. Delany.

Part Two briefly traces the history, narrative traditions and semiotic/linguistic patterns of sf and its possible antecedents, including the epic and Romance. It also examines the role of the frontier in American mytho-history, drawing on recent work by Bukatman, Albert Boime and Thomas Patin. Boime argues that the imagery of the Manifest Destiny,²⁴ and the associated Magisterial Gaze, common to American landscape painting of the 19th century, are expanded and perpetuated in later American arts, particularly cinema. Bukatman notes a parallel in the ideology and images associated with the frontier and with space,²⁵ and Patin examines the imagery and role of the National Park and sublime landscape in the performance of the Manifest Destiny.²⁶ Taking their arguments further, and drawing on Barbara Novak's ideas in *Nature and Culture* of the Sublime rhetoric in American landscape painting,²⁷ I extend John Hellman's 1986 work on the *Star Wars* trilogy to argue that the historically time-tied western is inadequate to the requirements of post-1960s America.²⁸ In contrast, the more open and flexible sf

genre is a perfect arena in which to present a new national mythos. In *Babylon 5*, it breaks from the ideologies of the past to offer the image of a less binary, non-linear future.

Having thus established the empirical evidence concerning the nature of sf, Part Three draws upon Structuralist and Post-Structuralist theories of innovation and repetition and examines the frequently overlapping textuality of sf – speculative fiction, science fiction and fantasy. With reference to works by Umberto Eco,²⁹ Jostein Gripsrud,³⁰ and John Caughie,³¹ it examines how the arts borrow from one another, and how the variants of series, serials and episodic television may be identified. It also considers how common representations of sf on television intersect with theories about the nature of television and theories of viewing. It examines traditional limits of television narration through forms such as the soap opera and the episodic drama, both of which have largely replaced the single drama more common in earlier days of broadcasting. The problems arising from theories of television and film narrative construction are likewise addressed, with reference to the arguments of authors such as John Ellis,³² and John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado.³³

An important point here is the changing nature and habits of the television audience. In *Visible Fictions*, John Ellis argues that whereas film is the subject of the concentrated gaze, television is subject to the casual glance. Perhaps there was a case for this belief in the early 1980s, but with advances in technology, most notably the video recorder, it is perhaps an inaccurate description today, when we have repeated access to this once live medium. It is also a theory about the assumed audience rather than the actual audience, as Ellis makes clear in *Seeing Things*.³⁴ Not only can we watch a programme later than its broadcast date and time, but we can also enjoy emotional catharsis from our recordings in much the same way as previously we have been able to enjoy recorded music, novels, poetry, and art. Making use of alternative theories of viewing to the gaze/glance school of thought, I draw on the newer work of Ellis to create links between modern television viewing and the emergence of televisual programmes to illuminate the potential for new television narrative strategies, as argued by Caldwell and Caughie.

Part Three also discusses the common representations of sf on television. It examines the forms of the episodic and the serial, briefly considering the common language and differences between cinema and television, and argues that cinema remains an essentially photographic medium whilst television has developed into a layered,

graphic medium. Science fiction often establishes its alternative mise-en-scène at the expense of other elements: it can at times appear to overplay the tendency to foreground the background, as identified by Spencer, thus reducing the ironic juxtapositions of sf to spectacle or farce. I also examine how our familiarity with realist, narrative-driven scenarios leads to sf being criticised for superficiality, when arguably, the necessity for spectacle and wonder is intrinsic to the genre. This section concentrates upon series emerging from the United States, the culture that produced *Babylon 5*. It considers, amongst others: *The Twilight Zone*; *The Outer Limits*; all four series of *Star Trek* (the original 1960s series, *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*); as well as the more contemporary *Stargate: SG-1*; *Millennium*; *Space: Above and Beyond*; *Dark Skies*, and *The X Files*. It also examines the British programme *Dr Who*, which offers an unusual format for television, the episodic serial.

New patterns and methods of narrative production emerged in the 1980s, and this section also examines the narrative strategies television now utilises in order to provide the sustained plausibility of an alternative reality. John Thornton Caldwell's *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television* identifies six major features and/or requirements of televisuality, as follows. Firstly, it offers a stylising performance; secondly, a structural inversion; thirdly, an industrial product; fourthly, a programming phenomenon; fifthly, a function of audience; and finally, a product of economic crisis.³⁵ Caldwell cites programmes such as *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Miami Vice* as typical examples. Whereas not all of his eclectic categorical mix is applicable to my case study, his assertions are important to this dissertation in that they locate specific forms by identifying the various tensions affecting the text. His theory also complements the arguments put forward by Guillen, Jameson and Parrinder. I will argue that the 1980s/90s period of televisuality Caldwell identifies, and the development (and experimentation) within programmes such as *Twin Peaks* and *Moonlighting* facilitated the creation of a series such as *Babylon 5*. This examination considers the questions of individual and collective authorship, as related to the industry and distribution/screening, and how the question of authorship intersects with the industrial concept of genre. It also identifies *Babylon 5*'s occasionally innovative use of a feature now common to American television series: the six-act structure.³⁶ This allows for commercial breaks without interrupting the flow of the narrative unnecessarily, although of course the respect shown by the various channels screening the series may differ and commercial breaks may be

inserted at inappropriate times. Rather than conforming, at times *Babylon 5* uses the structure as a narrative device for estrangement.

Part Four is a major study of *Babylon 5*. It considers *Babylon 5*'s mythological and historical basis, such as the history of Babylon itself, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It also examines *Babylon 5*'s broader narrative strategies: its appeal to the Sublime/the sense of wonder through a lingering usage of exterior computer generated imagery (cgi) and matte shots, and its homage to certain literary texts such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. It notes how *Babylon 5* locates and explores humanity and otherness, and how it draws upon the literary traditions of thousands of years in order to not only establish its historical and generic credentials, but to also create a new and entirely plausible reality within the realm of sf television. It argues that in its temporally, spatially, and stylistically relocated articulation of a classic, tragic scenario, *Babylon 5*'s format illustrates ways in which television may rise to the challenge of presenting plausible sf scenarios. Simultaneously, its narrative rejects the rigidity of ideological binarism in favour of a more open, flexible and balanced approach to existence. In the process, *Babylon 5* offers something radical in television discourse that evolved from, and was facilitated by, the aftermath of the 1980s experiments in televisuality.

This section also asks how the combination of narrative devices peculiar to sf incorporates adequate points of cultural reference for *Babylon 5*'s audience, and examines how a mise-en-scène for an alternative reality is sustained. This is notable because the series was not episodic (as in the case of *The Outer Limits* or *Star Trek*), nor open-ended (such as a traditional long-term soap operas like *Dynasty* or *EastEnders*), but preconceived with a finite life span, more akin to the tradition of a Latin American telenovela. It also considers to what degree the creation of a new aesthetic through divergence is acceptable to its audience, whether or not any innovations in television narrative convention have evolved, and if so, how they have manifested themselves. Whereas soap operas and traditional sf television tend toward redundancy, and offer full knowledge of the past in order to emphasise a continuous, essential existence in the present, *Babylon 5* avoids redundancy, demanding complete attention from its permanent audience. It offers fragments of the past, present, and future as evidence of its overall narrative arc for the faithful audience but also offers discrete episodes for the newcomer or occasional viewer. It utilises seers, visions, and flash-forwards, and, at three crucial points in seasons one, three and five, time-travel – both to the past and to the future. The

chronology is confused, as a full context/narrative omniscience is never provided, thus leaving the audience with the knowledge of what may happen or what might have happened, but crucially not how, why or when. *Babylon 5* combines the juxtapositional tendencies of literary sf with the spectacle of the fantastic mise-en-scène available to film and television through cgi and other special effects. *Babylon 5* is also radical in its representation of otherness, breaking new ground in its uses of the creation and bearing of meaning, challenging the dominant hierarchy of television narrative through its generic tendencies. In its eclectic approach it thus creates an entirely new kind of television sf discourse.

Part Five concludes that *Babylon 5* demonstrates the potential for a new type of television sf narrative. *Babylon 5* was pre-planned in the tradition of an epic five-act tragedy, in itself a radical break from the traditional approach to American television series. Yet although it dispenses with the redundancies and repetitions of soap opera, of necessity it retains sufficient of the components and mannerisms normally associated with television sf to remain reasonably accessible to both casual and dedicated viewers. In this way it is both innovative in its manner of offering televisual entertainment, yet familiar in its use of historical patterns and modes. This section concludes that in sf, the Romantic and epic elements of the plotting create an impetus which drives the narrative forward, whilst the presentation of the story (in both its vocabulary, and in the mise-en-scène it establishes through visual and verbal narratives) affords an epic sense of wonder. Simultaneously, it fulfils a desire born of a tendency toward Formalism through experimentation and gratification. In mainstream sf television the Romantic elements often dominate because we are trained to prioritise dramatic narrative over visual narrative in film and television art. In *Babylon 5* the equality and immediacy of the narrative mise-en-scène with the plot-driven narrative offers a clear demonstration of sf's remarkable and unique achievement.

This dissertation does not claim that *Babylon 5* was entirely successful. The initial season was not greeted with overwhelming warmth, whilst the fourth and fifth seasons' narrative structures were compromised by the uncertainty of renewal and the switch from Warner's to the Turner Network. Its requirement for constant watching rather than the combination of ongoing threads and an occasionally episodic structure means that its audience's experience is compromised if episodes are missed. Nor does it appear, at least superficially, to be the most radical of sf texts. Yet, ultimately it challenges and lays to

rest the binary ideologies of the past. Although it occasionally uses familiar modes of representation apparently at odds with the aims and objectives of sf, and ultimately suffered at the hands of traditional television production, I argue that *Babylon 5* challenges the traditional making and bearing of meaning within television. It is the first original television epic; it creates a new impetus and demonstrates hitherto untapped potentials within the medium. It introduces new kind of science fiction discourse for television, and concomitantly, a new mode of television narrative.

- ¹ Kathleen L. Spencer, " 'The Red Sun is High, the Blue Low': Towards a Stylistic Description of Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies* 10 (March 1983): 35-49.
- ² Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and Discourse of a Literary Genre* (London: Yale University Press, 1979).
- ³ Marc Angenot, "The Absent Paradigm: An Introduction to the Semiotics of Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies* 6 (1979): 9-19.
- ⁴ Eric S. Rabkin, "Metalinguistics and Science Fiction," *Critical Enquiry* (Autumn 1979): 79-97.
- ⁵ Samuel R. Delany, *The American Shore: Meditations on a Tale of Science Fiction by Thomas M. Disch – "Angoulême"* (Elizabethtown: Dragon Press, 1978), 55.
- ⁶ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974); John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, rev.ed. (London: Routledge, 1992); and John Tulloch, *Television Drama, Agency, Audience and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1990), for example.
- ⁷ John Caughie, "Adorno's reproach: repetition, difference and television genre," *Screen* 31, no.2 (Summer 1991): 127-153. Also in John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2000), 82.
- ⁸ Please see Appendix A for details of character arcs.
- ⁹ J. Michael Straczynski, "The Profession of Science Fiction, 48: Approaching Babylon," *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction* 64 (1995): 5-19. Details of this are available from many other sources, including a posting to a fan question on 10th May 1996, available at <http://www.midwinter.com/b5/CompuServe/cs96-05>.
- ¹⁰ Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, 2nd enlarged ed. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 17.
- ¹¹ Fredric Jameson, "Towards a New Awareness of Genre," *Science Fiction Studies* 9 (1982): 322.
- ¹² Brian Aldiss and Brian Wingrove, *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction*, 2nd ed. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1986); Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961); Thomas D. Clareson, *Many Futures, Many Worlds: Theme and Form in Science Fiction* (Ohio: Kent State University, 1977); James Gunn, *Alternate Worlds: The Illustrated History of Science Fiction* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall: 1975); Edward James, *Science Fiction in the 20th Century* (Oxford: Opus Books, 1994); John Clute and Peter Nicholls, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, 2nd ed. (London: Orbit Books, 1993); George R. Slusser, Eric. S. Rabkin and Robert Scholes, eds., *Co-ordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983); Patrick Parrinder, ed., *Science Fiction, A Critical Guide* (London: Longman, 1979); and Parrinder, *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching* (London: Methuen, 1980), amongst others, offer substantial historical and developmental insights.
- ¹³ Jameson, "Towards a New Awareness," 322.
- ¹⁴ Claudio Guillen, *Literature As System: Essays Towards the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 508-510. See also Jameson, "Towards a New Awareness."
- ¹⁵ Jameson, "Towards a New Awareness," 322.
- ¹⁶ Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre," *Screen* 31 no.1 (1990): 45-66, and "Aspects of ideology and narrative form in the American war film," *Screen* 32 no.1 (1991): 35-57, and Caughie, "Adorno's reproach."
- ¹⁷ See Asimov's introduction to *Soviet Science Fiction* (New York: Collier, 1962), and Jameson, "Towards a New Awareness," 323.
- ¹⁸ Thomas Schatz, *Old Hollywood/New Hollywood: Ritual, Art and Industry* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983).
- ¹⁹ I am indebted to John Conron, my tutor and colleague at Clark University during 1989-91 for this approach.
- ²⁰ Theresa Ebert, "The Convergence of Post-modern Innovative Fiction and Science Fiction: An Encounter with Samuel R. Delany's Technotopia," *Poetics Today* 1 no. 4 (1980): 91-104.
- ²¹ Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Post Modern Science Fiction* (London: Duke University Press, 1993).
- ²² Damien Broderick, *Reading By Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- ²³ Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984): 59-92. Amended version in Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

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- ²⁴ Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting c.1830-1865* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991). The Term 'Manifest Destiny' was apparently originally coined by John L. O'Sullivan in an editorial for the July *United States Magazine, and Democratic Review* of 1845.
- ²⁵ Scott Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime," in *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*, ed. Linda Cooke and Peter Wollen, Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.
- ²⁶ Thomas Patin, "Exhibitions and Empire: National Parks and the Performance of Manifest Destiny," *Journal of American Culture* 22 no. 1 (Spring 1999)41-59.
- ²⁷ Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).
- ²⁸ John Hellman, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- ²⁹ Umberto Eco, "Innovation and Repetition: between Modern and Post-modern Aesthetics," *Daedalus* 114 no.4 (1985): 161-184.
- ³⁰ Jostein Gripsrud, *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- ³¹ John Caughie. *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ³² Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, and *Seeing Things*.
- ³³ John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Dr Who: The Unfolding Text* (London: MacMillan, 1983).
- ³⁴ Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 100.
- ³⁵ John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authorship in American Television* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 5-10.
- ³⁶ This could be seen as four main acts plus a short introduction and tag, nevertheless, it comprises six distinct segments.

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PART ONE

Signs and Portents – Science Fiction in Context

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All texts have a fundamental need: they must quickly and efficiently establish a convincing reality. A science fiction story is no exception, but in addition to creating a sustainable reality, it must also create new or different rules by which that reality functions. One means of so doing is facilitated by genre, which functions as a subset of the larger conventions and rules associated with verisimilitude and the creation of alternative worlds. Science fiction's alternative realities are textually created both in, and through, language – the sole resource that written texts have for realising their magic. Clearly, audio-visual texts have different resources and concerns: these will be addressed later. In this sense the extrapolated/alien worlds of sf are created in a manner identical to the creation of those in other genres, and are defined in two crucial ways: firstly through sf's internal logic, and secondly, by its cultural and social location. This chapter explores how we categorise generic sf, identifying its philosophical, linguistic, and thematic characteristics in literature, film and television, and considers where we position it within our social and aesthetic culture, why, and what is signified by that location.

The popular notion of genre science fiction was born in April 1926 when Hugo Gernsback, the editor of *Amazing Stories*, offered his definition and in its field cited authors such as Verne, Wells and Poe, whose tales were “a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision.”¹ The term ‘science fiction’ has since been abbreviated, appearing sometimes in upper case as ‘SF’, but it nevertheless remains with us. In recent years the mass media has adapted it into the derogatory hybrid ‘sci-fi’, blurring its idiosyncratic tendencies and generally introducing a variety of mundane (everyday) elements. The socio-cultural location and perception of sf is another matter, but insofar as the name is concerned, as Arthur Clarke says in his autobiography *Astounding Days*, at least the term “sci-fi has the advantage of being instantly understandable to everyone.”²

This common sense approach is understandable because the concept of all generic labelling is rife with difficulty. As with William Godwin's political satire *Caleb Williams* (1794), cast into the shadowy world of gothic romance, a great many texts are thrown into the sf category simply because no-one knows quite where else to put them. Like the gothic before it (notably another marginal genre), the sf classification oftentimes functions as a convenient catch-all. However, although its delineation remains tantalisingly elusive, there is certainly a range of artefacts that the general audience readily accepts and recognises as sf. In *Reading by Starlight*, Damien Broderick alerts us to the problem with irony:

SF? Already we are in trouble, because those initials are the accepted abbreviation of a whole sheaf of classificatory terms applied to texts produced and received in ways marked only (as we shall see) by certain generic, modal or strategic family resemblances. Sf or sometimes SF, can stand for 'scientifiction', 'science fiction', 'space fiction', 'science fantasy', 'speculative fiction', 'structural fabulation' (just possibly including 'surfiction'), perhaps 'specular feminism' and, in sardonic homage to right-wing sf at its most florid, 'speculative fascism'.³

In the 1993 *Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, Brian Stableford, John Clute, and Peter Nicholls describe about twenty definitions of sf, and list many of the theories attempting to define it, demonstrating the concerted attempts to pin down the subject area.⁴ When and where proto-generic sf began is an even harder question to answer. Some suggest, apparently sensibly, that it can only be a modern genre, since the technologies with which much of it is preoccupied are relatively new. Others, like Lester del Rey, argue for a direct lineage springing from ancient Mesopotamian texts, and include myths and legends in their lists.⁵ Patrick Parrinder suggests the epic, fable, and romance.⁶ The world of Faerie is an occasional and uncomfortable visitor to this more general field, as is the knotty issue of fantasy – in the modern sense. Likewise, there is arguably a substantial connection with the Romantic – particularly the Victorian gothic and detective novels.

Broderick argues that this sort of combination of ancestries is an awkward argument for sf per se. He suggests provocatively that:

science fiction, which is often crucially concerned with the strictly unforeseeable social consequences of scientific and technological innovation, is principally a diachronic medium - that is, a medium of historical, cumulative change, in which each step is unlike the last. Myth, by contrast, operates typically and primarily in a synchronic, or 'timeless' dimension while the fairytale, and often legend and archaic 'history', tracks the 'cyclical' time of individual psychic and social development.⁷

But this is a rather narrow and arrogant attitude towards sf, and implies that only in an era of technological advance could stories of future *human* development be written. Science fiction is indeed “often” (but not *always*) concerned with technological advances and this approach is essentially rooted in the prejudices of the 20th century. If we take a broader view and include early speculative fictions and fantasy – all of which include discoveries and advances of knowledge – we find ourselves in worlds of myth, magic and non-technological possibilities. The science of today is the magic of yesterday, the magic of today is the science of tomorrow. As Kathryn Cramer points out in “On Science and Science Fiction” (1984), along with utopian fiction even the so-called gadget-orientated hard-core sf originated in:

the desire to create and predict the possibility of a better world. In sf, this better world will be created and predicted through science and technology; scientific exploration and technological innovations are political acts leading to world salvation. But without the tradition of the folk-tale, sf, if it existed at all, would be a literature of didactic tracts, blueprints for “utopia”. Fortunately, the enlightened, rationalistic, utopian impulse collided with the irrational, romantic, fanciful folk storytelling tradition.⁸

So the question still remains – what do we mean by this loose generic term ‘sf’? Tzvetan Todorov puts forward a compelling case against purely empirical research in genre theory in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975). He follows a similar line to Guillen’s arguments when he notes that:

one of the first characteristics of scientific method is that it does not require us to observe every instance of a phenomenon in order to describe it; scientific method proceeds rather by deduction. We actually deal with a rather limited number of cases, from which then we deduce a general hypothesis, and we verify this hypothesis by other cases, correcting (or rejecting) it as need be. Whatever the number of phenomena ... studies we are never justified in extrapolating universal laws from them; it is not the quantity of the observations, but the logical coherence of a theory that finally matters.⁹

Todorov’s study was limited to specific nineteenth century texts, so it does not offer much help with modern texts like *Vurt* (1993), Jeff Noon’s nightmare of Mancunian life, or William Gibson’s 1980s cyberpunk roller-coaster rides, or even Philip K. Dick’s wry examination of Zeno’s Paradox in “The Indefatigable Frog” (1953). But the psychology behind Todorov’s comment is nonetheless useful because, as Broderick notes, it locates “its effectivity ... within the reader, and not least within the reader’s unconscious.”¹⁰ In *Fantasy and the Cinema* (1989) James Donald, referring to Steve

Neale's contention that genre is "a means of regulating memory and expectation, a means of containing the possibilities of reading,"¹¹ argues that it involves:

not just the obvious iconographic and narrative conventions ... but also 'systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject.' What distinguishes one genre from another, Neale suggests, are not so much particular formal elements as the way such elements – which may be common to a number of genres – are combined so as to produce particular narrative structures and modes of address.¹²

J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962) offers an organic version of this. As the Earth itself becomes a kind of time machine, life devolves, careering back through the aeons towards the Palaeozoic era. The biologist Bodkin suggests that we are each:

as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our bloodstreams are tributaries of the great seas of its total memory. The uterine odyssey of the growing foetus recapitulates the entire evolutionary past, and its central nervous system is a coded time scale, each nexus of neurones and each spinal level marking a symbolic station, a unit of neuronic time.¹³

This is an appropriate and reasonable analogy for the evolution of genre. It operates in a similar manner, reminding us of past manifestations – some of those pasts at the expense of others. I suspect that the hierarchy has more to do with endurance of pattern, a survival of the fittest, rather than of individual quality or quantity, but the beauty of genre is that the very act of reading has an impact upon the result. In this way, forgotten gems are resurrected, and hitherto unseen ironies can be identified. Just as a post-modernist self-reflexive text must refer by default to its conservative ancestry, so the most conservative text must also contain the capacity for self-reflexivity and ironic critique. As Neale and Williams have argued with film,¹⁴ and Caughie with television, we need to be sensitive "to generic difference as much as to repetition, and, in particular, to generic difference which cannot simply be assigned to the magical agency of authorship."¹⁵ Jostein Grisprud reminds us that "genres are used for specific purposes, address specific problems, provide specific pleasures, produce specific types of insights and experiences."¹⁶ Perhaps the point here is simply that the question of what comprises any genre should be continually reassessed over time, and reconsidered in the context of its era, and the forms and institutions impacting upon it.

In “ ‘The Red Sun is High, the Blue Low’: Towards a Stylistic Description Of Science Fiction”, Kathleen L. Spencer suggests that a more logical approach is to stop “seeking a dictionary definition of SF,” and ask instead how readers may “identify a text as SF.”¹⁷ We run the risk here of merely resorting to descriptions of BEMs (bug-eyed monsters), interplanetary travel, laser guns and virile space captains, but helpful again is Broderick, who reminds us that at the heart of any reading is an act that helps to:

create a world, built out of words and memories and the fruitfulness of the imagination. Usually, we miss the complexity of this process. Like poetry and postmodern fiction, all sf tests the textual transparency we take for granted, contorting habits of grammar and lexicon with unexpected words strung together in strange ways.¹⁸

The missing of the process is largely due to the realist tendency, the effacement of the signifier in most fiction. Indeed, the ambitions and lexicon of sf (and some modernist/post-modernist fiction) arguably stand in contrast to the central objective of much of what Samuel Delany calls “mundane” fiction, especially that written from the late 18th century onwards. Equally there are differences which immediately isolate the sf text from the experimental or post-modernist mundane text. In Delany’s opinion, mundane fiction generally proceeds:

as a series of selections from a theoretically fixed, societally extant lexicon of objects, actions and incidents. In the s-f tale, a series of possible objects, possible actions, possible incidents (whose possibility is limited, finally, only by what is sayable, rather than what is societal) fixes a more or less probable range of contexts for a new lexicon.¹⁹

A remarkably high degree of plausibility is vital to science fiction; the method of highlighting ‘difference’ is where the sf novel varies from the mundane realist novel, and the necessity of doing so both rapidly and acceptably for the reader is paramount. In *Structuralist Poetics* (1975) Jonathan Culler suggests that there are several underlying conventions of realism in literature, reminding us of just how vital the creation of a believable world is, when he says that:

our expectation is that the novel will produce a world. Words must be composed in such a way that through the activity of reading there will emerge a model of the social world, models of the individual personality, of the relations between the individual and society, and perhaps most important, of the kind of significance which these aspects of the world can bear.²⁰

Drawing on this, Spencer explains that as readers we can “identify elements within the text which allow us to construct the world.” In doing so, we “*naturalize* the details of the text by relating them to some kind of natural order or pattern already existing in our physical or cultural environment” (her stress).²¹ Culler offers five levels of *vraisemblance* (or verisimilitude) within texts, each offering a progression of abstraction. The first level takes the form of ‘the real,’ a level at which Culler believes there is no need for any justification, “because it seems to derive from the structure of the world” – the presence of gravity, for example.²² The second level suggests a kind of cultural verisimilitude – and includes such methods as cultural stereotyping, and cultural icons, the associational meaning of, for example, a wedding ring on someone’s finger. This allows progression to the third level, which provides a set of “explicitly literary and/or generic norms.” In this context Spencer argues that we are not only considering familiar genre types – mystery, romance, tragedy, etc., but also the “fictional milieux” created by authors such as William Faulkner or Mark Twain. She argues that “a character like Heathcliff, for instance, though natural and believable in the gothic intensity of *Wuthering Heights*, would be totally out of place in Jane Austen.”²³ Spencer’s reference to Austen as the author is important: it is not just the *mise-en-scène* to which this refers, but the entire context. In recognising this fact, she reminds us of Todorov’s belief that “there are as many versions of *vraisemblance* as there are genres.”²⁴

Spencer erroneously pays attention only to the first three categories of Culler’s hierarchy, arguing that the remaining two do not concern her study of sf. The fourth relates to the conventionally natural, which is concerned with an explicit textual self-reflexivity (a western that talks about the conventions of the western, for example), and the fifth level concentrates upon the degree of subversion attempted. Spencer suggests that the level of parody and irony of both the text itself and the text it challenges are “naturalized by reference to another level in which the terms of the opposition can be held together by the theme of the literature itself.”²⁵ Indeed, at first glance, science fiction literature would appear to be most reliant upon adherence to the first three levels of Culler’s structural approach, and initially realism seems at odds with its fantastic aims. But in order to create a plausible and continually acceptable story world, the reality of that world must be sustained as precisely as Austen’s middle class niche or Brontë’s passionate windswept moorlands. Self-reflexive and parody texts co-exist from the early classical stages of genre, as Thomas Shatz demonstrates in *Old Hollywood/New*

Hollywood (1983). However, the dominant modes of presentation over time move roughly from classical to modernist to parody (from critically unaware to mannerist intertextuality). Therefore why should sf literature, film or television, all able to create irony and distancing, not also draw upon the strategies of Culler's final two categories?

Some of the common narrative structural elements and strategies have already been identified, but the aspects of sf to which Spencer refers rely heavily upon the linguistic elements to which Culler and Delany make reference. Together they form the process initially favoured by the Russian Formalists, and dramatists such as Brecht in his *Lehrstück* or 'learning plays'. They claim to offer something radically shocking, different from the normal experience of the audience: the sense of estrangement. This, as we shall see shortly through the theories of Darko Suvin, is elemental to sf, where much is achieved through the power of juxtaposition and poetic language.

Emerging shortly before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Formalists were a militant group whose polemics "rejected the quasi-mystical symbolist doctrines which had influenced literary criticism before them, and in a practical, scientific spirit shifted attention to the material reality of the literary text itself."²⁶ As Robert Stam notes:

for them aesthetic perception was autotelic, an end in itself. Art was largely a means for experiencing what Shklovsky called the 'artfulness of the object,' for feeling the 'stoniness of the stone'.²⁷

The Formalists were also the first to explore the analogy between film and language. Drawing on the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, they "set out to systematize the apparently chaotic world of filmic phenomena."²⁸ Writing in *Poetica Kino*, Eikhenbaum, Tynjanov and Shklovsky proposed a poetic use of film equating to the literary use of language they were applying to verbal texts. Tynjanov compared montage to prosody, and importantly to this study of sf, argued that just as "plot is subordinate to rhythm in poetry, so plot is subordinate to style in cinema."²⁹

The Formalists applied linguistics to the study of literature, and rather than considering form as an expression of content, instead took account of the form over the content – they considered content merely a motivation or a "convenience for a particular kind of formal exercise." They began by viewing literary works as arbitrary collections of devices, and later came to view these devices as "interrelated elements or 'functions' within a total textual system."³⁰ These functions comprised the catalogue of formal

Literary elements – metonymy, synecdoche, chiasmus, sound, imagery, rhythm, metre, rhyme and syntax – but on application to ‘ordinary’ language, the Formalists argued that the effect of their twisting, condensing, amplification and intensification invariably resulted in something startling for the reader. According to Viktor Shklovsky, whose seminal paper “Art as Technique” (1917) focused on Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67), the leading method by which any change of perception is achieved occurs through the process of defamiliarization or ‘estrangement’ (in Russian: *ostraneniye*, “making strange,” and *zatrudnenie*, “making difficult.”).³¹ There is no single device for achieving this, rather a variety of methods are utilised, such as the roughening of poetic language, wordplay, or arcane figures of speech.³² For Shklovsky, the role of poetic art is to “explode the encrustations of customary, routinized perception by making forms difficult.”³³

This rigorously aesthetic approach lay in opposition to the dominant Realist/Romantic aesthetic theories of the time, typified by the critical approach of Alexander Potebnya, and epitomised by the maxim that “art is thinking in images.”³⁴ Close as they were to the *avant garde*, the Formalists made a crucial distinction, one that echoes through the aesthetics of the 20th century. Much as Delany observes differences between ‘mundane’ fiction and ‘science’ fiction, the Formalists differentiated between the text that repeats recognisable and conventional rhetorical forms of literary reality, and those that in some manner attempt to break with them. Shklovsky argued that the purpose of art is to make us notice. For him, not only does art “bear meaning, but it forces an awareness of its meaning upon the reader/viewer,”³⁵ and he goes on to suggest that art “is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object, the object is not important.”³⁶ However, like many of the other Formalists, Shklovsky places metaphor rather than irony as the basis for poetry. So although he avoided the weakness of what he called “one-way” metaphors “that work only by presenting the unknown in the terms of the known” endeared to Potebnya and his adherents, as Lemon and Reis suggest in their analysis and introduction to the 1965 collection of *Russian Formalist Criticism*, he “fell into another” trap.³⁷

The Formalist movement flourished in the 1920s, until Stalin turned his attention to the arts and effectively silenced them within the Soviet Union. They saw ‘literary’ language as deviant from everyday, ‘ordinary’ language. It was a form of linguistic violence. As Caughie notes, Jakobson’s theories of language demonstrate how “the

conventions which guarantee a form's verisimilitude and secure it in public opinion have temporal limits on their effectivity."³⁸ As time passes, conventions are seen as clichés and formula becomes a trap, therefore reducing the value placed upon the genre by the public. Jakobson points out that our everyday language utilises:

a number of euphemisms, including polite formulas, circumlocutions, allusions, and stock phrases. However, when we want our speech to be candid, natural, and expressive, we discard the usual polite etiquette and call things by their real names. They have a fresh ring and we feel that they are 'the right words'. But as soon as the name has merged with the object it designates, we must, conversely, resort to metaphor, allusion or allegory if we wish a more expressive term. It will sound more impressive, it will be more *striking*. To put it another way, when searching for a word which will revitalise an object, we pick a far-fetched word, unusual at least in its given application, a word which is forced into service.³⁹

However, it is worth remembering Terry Eagleton's warning that this approach does not openly consider that the ordinary language of – for instance – a Glaswegian docker is not the same ordinary language as that of an Oxbridge philosopher, nor presumably, as that of a Ukrainian labourer.⁴⁰ Eagleton points out that any:

actual language consists of a highly complex range of discourses, differentiated according to class, region, gender, status and so on, which can by no means be neatly unified into a single homogenous linguistic community. One person's norm may be another's deviation: 'ginnel' for 'alleyway' may be poetic in Brighton but ordinary language in Barnsley. Even the most 'prosaic' text of the fifteenth century may sound 'poetic' to us today because of its archaism.⁴¹

Thus the first problem is that the estrangement effect to which Jakobson refers is not guaranteed – except against a "certain normative linguistic background", and if this background were to alter, the writing would cease to be perceived as literary. Eagleton makes the point clear when he suggests that if we were all to use phrases "like 'unravished bride of quietness' in ordinary pub conversation, this kind of language would cease to be poetic."⁴²

There is a second problem with this explanation of estrangement, one which facilitates the type of humour so beloved of *Monty Python*, because, as Eagleton demonstrates:

there is no kind of writing which cannot, given sufficient ingenuity, be read as estranging. Consider a prosaic, quite unambiguous statement like the one sometimes seen in the

London underground system: 'Dogs must be carried on the escalator.' This is not perhaps quite as unambiguous as it seems at first sight: does it mean that you *must* carry a dog on the escalator? Are you likely to be banned from the escalator unless you can find some stray mongrel to clutch in your arms on the way up?' ⁴³

Nevertheless, Eagleton admits, even if someone were "to read the notice in this way, it would still be a matter of reading it as poetry."⁴⁴ This is the vital distinction here, and was the prime concern of the Formalists, who did not desire to define Literature, but rather the Literary or Literariness – the specific and special use of language which exists not only *inside* the text, but also *outside* of it. They were aware that the social or historical context impacted upon the norms and deviations of language, and that poetry was dependent upon the position of the reader at the time of engagement with the poem. However, they believed that estrangement was still central to the creation of the Literary, and equally, that 'Literariness' was not an eternally given state, but a "function of the differential relations between one sort of discourse and another."⁴⁵ They simply "relativised this use of language and saw it as a matter of contrast between one type of speech and another."⁴⁶

The importance of the Formalist theory to sf is that, despite its flaws, it emerges in direct opposition to the representational sign of Realism "which effaces its own status as a sign in order to foster the illusion that we are perceiving reality without its intervention."⁴⁷ As Eagleton concludes, Roland Barthes' notion of a double sign which "gestures to its own material existence at the same time as it conveys a meaning" can therefore be identified as "the grandchild of the 'estranged' language of the Formalists and Czech Structuralists, of the Jakobsonian poetic word which flaunts its own palpable linguistic being." Eagleton makes the link, suggesting that:

the more direct offspring of the Formalists were the social artists of the German Weimar Republic – Bertolt Brecht among them – who employed such 'estrangement effects' to political ends. In their hands, the estranging devices of Shklovsky and Jakobson became more than verbal functions: they became poetic, cinematic and theatrical instruments for 'denaturalising' and 'defamiliarizing' political society, showing just how deeply questionable what everyone took for granted as 'obvious' actually was. These artists were also the inheritors of the Bolshevik Futurists and other Russian *avant-gardistes*, of Mayakovsky, the 'Left Front in Art' and the cultural revolutions of the Soviet 1920s.⁴⁸

Barthes examines this work of the break in *S/Z* (1970), a study of Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1830). Here the literary is no longer stable or delineated as a structure, and the

much-vaunted apparent scientific objectivity of the critic is relinquished. As Eagleton points out, this means that the "most intriguing texts for criticism are not those which can be *read*, but those which are writable (*scriptible*) – texts which encourage the critic to carve them up, transpose them into different discourses, produce his or her semi-arbitrary play of meaning athwart the work itself."⁴⁹ In effect, the reader becomes a producer, not a consumer.

Jakobson's "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetry" (1960) continues with this line of enquiry, arguing that "in poetry any verbal element is converted into a figure of poetic speech."⁵⁰ Following in the footsteps of Tynjanov et al., Christian Metz took this to the comparable level in film, suggesting that any element in cinema could be turned to expressive purposes, i.e., into Jakobson's poetic speech. Between them, Jakobson and Metz thus facilitated a more radical approach to the question of literary and cinematic realism. Until their arguments, reflectionism had been the accepted approach – a view which insisted that the text be assessed against some *a priori* concept of the 'real': with reflectionism under assault, cinematic realism could be considered as "an effect produced by certain kinds of texts."⁵¹

The problem with the general premise of Formalism is that it approaches realism as if it emerges from some monolithic and classical definition. Colin MacCabe's 1974 "Realism and the Cinema: Some Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," draws upon the developments made by Metz, Jakobson and Roland Barthes, when he suggests that it is "explained not with reference to external reality but as an effect the text produced through a specific signifying organization."⁵² MacCabe argues that a "classic realist text may be defined as one in which there is a hierarchy amongst the discourses which compose the text and this hierarchy is defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth."⁵³ He suggests that realism arranges the variety of discourses within the text into categories which equate to what Alfred Tarksi identifies as the *object* language and the *meta-language*.⁵⁴ Accordingly, realist cinema makes the dialogue into the object language and the view permitted us by the camera is the meta-language – what 'really' happened. The effect of this is to encourage the audience to overlook the construction of the film – the script, editing, mise-en-scène, etc., – and to respond to the visual story as if it reveals the definitive version of what happened. *Badlands* (1973) offers a useful example of this in action: here the voice-over narration we hear is at total odds to the visuals of Kit and his teenage lover on their violent rampage in Dakota. For MacCabe, as for Brecht, realism is

inherently conservative, as within this construct, it cannot deal with the radical nature of contradiction, which contains the potential for change.

Stephen Heath (1976) also examines the problem in his analysis of the 1975 film *Jaws*.⁵⁵ He argues that the narrativization of the beach party scene at the opening of the film is typical of this conservative and conventional cinema, and that it “transforms fixity into process and absence into presence by promoting (in Lacanian terms), the Imaginary over the Symbolic.”⁵⁶ Radical alternative cinema would deny the coherence achieved through such an approach, forcing the viewer instead to experience the process itself, as they are themselves part of it. This is a major problem for Hollywood sf (and is explored further in the following chapters), but in essence, any potential estrangement effect is largely negated by the dominant institutionalised drive for classic-realist production. Heath and MacCabe differ slightly in their conclusions; for Heath realism contains and controls the process of signification, whilst for MacCabe, who still holds to a kind of structuralist definition of realism, it effaces the signifier in order to achieve transparency. Either way, within this context, science fiction creates a problem. It cannot belong to an existing textual version of reality, because its entire *raison d'être* is to speculate and encourage speculation about other potential and plausible realities. In fact, Heath's studies (and to a lesser extent those of MacCabe) suggest that a more practical starting point is to consider that realism is wholly internal: it is produced anew and internally in every discourse.

Writing of Philip K. Dick's *Time Out of Joint* (1959), Fredric Jameson follows this a rich tradition in *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), suggesting that sf offers “the estrangement and renewal of our own reading present.”⁵⁷ According to Scott Bukatman, science fiction primarily “narrates the dissolution of the very ontological structures that we usually take for granted,”⁵⁸ pointing out that “the ‘multiple mock futures’ of science fiction work by transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come.” He refers also to McCaffery, who suggests that sf has “the capacity to ‘defamiliarise our science fictional lives’, reflecting them back to us in more hyperbolic terms.” This is more than the “new mimesis”⁵⁹ Bukatman identifies; it means that the reader of sf is made to “temporarily inhabit worlds” composed of “cognitive distortions and poetic figurations of our own social relations – as these are constructed and altered by new technologies.”⁶⁰

This brings to attention a feature intrinsic to sf texts, one which both Kathleen Spencer and Samuel Delany consider important. This is the tendency of sf to foreground the background in a manner seldom found in mundane texts. As Spencer remarks, the information which the reader of a non-sf novel “can take for granted – the appearance and function of bathrooms, for instance ... must be specified in a SF text.”⁶¹ As a result we find that sf texts spend far more time on background information than would mundane novels. Often this leads to the complaint that sf is all style and no substance – there is neither characterisation nor plot development. In fact the development is in the background – in the setting, the location. Certainly this would seem to be true of 1990s sf cinema such as *The Fifth Element* (1997) or *The Matrix* (1999). However, I contend that critics who pose this argument are in fact missing the point of such a spectacle: sf is about experience, about immersing oneself in the new. It is a call to the sense of wonder, to the Sublime – the child-like awe at the beauty of a rainbow on a stormy day. As Jameson would claim (perhaps demonstrating his Formalist heritage, and certainly echoing Tynjanov’s desire for a film language which provides style over plot), the collision of sf and spectacular special effects (sfx) in film of the late 20th/early 21st century, is a demonstration of an *aesthetic* dominant cinema.

A simple example of how sf positions the background in preference to the foreground comes from an old story. As Delany has recalled, in what other genre would a door not *open*, but *dilate* – much to Harlan Ellison’s joy? And Delany, remembering the impact of this irised door upon his colleague and peer, later wrote in “Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones” of an elevator door that “folded about us its foil petals.”⁶² Teresa Ebert and Damien Broderick join Marc Angenot in dealing with the depths of such linguistics in considerable detail, but as Edward James and Delany agree “as naturalistic fiction or fantasy,” the phrase “the door dilated” is meaningless. But James continues by quoting Delany, who says with heartfelt joy, that “as sf – as an event that hasn’t happened, yet still must be interpreted in terms of the physically explainable – it is quite as wondrous as Ellison feels it.”⁶³ Only in sf can a phrase such as “her world exploded” be taken legitimately as anything other than metaphor.⁶⁴

Delany calls this shift between foreground and background “the deposition of weight between landscape and psychology.”⁶⁵ This frequently means that the information required by the reader is dispersed by oblique or implicit means, which requires more concentration and thus automatically engages the reader in a manner different to that

required by a novel of the everyday world. This of course invites criticism about a lack of symbolism in sf texts. Delany points out that science fiction largely “does not have time for symbolism (in the accepted sense of the word); its aesthetic framework, when richly filled out, is just too complex.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, as Spencer suggests, it is fair to say that on first reading arguably “everything in an SF text ... is foreground,” and as such, provides another means of creating the estrangement associated with the genre.⁶⁷ Through this “thematic and stylistic estrangement,” the most challenging science fiction thus allows “that renewal (and cognitive mapping) of the reader’s present” referred to by Jameson,⁶⁸ and negates the effect of classical realism as MacCabe or Heath would argue it. One might note that the high production values in Hollywood film effectively counteract the process and effects of estrangement. The real and the unreal are blended so well by eye-line matches and the continuous editing style of classical realism that the potential of sf is diminished or missed. At the level of spectacle, the more explicit sf film is ‘unreal’, but my point here primarily concerns a psycho-spatial system, which locates the viewer in a potentially infinite mobility of gaze upon *and* within that spectacle.⁶⁹

The initial identification of an association between estrangement and science fiction emerges in Darko Suvin’s study of Victorian sf in *Metamorphoses of a Literary Genre* (1979). Taking his cue from the Formalists, he describes sf as “a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative alternative to the author’s empirical experience.”⁷⁰ Alongside cognitive estrangement, Suvin identifies one other major structural component of sf. He claims that sf is frequently distinguished by the narrative hegemony of a fictional innovation or novelty, the ‘novum’; its narrative is determined by a change/changes based upon some scientific or logical innovations. Edward James simplifies this and reminds us that most science fiction stories are based upon the premise “what if...?” Science fiction writers create new histories, and new futures based upon those histories, stories of our world and of other worlds, and examine their impact upon societies and individuals.⁷¹ For example, Philip K. Dick’s “Breakfast at Twilight” (1954) asks how a family would react if it were sucked temporarily into some dreadful apocalyptic future just eight years away and then sent back to the present to finish breakfast. Isaac Asimov’s 1952 story “What if...” asks the question more pointedly, whilst in his memorable “A Sound of Thunder” (1952) Ray Bradbury has a group of time-travelling hunters journey into the past in search of

dinosaurs. One traveller accidentally slips from the safe path and treads on a butterfly, inexorably altering the pattern of evolution on the planet and thus the very future to which he must return.

“Prize Ship” (1952), another droll Dick story, has the war-torn Earth forces discovering what they believe to be a new alien assault ship. Delighted, they set about examining it, and eventually try to use it. When they step out of the ship, they discover themselves to be giants in a world of tiny medieval knights. Returning to the ship, they operate it once more, this time finding the world outside populated by giants. They retreat again, and manage to return to their original base, whereupon they discover that the alien vessel is not a *war* ship but a *time* ship: they have travelled backwards and forwards in time, and the proportionately expanding universe is responsible for their experiences regarding size.⁷² The story says far more about the ideologies and expectations of the military men and scientists who discover and use the ship than it does about the ship itself – indeed the technology of the ship is scarcely described – it has just a single operational handle which moves forward or backwards. But attention *to* both the handle and the ship is considerable, as is the attention to the environment in which the men find themselves, and the response they make.

Each of these stories demonstrates Suvin’s novum – an idea, a technological breakthrough – that allows the central question, often moral or philosophical, to be addressed. In the above stories it is an ability to travel through time. Having provided and demanded centrality to this novum, the sf story extrapolates to their logical conclusions the cultural, social and technological ramifications, and they take effect upon the world we know from empirical experience. The result, as Suvin notes, is the creation of a “reality sufficiently autonomous and intransitive to be explored at length as to its properties and the human condition it implies.”⁷³

This capability is unique and vital to sf; it cannot take over an existing textual production of reality, because its entire *raison d’être* is to speculate about *other* possible realities. Essentially, the novum functions as a specific device whose ramifications for existing reality (which would be covered by Culler’s first three categories) are then explored in combination with the Formalist-based method of foregrounding the background. Cognitive estrangement can therefore be seen as defining the textual effects of such work: the text faces its reader with something that will not fit into the existing

patterns of verisimilitude, yet is being asserted and explored as fact.⁷⁴ Science fiction narratives explore what this break in reality means for the remainder of reality.

It is notable that the sf short story has had more magazines devoted to it and enjoys perhaps more success with short stories than does any other genre. Equally, in sf television, explicitly episodic series dominate - *The Twilight Zone*, *The Outer Limits*, *UFO*. Even in weakly-linked series like *The Time Tunnel*, *Land of the Giants*, and *Space 1999*, stories rarely continue over more than two weeks and the levels of built-in redundancy ensure that the casual viewer is not confused. It is rare too for film not to offer a discrete viewing experience although film series have become increasingly popular. *Jaws*, *Indiana Jones*, *Alien*, *The Terminator*, etc., were all so successful that they spawned sequels. Whereas knowledge of *Alien* (1979) might enhance a viewing of *Aliens* (1986), and in turn *Aliens* would enhance *Alien³* (1992), and *Alien Resurrection* (1997), it is far from essential: the films provide their own narrative independence and coherence. This is true of film in general, of course: I am not making a special case for science fiction cinema. The difference between the continual flow of a segmented story, common to television, and a discrete narrative experience, common to cinema, is explored in Part Three.

Science fiction's inherent challenges arguably suggest that it is well suited to a brief, thought-provoking encounter. However, H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, and other serials notwithstanding, from Asimov's 1951 *Foundation* (perhaps boosted by Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954-5) in literature, and from the 1960s in television, with *Dr Who*, *The Survivors*, and *Blake's 7*, lengthier explorations of sustainable sf realms were pioneered successfully. In the USA 1930s cinema serials such as *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* tested the ground with their super-human heroes and evil alien emperors. In American television this was belated: the sf mini-series *V – The Final Battle* (1983) was amongst the first to experiment with it. Over a decade later *Space: Above and Beyond* and *Dark Skies* (both 1995-6) revived the effort, and the final three seasons (1996-9) of *Deep Space Nine* join *Babylon 5* in offering a lengthy and connected narrative of an alternative reality. This is explored in more detail in Part Three, but the maturity and confidence of the genre is demonstrated by its ability to not only create but to sustain its alternative realities in both verbal and visual texts – as well as its audience's willingness to accept them.

Of course there are limitations to the degree of break sf can successfully achieve. Whether in the format of individual episodes or serial drama, short story or trilogy, as Spencer points out, "the world of the [sf] text must stand in some kind of cognitively discoverable relation to our own empirical experiences."⁷⁵ Therefore not only are we thrown into new worlds by sf, but as Delany explains, and as Dick's "Prize Ship" demonstrates succinctly, to ensure that we appreciate the vulnerability of our situation, it also carefully "specifies how we got there."⁷⁶ So, Suvin's Formalist-derived model of sf stands in opposition to a passive or submissively uncritical acceptance of religious or ideological faith, and Patrick Parrinder concludes that the "idea of cognitive estrangement takes its stand in the ongoing battle between agnostic materialism and mystical idealism."⁷⁷ Science fiction does not often appeal to the higher or intuitive logic of the occult, as do fantasy and supernatural genres, but rather is distinguished by cognition as a correlative "identical to that of a modern philosophy of science."⁷⁸

Thus Suvin's definition of sf as the literature of cognitive estrangement remains useful, firstly because it offers us a sense of the loci of sf, and secondly because it does not need to include or exclude. Instead it takes into account the fact that any generic model is at the mercy of endless qualification, and that in common with any paradigm the organising perspective is the issue of primary significance.⁷⁹ Indeed, Todorov and Suvin offer contrasting but not mutually exclusive theories, as Christine Brooke-Rose explains:

In Todorov's theory, science fiction is a development of the marvellous...In Suvin's theory, science fiction is opposed, horizontally, to realist fiction on the distancing criterion, and vertically, to the marvellous, the fantastic, and myth, on the cognition and pluritemporality criteria, which unite it to realist fiction.⁸⁰

But there are dangers in a purely structural approach, as Patrick Parrinder reminds us when he says that sf has "normally been defined in terms of its content: science." He claims that it is limited by its anchor in "time and place," reminding us that in English the word 'science' "... carries a very strong bias toward the natural sciences, so that the French *science* and German *Wissenschaft* are often better translated as 'knowledge'."⁸¹ Suvin's point also suggests that we may wish to consider speculative fiction – the tales of ancient and fabulous journeys and adventure (*Gilgamesh*, tales of Sinbad's voyages in *The Arabian Nights*, or Odysseus' superhuman quests in *The Odyssey*) – within the broadest framework of the genre. Certainly these tales function as informing

predecessors, although in no way can they be claimed specifically as science fiction as we would recognise it.

It can therefore be argued that sf has a rich heritage, and it seems reasonable to suggest that sf extends its roots and claims a heritage from a deeper time line than the limits our technological century demands. By extension then, as Parrinder suggests, it seems wise to recognise that:

the criterion of proto-science fiction in earlier periods, all the way to the Greek legends, must be not so much its anticipation of the specific themes of later SF (such as the journey to other worlds) as its relationship to the body of cognitions in its own day. Only this can determine whether we are in the presence of a cognitive thought-experiment or an irresponsible fantasy.⁸²

Most sf falls somewhere between these two extremes. Since the 1900s mainstream stories have examined many futuristic (yet simultaneously time-tied) issues: time travel; space travel; utopia/dystopia; nuclear holocaust/the breakdown of society; ESP; alien encounters; technical and conceptual breakthroughs. Importantly, as we have noted, it also takes time to tell us how we got there, mostly through an explanation of technology (Suvin's novum). As Spencer observes, the identification of this process creates "a base from which the reader can reason about the ways in which the world of the text differs from our world, whilst simultaneously justifying the ways in which the two worlds are similar."⁸³ Accompanying this is Suvin's sense of cognition, which allows for authorial explanations of any technological advances.

This means that there is no need for sf to limit scientific awareness by our own current scientific or technical abilities. This is as true for popular sf television and film as it is for literature, otherwise in *Dune* the spice merchants could not 'fold space', Kyle Reese could not travel back in time to rescue Sarah Connor in *The Terminator*, and *Deep Space Nine*'s 'Defiant' would never achieve Warp 1, let alone Warp 9. As Spencer argues, the sf author has to create a kind of scientific/common sense explanation, one that is "based upon reasoning from natural laws, whether those happen to be empirically true or not."⁸⁴ Therefore, sf narratives notably create their own limitations – for instance, Federation vessels in *Star Trek* cannot exceed Warp 9.9. There are theories of how the barrier can be broken, of course, but any attempt at experimentation invariably ends in disaster, involves dubious alien technologies, or demands an unacceptable ethical and moral position. The infamous Warp 10 is achieved in the *Voyager* episode "Threshold",

where Lt. Tom Paris achieves the impossible with the help of alien science. Mentally unstable, he returns to kidnap Captain Janeway, and they promptly (d)evolve to become lizard-like creatures – although via the medical marvels of an episodic universe, the Medical Hologram ensures that they are miraculously fully recovered for the following week's episode (with no sign of ill effects and no apparent memory of the incident). In "Equinox" another Starfleet crew lost in the Delta Quadrant discovers a new technological means of speeding their lengthy journey home to Earth. However it involves questionable means and is therefore unacceptable to the Voyager crew, who remain bastions of the Federation's time-warped 1990s common sense morality.

Spencer also illustrates where fantasy functions in contrast to sf. In fantasy we find "magic instead of technology – flying carpets for instance – in SF the reader is presented with [a] portable 'antigravity device' and possibly a brief history of its invention." She argues that the "scientific explanatory mode of SF [one of the things that Suvin sums up in the term 'cognition'] is an identifying characteristic of the genre, distinguishing it categorically from fantasy."⁸⁵ But although she mentions the argument, Spencer neglects the central issue of evolution through time; too easily she dismisses the argument that any reasonable advanced technological system would be inseparable from magic for a lesser mortal. Ursula K. Le Guin's novels of *Earthsea* (1971-) and Gene Wolfe's *Urth of the New Sun* (1981-) provide magical worlds where so mundane are the miracles of the mystical ancient arts that they are governed by the same inevitability as scientific experimentation and its resultant technology.

In effect, this raises the issue of 'user interfaces', a question central to the *Star Trek* spoof-film *Galaxy Quest* (2000). Believing the television episodes of the sf show "Galaxy Quest" to be historical documentaries, aliens seek the actors' help to defeat a terrible enemy. They design a ship with technologies based solely upon how they saw the 'crew' operate the props. The actors can manipulate the ship's technology merely by copying how they pretended to operate it in the television series.⁸⁶ In effect, skill is required to invent the systems but not to operate them – and here we can find a simple parallel to our world today in the everyday use and knowledge of the instrument we call a computer. *Babylon 5* is not only presented to us as an 'historical record', as the voice-over introductions, ISN reports and episodes such as "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars" (4.22) demonstrate, but it also utilises both fantasy and scientific extrapolation. The Techno-mages in "The Geometry of Shadows" (2.03) are an intelligent reminder of

this juxtaposition. To the Techno-mages of 2259, the combination of technology and alchemy is a learned skill: to the uninitiated observer, their works are acts of magic. Here science and magic collide, and are revealed to be the same in function, united by artistry. They are only confused or obscured through time and the limits of individual perception.

In *Across the Wounded Galaxies* (1990) Larry McCaffrey notes that “SF writers share with their post-modernist cousins a sense of urgency about the need to re-examine central narrative assumptions and metaphorical frameworks.”⁸⁷ In the 1930s and 40s pulp magazines like *Astounding* were predicting the very future in which we now find ourselves living. During the 1950s and 1960s authors like Ballard and Dick were respectively providing post-modernist writings in the shape of condensed novels and *The Simulacra* (1964), for example, before the phrase ‘post-modernism’ was ever coined or applied. Bukatman suggests that it was Ballard “who, in advance of Jameson, isolated ‘the death of affect’.”⁸⁸ In *Crash* (1973) Ballard wrote of the end of modernism in literature, characterising its “sense of individual isolation, its mood of introspection and alienation.” He describes a new cultural dominant, defined by rapid technological change, busy at work in a landscape of extremes:

Across the communications landscape move the spectres of sinister technologies and the dreams that money can buy. Thermonuclear weapons systems and soft drink commercials co-exist in an overlit realm ruled by advertising and pseudoevents, science and pornography.⁸⁹

Here Jameson’s cognitive mapping⁹⁰ has been in some ways anticipated, in this case by Ballard. In sf it is the loci provided by such mapping that is so often destroyed. But Jameson was also pre-empted by Suvin, whose *Metamorphoses* offered us cognition – the process of acquiring knowledge, and the use of reason. Patrick Parrinder takes this further, noting that since the concept of:

cognitive estrangement assumes the dynamic interaction of its two terms, its force is clearly normative as well as descriptive. Such a definition suggests that the work in which the potentialities of science fiction are most fully realised will be that in which the ‘novelty’ is not only significant in itself, but is developed in the most thoroughly cognitive or scientific spirit. Cognition must be understood as embracing the polarities of human intelligence; that is, it is at once logical and imaginative, rational and empirical, systematic and sceptical.⁹¹

Parrinder is right to draw our attention to the “*dynamic interaction*” (my stress) between the words ‘cognitive’ and ‘estrangement’; they should not be read together as one inseparable term. There will always be differing attitudes regarding what comprises sf, along with a variety of approaches to it (such as satire or romance), which respectively comment upon our own world through metaphor and extrapolation, with utopian or dystopian visions of alternative realities, only to domesticate them and make them familiar.⁹² Essentially these approaches, from both authors and critics, are concerned with the creation and exploration of the same thing – texts that make known the unknown and the known unrecognisable. They do this by sending us on magical, mythical and technological journeys of human (self) discovery. The corollary of these journeys is that various representations of ritual and convention from our own world can be seen through new eyes.

In a genre full of technology and one presumed masculine, sf has a surprising number of female adherents. Sarah Lefanu offers a strong argument for regarding sf as a literature that questions the basis of cultural assumptions and gendered subjectivity in her book *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (1988). She points out that borrowing as it does from its rather more closed origins in “horror, mythology and fairytale,” sf is unlike “other forms of genre writing, such as detective stories and romance, which demand the reinstatement of order ... science fiction is by its nature interrogative, open.”⁹³ I take issue with Lefanu’s dismissal of romance, since sf draws also from the Romantic in order to create the rationale for an examination of its new worlds, and, as we shall see later, the detective genre plays a special role in the plotting of many stories. Nevertheless, she makes clear that the possibilities for open, radical, questioning texts in sf would appear to be endless.

Le Guin’s society of hermaphrodites in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Joanna Russ’ tales of *Alyx* and *The Female Man* in the 1970s clearly set the agenda. Russ, in some ways anticipating Donna Haraway’s cyborg manifesto,⁹⁴ says that:

one of the best things (for me) about science fiction is that – at least theoretically – it is a place where the ancient dualities disappear. Day and night, up and down, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are purely specific, limited phenomena which have been mythologised by people. They are man-made (not woman-made) ... Out in space there is no up and down, no day and night, and in the point of view that space can give us, I think there is no “opposite” sex – what a word! Opposite what? The Eternal Feminine and the Eternal Masculine become the poetic fancies of a weakly diamorphic species trying to imitate every other species in a vain search for what is ‘natural.’⁹⁵

Russ' condemnation of these binary "poetic fancies" brings us to the final element that vitally distinguishes sf from even the post-modernist mundane text: its unique use of linguistics. The language of sf is one of its key distinguishing features, and one of its most exciting signposts. A particular discourse or lexicon is not unusual to genre, rather it is essential to it, but the sense of awe, of wonder in the vocabulary of sf is paramount. It is a call to the simultaneous fears and pleasures of the sublime, facilitated and amplified by the break in reality which demands that we renegotiate our location and its meaning at every step. Spencer suggests that the purpose of what Culler calls 'descriptive residues' – objects with no apparent role in character/plot development – is to:

denote the *thereness* of the world. SF writers also include such items in their texts, but now the items do more than denote the simple *thereness* of the world they belong to; they also tell us – again, usually in oblique ways – something about the nature of the world we find them in.⁹⁶

In "Metalinguistics and Science Fiction", Eric S. Rabkin identifies three main functions of metalinguistics in sf. Arguing that language can be treated as subject, material, or context, he suggests that:

the text can at points take language as its subject; the text can use language as the material it cuts and patterns and sews into new creations not necessarily having anything overtly to do with the linguistic materials; and the text can remind us that language itself forms part of the context determining our understanding of the particular language we are reading.⁹⁷

Rabkin considers that sf uses language as a subject because sf writers are aware that they must explain how communication is achieved for characters from different cultures, eras and planets. He uses *The Time Machine* (1895) and the Traveller's encounter with the Eloi as an example. The failure of the traveller to understand their curious speech "leads to some lovely pathos as the Traveller tries to apprehend a world solely by means of observation and exchanges of facial expression and gesture." The focus on language erodes as the story progresses, and we soon understand that there will not be communication in the sense of conversation, but the explanation "adds plausibility to this fantastic tale."⁹⁸ In other tales the ability to communicate is essential, and Rabkin cites Laurence Manning's "The Man Who Awoke" (1933) as an example of this device. The protagonist, Winters, has been asleep in an underground chamber for some three

millennia; he wakes, goes above ground and encounters a man. Winters remarks with relief that he could understand him, despite there being “new words, of course, and the accent was strange in his ears – a tang of European broad As and positively continental Rs.” Clearly, the need to create a believable reality in this new world speaks to the converted – the effort is brief and barely adequate. Winters muses over whether or not radio and recorded speech is responsible for this “persistence of the old tongue,” and then turns his attention to the environment and the houses which he and his new companion are approaching.⁹⁹

Rabkin argues that sf works presenting language as material are often “also the works that present the most intelligent discussions of language as subject, as in Delany’s *Babel-17*.”¹⁰⁰ Here, Rydra Wong, a space captain-poet-cryptographer on a personal quest for self-discovery, is deciphering a new language which alien invaders are using to destroy human communications. She encounters romance though a character called The Butcher, a failed man brainwashed into using a language which does not contain the first person singular pronoun. As she works, she eventually teaches him the concept and applications of the word ‘I’. According to Rabkin, Wong’s deciphering of:

the language called Babel-17 allows not merely for victory but for the next stage in linguistic evolution, a Babel-18 which promises, as the book closes, an age of such increased understanding that future conflict may be avoided.¹⁰¹

Language can also be transformed, although as Rabkin points out, it then does not address “the totality of the fictional world as does the treatment of language as subject, it primarily favours the fiction rather than constitutes it.”¹⁰² It is also a more subtle approach perhaps, and its gradual creation has a more lasting but less immediate impact upon the reader. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is a clear example of this. The location for this story is the planet Winter, where the extreme climate means that even the volcanoes are frozen in ice. Rabkin identifies familiar phrases transformed: ‘Rome wasn’t built in a day’ becomes “the Glaciers didn’t freeze overnight,” while “Mountains should be seen and not heard,” has an equally obvious origin in ‘children should be seen and not heard.’¹⁰³ With reference to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis,¹⁰⁴ which concerns the implicit belief that language and reality are intimately – perhaps even causally – related, Rabkin recognises this effect as:

a Whorfian shift of consciousness away from the human and towards the environmental. Thus, by a metalinguistic engagement with something we might call an ecological code, Le Guin subtly and implicitly claims a special kind of reality for certain aspects of her science fictional world.¹⁰⁵

The transformation creates something new, and Rabkin suggests Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light* (1967) as an example, noting how Homer's "rosy fingered dawn" becomes a day of battle which "dawned pink as the fresh bitten thigh of a maiden." This device also illuminates and enforces a shared educational heritage, a linguistic connection with something old and/or mythological, ensuring the text can safely make its claim to reality.¹⁰⁶ The development of this process, and the establishment of a mytho-historical world in speculative literature in general, is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Rabkin points out one other linguistic feature within sf that demands attention. Science fiction frequently demonstrates a remarkable and often shocking juxtaposition of common and everyday words – but the alternative course of action is to use what Marc Angenot calls 'neologisms.' In "The Absent Paradigm", Angenot describes sf as a "semiotic practice,"¹⁰⁷ arguing that sf can immediately be recognised by the reader as such because of the individual semiotic practice I have described above. He offers examples of 'realist' and 'sf' discourse to illustrate his point:

(1) "A young lady with a blue merino dress trimmed with three rows of frills came to the doorstep. She introduced Mr Bovary in the kitchen, where a big fire had been kindled" (Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (1856) I: 2)

(2) "Around the swimming pool were strangely shaped chairs made of blentox.... Over her driscoll she was wearing an iridescent gown fashioned of vovax, and adorned with bernital inlays" (B. -R Bruss, *Complot Vénus Terre* (1963) chapt. 1)¹⁰⁸

One could ask how many people would know instantly what Flaubert means by 'merino' – nevertheless, in his realist mundane text he is "offering allusive linguistic detail which serves not to conjure a visual image but to establish the concrete nature of the world."¹⁰⁹ It is the structure of the sentences, the combination of the recognisable with the unknown, that allows us to come across new words and work them logically into our vocabulary – even though we might not be sure what they mean we understand adequately where they belong. In this case they are nouns; the verbs are all recognisable and aid in our (re)locating of the text. In the case of Bruss, with his "blentox," "vovox," and "bernital inlays," we have anchors in the use of "chairs made of," "gown fashioned

of,” and “adorned with,” which ensure that the new is interlaced with the old. Nevertheless the constant recourse to new words reminds us that we must repeatedly renegotiate our relationship with the reality of the textual world when we read sf literature.

Naturally, everyday mundane linguistic discourse evolves over time, and in the century between the texts the terminology within mundane realist novels could be radically different. In both of the above examples, it is the nouns to which we are drawn as a means of initiating understanding. However, that aside, Angenot’s point is clear. Peculiar to sf is a use of what Myra Barnes calls “exolinguistics” – the supposed lexicon of alien worlds.¹¹⁰ Angenot concludes that the “truthfulness of language is two-fold: external (in its reference to the empirical world), and internal (in the operative character of its code).” In doing so, he claims that sf uses the schism between “the signified and the referent, concepts which are incompatible yet necessarily linked and taken for each other”. This produces “a paradigmatic mirage,” which demands that the act of reading is also an act of conjecture,¹¹¹ as Bukatman, Delany and Broderick have also argued. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* Le Guin uses contrast as a means of unification. The dominant philosophy of the world of Winter informs us that:

Light is the left hand of darkness
And darkness the right hand of light.
Two are one, life and death, lying
Together like lovers in kemmer,
Like hands joined together,
Like the end and the way.¹¹²

Kemmer is to do with a sexual cycle that can have no direct translation for humans since Winter’s population is neuter and only becomes sexually active when the hormonal activation creates a ‘male’ or ‘female’ as we would recognise them. Rabkin argues that in her employment of this neologism, Le Guin makes:

an implicit claim for the reality of her alternative world with its alternative values. A central truth in that world – as in ours – is that things are often known by their contrastive relationships, as linguistics separate phonemes by binary contrast.¹¹³

So although Le Guin uses the sense of the Taoist unification in her conjunction of the End and the Way, because of the alien qualities associated with *kemmer* there is still a

schism, albeit a subtle one. By “using the language of her characters rather than the language of her readers as material,” Le Guin creates a reality with a system and code of values that we cannot recognise as contemporary. Instead she offers an alternative set of values.¹¹⁴

Many sf works are replete with transformed language, with new words: neologisms. It is clear however, that most words within any kind of tale must be recognisable – else the reader is truly alienated or the prose fractures into pure nonsense. When we encounter new situations in reality, frequently our vocabulary is initially inadequate – we struggle to find an appropriate phrase and as a result are rendered speechless. Crossing the Great Salt Lake in 1846 (one of the first travellers to do so), Edwin Byrant endured just such an experience. Initially he and his group admire the mirages they see, but unable to sustain the description, and through lack of understanding and knowledge, Bryant’s account of the experience belies both his fear and the total inadequacies of his vocabulary. He describes:

beautiful villas, adorned with edifices, decorated with all the ornaments of suburban architecture, and surrounded by gardens, shaded walks, parkways, and stately avenues ... renewing the alluring invitation to repose... These melting from our view as those before, in another place a vast city, with countless columned edifices of marble whiteness, and studded with domes, spires, and turreted towers, would rise upon the horizon of the plain, astonishing us with its stupendous grandeur and sublime magnificence. But it is in vain to attempt a description of these singular and extraordinary phenomena. Neither prose, nor poetry, nor the pencil of the artists can adequately portray their beauties...

About eleven o’clock we struck a vast white plain, uniformly level and utterly destitute of vegetation or any sign that shrub or plant had ever existed on its snow-like surface.¹¹⁵

His inability to portray his experience is made clear, admitting he cannot find the words, he immediately returns from poetic fancy to a dry and scientific description of the area. Bryant is in effect looking at the future of the USA, but his 19th century vocabulary has no means of dealing adequately with it – he cannot even deal with the fantasies of Gothic or Arabesque architecture since in reality he has never seen any. Even retrospectively, written as a diary, such an experience means that his prose fractures, plunging from the heights of heady romance to cool and remote science – from dangerous fantasies to safe and secure fact.¹¹⁶ His contrasting use of the two styles serves only to underline and draw attention to the ‘alien’ experience, but only in terms of that which we already know. Much like Potebnya, his metaphors work only one way.

One of the more reflective stories from *Star Trek's The Next Generation* television series offers a simple but clear example of sf's linguistic challenges. In "Darmok" (1981), the Enterprise crew encounters an alien species, the Children of Tama, with whom successful contact has never been established. The Enterprise's crew seldom has problems with language and difference thanks to *Star Trek's* universal translator – when this fails it is generally the device for humour.¹¹⁷ However, here the Tamarians are called "incomprehensible", and for once, the inability to instantly translate meaningful sentences provides an opportunity for linguistic exploration. Picard is apparently kidnapped, and finds himself on the planet El-Adrel with the Tamarian Captain, Dathon, unsure of the latter's motives – until they are both attacked by an alien beast and the Tamarian is wounded. Meanwhile, as tension increases between the first officers who have remained on their respective ships, Counsellor Troi and Lt. Commander Data can use the Enterprise's extensive computer data-base to locate words, but cannot translate the Tamarian syntax. Picard and Dathon's attempts at communication are more successful. United against the alien beast, and when the action lulls in the twilight, they attempt to communicate by telling each other the stories of their ancestors. Enthused and impressed by the Tamarian's determined attempt to make himself understood, Picard recognises a parallel between the alien's story and a memorable tale from human history. Dathon tells of how two warriors named Darmok and Jelahd joined forces in order to defeat a dangerous enemy, and battled to victory at a place called Tenagra. Using drawings in the sand to enhance his explanations, Picard relates the legend of Gilgamesh and Enkidu battling the Bull of Heaven, realising that the incredible risk taken by the Tamarian captain was a selfless one, made with the intention of creating communication where there had been none. It was an act carried out, naturally, in the abstract manner of his people.

Asked to study the language and try to find some common ground, Data and Troi are at a loss, but at least note the repetition of certain proper nouns, notably 'Darmok' and 'Tenagra'. Searching the ship's database for the sector's records of these nouns, they discover a communality: on the planet Chantil 3 there are records of a mytho-historical hunter called Darmok, and an island continent called Tenagra:

Data: "The Tamarian ego structure does not seem to allow what we would normally think of as self identity. Their ability to abstract is highly unusual. They seem to communicate

through narrative imagery, a reference to the individuals and places which appear in their mytho-historical accounts.”

Troi: “It’s as if I were to say to you: ‘Juliet on her balcony’.”

Data: “The situation is analogous to understanding the grammar of a language, but not the vocabulary.”

As Dr Crusher realises, for her the image of Juliet conjures up the idea of romance, but unless we are familiar with Shakespeare’s tale of *Romeo and Juliet*, the tragic context is meaningless and therefore so is the image. Thus communication between the Star Fleet crew and the Children of Tama is initially impossible because the metaphors and their temporal locations are contextually empty: the Tamarian language appears to be just random names and locations, rather than a sophisticated form of syntax. Hence the computer can make no sense of it although it can translate individual words but not speculate as to the semantics: “Shakka, when the walls fell,” and “Darmok, at Tenagra, his arms wide,” mean nothing in isolation. Just as our own language demands metaphor for expression, so the Tamarian language is based upon its own system of metaphors. In this case, situations are related to a template provided by their historical predecessors. The examples “Darmok” offers are simple; it takes little invention to realise that “In Winter” said sharply probably implies that someone is “frozen out”, but the problem of functional comprehension is nevertheless genuine. However, *The Next Generation* offers a successful resolution. Although the beast on the planet kills the Tamarian, Captain Picard survives. He returns to the Enterprise able to explain what has happened to the Tamarian Captain, and expresses his grief by saying “Shakka, when the walls fell,” thus avoiding violent recriminations. The Tamarian officer responds by elevating the story of Picard and his captain to a status similar to that of Darmok and Jelahd at Tenagra, saying “Picard and Dathon at El-Adrel.”

As this demonstrates, and as Angenot has pointed out, we can only describe what we see and what we know; our seeing is a discursive act, and by extrapolation we imagine our future with our current ability, and an adorned or embellished vocabulary. We build on what we know, advancing as far as common sense and imagination dictate, but in mundane fiction our vocabulary and patterns of syntax limit us, whereas in sf neologisms can occur. Lewis Carroll’s “The Hunting of the Snark” (1876), demonstrates the practice taken to a purposefully witty extreme, whilst, as Rabkin points out, one of the best known examples “of an apparently new language is the nadsat style of Anthony Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange* (1962).”¹¹⁸ This offers a fine example of a mundane novel apparently

running on the very edge of comprehension. It opens with Alex and his three droogs appreciating the fact that there is:

no law yet against prodding some of the new veshches which they used to put into the old moloko, so you could peet it with velocet or synthemesc or drencom or one or two other veshches which would give you a nice quiet horrorshow fifteen minutes..."¹¹⁹

However, even here, the words Burgess uses to describe Alex's future-speak are in fact a combination of Russian and Polish etc., so the youthful slang of *A Clockwork Orange* is still reliant upon today's vocabulary. These are not true neologisms, but examples of Rabkin's transformed language. It is worth remembering that unlike literature, visual sf allows us to concretise these futuristic visions. In the 1971 film version, a "moloko" is manifested for our benefit – thus although they share much common ground, both words and images being abstractions, visual sf offers other potentials and faces different challenges to those confronting its counterpart in literature. The similarities and differences between the language, and the opportunities provided by visual and verbal sf, are examined in more detail in the following chapters.

According to Rabkin, the third and final variety of the metalinguistic function of language emerges from the use of language as context; and contrary to Spencer's use of Culler's theory concerning sf, it can manifest itself in the technique of self-reflexivity (Jakobson's poetic function). The application of this mannerist approach creates what Rabkin calls "a double bind." Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *We* (1920) presents a technological dystopia of collectivised science-oriented language where emotions, encounters, and life itself are written and recorded as algebraic equations. D-503 addresses: his reader concerning 'my records – which look like an ancient, strange novel' (record 31), when, of course, to someone of D-503's time, the book by Zamyatin is a strange, ancient novel. But if it *looks* like an ancient novel, it is not one, but we know it is."¹²⁰ Rabkin reminds us of Jorge Luis Borges, famous for his self-reflexive work, who surely speaks for many readers when he asks why we are uneasy knowing that:

the map is within the map and the thousand and one nights are within the book *A Thousand and One Nights*? Why does it disquiet us to know that Don Quixote is a reader of *Quixote*, and Hamlet is a spectator of *Hamlet*? ... those inversions suggest that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious.¹²¹

This technique is not unique to sf and, to prove the point, Rabkin draws on all three of his metalinguistic functions to offer an analysis of Canto 31 in Dante's *Inferno*. The important point here is that they are necessarily making "all sorts of reality claims" and although *Inferno* is not science fiction in any sense, neither is it a mundane text – certainly in the manner we use the word today – like modern sf writers, Dante uses the fantastic to dramatise his ideas more boldly, and even though his main concern is a serious religious philosophising, it is also still a form of cognitive speculation.

In "The Convergence of Postmodern Innovative Fiction and Science Fiction" (1980), Theresa Ebert points out that the challenges offered by the language of sf are now being absorbed and utilised by post-modernist fiction, that is to say a branch of mundane fiction. This process has been ongoing for a considerable time, as Rabkin's reference to Dante makes clear, but I would argue that there are identifiable differences which isolate the sf text from the experimental or (post)modernist mundane text. Brian MacHale makes a useful distinction, saying:

science fiction is to postmodernism what detective fiction was to modernism: it is the ontological genre *par excellence* (as the detective story is the epistemological genre *par excellence*), and so serves as a source of materials and models for post modernist writers (including William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, Italo Calvino, Pynchon, even Beckett and Nabokov).¹²²

Post-modernism is chiefly concerned with ontology, with the nature of existence, a concern it clearly shares with sf; modernism was concerned with epistemology, or that which addresses the nature of knowledge. Whereas sf and post-modernist writers originally approached the subject of reshaping the world and our experience of it from different directions, MacHale's examination of the 1960s work of Dick and Philip José Farmer in the 1970s suggests that more recently they have converged, sharing similar themes and obsessions. Thus the iconoclasms of cyberpunk are associated with Baudrillard as much as with William Gibson. Indeed, in 1980 Parrinder remarked that in the area "of science fiction today, the relationship between theory and practice is sufficiently close for there to be the very real possibility of the novelist bringing his cognitive scepticism to bear on the definitions put forward by academic critics."¹²³ Arguments over the genre of work by Ballard and Iain (M) Banks are testament to this, whilst the post-modernist critical essays and fictions of Baudrillard, Borges, Delany and Gibson are arguably interchangeable. This contrasts with the fears expressed by Adorno

and Horkeheimer in 1944. They suggest that the commodification of culture, their version of Nietzsche's "stylised barbarity,"¹²⁴ means that innovation lies almost entirely within the province of the avant-garde: thus by default, that commercial sf is incapable of such aesthetic advances.

However, the main point demonstrated by these literary manifestations is that sf shares stylistic and thematic elements, maybe a common goal, with the vanguard of modernist and post-modernist fiction – and perhaps with some post-modernist criticism. This cross-fertilisation of semantic practice and thematic concern could signal the best hope that sf literature has of being regarded as genuinely innovative and worthy of study, rather than as pulp and pointless. Nevertheless, however innovative, the world created by the sf, or occasionally the post-modernist mundane text, must still operate as above, and "stand in some kind of cognitively discoverable relation to our own empirical situation" lest its tale remain beyond an unbridgeable chasm created by its generic syntactical challenges.¹²⁵

Reginald Bretnor's "Science Fiction in the Age of Space" offers a definition of sf. He suggests that it is "fiction based on rational speculation regarding the human experience of science and its resultant technologies."¹²⁶ Quoting Bretnor in summary of his metalinguistic inquiry, Rabkin says that he has no intention of debating the rights and wrongs (and indeed the dangers), of Bretnor's precise definition, but he rightly seizes upon the word "rational," saying:

to the extent that a work is fantastic, it must make reality claims in order to be treated seriously, and to the extent that the kind of reality sought is a conscious, rational reality, those claims can be enhanced by exploiting the metalinguistic function of language. But to the extent that the reality sought is an unconscious, irrational reality, the text must preserve itself against the potentially disruptive metalinguistic function because in all fictions, science fictions or fairy tales or Shakespearean plays, the very possibility of artistic reality rests on the uninterrupted operation of the magic of language.¹²⁷

Rabkin summarises what we have established here – that literary science fiction's claim to reality is actually no different to those made by any other genre. Despite this fellowship, sf has a remarkable reputation and image. The very worst associations of convention-attending preadolescent obsessive fans (and naïve aliens) confusing reality with fantasy, unable to move on some 18 years after a show has been cancelled, are parodied magnificently for the general audience in *Galaxy Quest*. With due respect to the continual *Star Trek* repeats on television, film is arguably the main medium through

which the non-convert might encounter the sf genre today. As Ballard points out with considerable candour:

the collective dreams and nightmares of the twentieth century have found their more vivid expression in this often disparaged but ever popular genre. ... Like most of my fellow s-f writers, American and British, I nurse ambivalent feelings towards the science-fiction movies. Despite our heroic efforts, it is not the printed word but the film that has defined the images of science fiction in the public mind and also, incidentally, exerted a huge influence on architecture, fashion and consumer design. Even now, the future is anything with a fin on it.¹²⁸

Since the success of *Star Wars* in 1977, science fiction (and fantasy) has again proved a popular subject for cinema and television.¹²⁹ People who are not avid fans of *Star Trek* in any of its guises may well be prepared to watch one of Kirk or Picard's cinema excursions. Equally, those who ignore *The X Files*, Chris Carter's series of paranormal encounters, might still be tempted to watch the 1999 *X Files Movie*. We have already established that sf often draws from the rich tradition of the gothic novel, and so one need not be a fan of sf to watch the 1982 gothic-infused neo-noir film *Blade Runner*. Likewise, the war zone of *Aliens* (1986), a retake of the 1979 *Alien*, is readily accessible: the story is merely one of soldiers fighting an unseen enemy in an unfamiliar labyrinthine complex, a familiar enough scenario post-Vietnam. The only difference is that these soldiers are in space, and their xenomorph enemy means they are on "a bug hunt" – as Corporal Hicks (Michael Biehn) eloquently puts it.

Science fiction cinema, like its literary cousin, arouses a remarkable ambivalence. It either extends an exciting invitation to those who nurture precious copies of Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness*, or confirms that the semi-naked woman and blood-encrusted alien depicted on a once-glanced-at cover of *Planet Stories* or *Startling* are merely a hint of the depths of sf's repetitive depravity.¹³⁰ Perhaps more people are likely to be drawn to watch Steven Spielberg's version of *Jurassic Park* (1993) than to read Michael Crichton's original novel. Fewer still are probably aware that Crichton was also responsible for the original theme-park techno-sf nightmare of *Westworld* (1973). Quite how any invention and advancement in any field can ever occur without imagination and speculation is a moot point, yet still the notion of cheap and silly, childish and pointless, lingers around sf's imaginative futures – and particularly around sf film. It has reduced slightly now that popular culture has become popular intellectual property, and sf has made what Jameson calls "the evolutionary leap from the pulps to 'high culture', along

with the subsequent respectabilization as an object of academic study.”¹³¹ John Baxter’s dismissal of sf film as “an intellectual impossibility,” perversely in a book *about* sf cinema, demonstrates the extraordinary prejudice most poignantly.¹³² Not by accident did the UK’s Sci-Fi Channel reinvent its image and station idents in 1998, moving away from spectacular planetscapes and cgi space battles to disconcertingly inexplicable images which are rapidly located as items of mundane domestic technology. Ballard sums it up neatly when he says:

at its worst, science-fiction film offers the sheer exhilaration of the roller-coaster. At its best, and to its credit, it tries to deal with the largest issues facing us today, and attempts, however naively, to place some sort of philosophical framework around man’s place in the universe.¹³³

The opposition to sf in all forms arises from the extraordinary social and cultural location of science fiction in the written and visual arts. Arguably more than any other genre, science fiction has its long time detractors: the image of sf readers (and authors) is not flattering. The image of sf is in some way perpetuated as “trivial and sub-literary,” an assumption for the most part generated by the “specialist sf magazines and their cultivation of a coterie audience.”¹³⁴ The very paradox of the name does nothing to encourage the cynic – science (factual, proven) juxtaposed with fiction (storytelling, make-believe). As the poet and author Thomas Disch points out, sf is not ‘adult’; it is a return to childhood dreams and imaginings. So on one level, sf cannot be taken seriously: it’s *only* fantasy. In the 1960s Disch admitted that he believed science fiction was “a branch of children’s literature,” adding that this was “most of what was radically wrong with SF, as well as a good part of what was right.”¹³⁵ There is a degree of ambivalence in his statement, and as Disch explains, and as we will examine more closely in the following chapter, it highlights what had limited pre-60s classical sf “intellectually, emotionally and morally.”¹³⁶ Of course, Disch was one of the most innovative of the 1950s and 60s sf authors, and children, granted a peculiar sense of amorality until society trains them otherwise, specifically relish testing limits of any kind. Children also view things with open eyes, unmediated by opinions formed by cultural niceties or social expectations. They possess the sense of wonder.

Tragically, some of the worst types of sado-masochistic violence lurk amongst these juvenile ‘only fantasy’ shelves, and in *Wizardry and Wild Romance* Michael

Moorcock cites John Norman's lengthy series of *Gor* books as a prime example. The protagonist, an avenging, sword-wielding, and muscle-bound hunk by the name of Tarl Cabot, is reminiscent of both Allan Quartermain and Conan the Barbarian, but the texts themselves are "obsessed with a crude form of sado-masochism... [and]... go further than any other books of their kind towards reflecting the aggressive terror of adulthood, sexuality and women in particular, common to so many of them."¹³⁷ They clearly appal Moorcock, and he offers the following example from the 1975 *Marauders of Gor*, which more than adequately proves his point:

Whereas fear inhibits sexual performance in a male, rendering it impossible, because neutralising aggression, essential to male power, fear in a woman, some fear, not terror, can, interestingly, improve her responsiveness, perhaps by facilitating her abject submission. This is another reason, incidentally, why Goreans favor the enslavement of desirable women; the slave girl knows that she must please her master, and that she will be punished, perhaps harshly, if she does not¹³⁸

Moorcock neglects to say whether it is the obsessive nature of the prose alone or its use of the comma that most offends him. But such sexual fantasies are not peculiar to the more extreme ends of the market. Stephen Donaldson, author of the high fantasy *Thomas Covenant* books, offers some suggestions of his own for control in the first book of the five *Gap* tales. In *The Real Story* (1991) a junior police officer, Morn Hyland, is taken prisoner by the miscreant Angus Thermopyle, who uses a "zone implant" to control her. He becomes one of several men who use the implant to gain sexual control over her:

Moving like a robot – responsive to nothing but the implant's functions – she replaced the scalpel in its compartment. When he instructed her to smile, she obeyed; but the lift of her lips remained as expressionless as the rest of her face. Obediently, she knelt in front of him.

His organ was no longer as intensely eager as it had been a few moments ago. Down in the black bottom of his heart, he was disappointed. His cowardice had cost him something he had wanted. But disappointment made him angry – and anger had its uses. Suddenly furious, he forced open her mouth and drove himself into her, gagging her fiercely until he came.¹³⁹

However, the aim of Moorcock's book is to praise the power of the general and less abusive fantasy, and emphasises that these sinister – or risible – efforts aside, fantasy has a vital role. It offers a rare opportunity to see our world, our ideologies, our cultures, and ourselves in a different context. Speaking here of the dream factory of Hollywood,

the influential anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker points out the usefulness of this experience, one in which we:

can escape into a world of imagination and come from it refreshed and with new understanding. One can expand limited experiences into broad ones. One can escape ... into fantasies which exaggerate existing fears. Hollywood provides ready-made fantasies or daydreams; the problem is whether they are productive or non-productive, whether the audience is psychologically enriched or impoverished.¹⁴⁰

Despite Powdermaker's powerful point, the culture of canonical literature (and film) has tended to dismiss the productive fantasies of sf precisely for their lack of canonical virtues. David Hartwell suggests that this is because sf is so "unreal on the one hand (space travel and atomic power were considered fantastic and laughable...), and so concerned with the gritty realities of science and technology on the other."¹⁴¹ Thus sf cannot fit within the 'establishment'. Yet many lauded 'establishment' writers, such as Margaret Atwood, J.G. Ballard, Angela Carter, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell have all written sf. The telling thing is that the defining letters/words are absent from the profile we hold in our heads of these writers, and the covers of their books are equally silent. For instance, Edward James notes that on Ballard's 1990 collection *War Fever* the only hint of the type of story therein comes from the cover-note which informs us that Ballard's first short story was published in *New Worlds*. As James points out with elegant irony:

only the initiated will know that this was the most celebrated of the British SF magazines. The stories, several of which were first published in genre sf magazines in the 1980s, are all, save one, sf, and very much more traditional sf than Ballard was writing in the early 1970s. But since *Empire of the Sun* (1984), Ballard has been lionised by the British literary establishment, and therefore cannot be an sf writer.¹⁴²

James also notes that in some ways this is highly positive for reader and author alike. Labelling is problematic; it can lead to ghettoization. On the other hand, the lack of it may permit more uncertain readers to approach sf almost accidentally. When this happens, ideally "the motifs and themes from sf are drawn into the world of contemporary fiction, fostering a cross fertilisation that enriches both sf and the wider field of literature." However, as James rightly argues, any form of ghetto creates cultural impoverishment and the few authors who transcend the barriers in either direction do not

diminish the need to reassess the others trapped inside or out.¹⁴³ To a degree it is the audience response which condemns, not the label itself.

Moorcock, frequently overlooked due to his early and prolific pulp-fiction output, argued much the same thing in the 1960s. Pre-empting MacHale, he suggests that a quality sf short story magazine could “attempt a cross-fertilisation of popular sf, science and the work of the literary and artistic avant-garde.”¹⁴⁴ However, Moorcock does not claim that the bookshelves of sf and fantasy are filled with erudite post-structuralist linguistic explorations of existence, or the crystalline prose of psychotic mindscapes under assault from the unrelenting elements, as are found in the respective writings of Delany, Disch or Ballard. Writing a guest editorial for *New Worlds* in 1963, Moorcock suggested that science fiction “has gone to hell and Kingsley Amis is mapping it.”¹⁴⁵ He goes on to point out precisely what he feels much 1960s sf neglects, saying that:

these are some of the qualities I miss on the whole – passion, subtlety, irony, original characterisation, original and good style, a sense of involvement with human affairs, colour, density, depth, and, on the whole, real feeling from the writer.¹⁴⁶

For the most part, shelves designated ‘science fiction’ and/or ‘fantasy’ contain numerous tedious volumes of fascist and militaristic escapades. Worse still they provide rambling post-Tolkienesque trivia replete with a plethora of Elvish and human characters whose names are invariably reminiscent of Elrond or Aragorn, and whose dire trudges across a vapid reincarnation of Middle Earth would try the patience of the most subtle wizard. This is just the fantasy end of the market. Brian Aldiss loathes the current state of his more central literary field, decrying the 1970s and 80s mass media “sci-fi” market as “widely disseminated,” and sf as a genre eviscerated by the:

awful victories of the Lord of the Rings, Star Trek and Star Wars, [which] have brought – well not actually respectability, but Instant Whip formulas to sf. ... The nutritive content has been fixed to suit mass taste. Now the world, or the solar system, or the universe, or the Lord Almighty, has to be saved by a group of four or five people which includes a Peter Pan figure, a girl of noble birth, and a moron of some kind.... In the old days we used to destroy the world, and it took only one mad scientist. SF was an act of defiance, a literature of subversion, not whimsy.¹⁴⁷

A brief walk around a bookstore today suggests that Aldiss’ worst fears are true and Moorcock’s rueful listing still applies to literature. What then of film and television? One could argue that the film *Star Wars* (1977) and Christopher Vogler’s book *The*

Writer's Journey (1992), a condensed simplification of Joseph Campbell's seminal attempt at a unification of world mythologies, provide precisely the template Aldiss so loathes. Yet in its voice-over introduction the television series *The Outer Limits* explains that it takes its audience from "the deepest inner mind to the outer limits". Clearly even in the 1950s at least television sf was already aware that its potential went beyond gleaming spaceships in star-lit dogfights with evil alien invaders. As Richard Matheson notes, with films like *2001* (1968), *The Forbin Project* (a.k.a *Colossus: The Forbin Project*) (1969), and *The Andromeda Strain* (1972), sf cinema came of age, creating mature stories which flexed the muscles of visual sf. However, much of it remains superficial alongside its literary cousin. Matheson ruefully suggests that if we:

conceive the Solar System as full possibility in the realm of science fiction films, with the basic concepts starting out from the sun, Hollywood is not quite to Earth yet in the radiating expansion of its thought.¹⁴⁸

So there remains much potential, as yet untapped – but potential nonetheless. As Sobchack points out, before sf as either film or literature is condemned too harshly because 90% of it seems such puerile rubbish, it is worth recalling Sturgeon's Law: "90% of *everything* is crud!"¹⁴⁹ By 1993 Ballard was demonstrably more optimistic about the genre, and willing to:

almost make the case that science fiction, far from being a disreputable minor genre, in fact constitutes the strongest literary tradition of the twentieth century, and may well be its authentic literature. Within its pages, as in our lives, archaic myths and scientific apocalypse collide and fuse. However naively, it has tried to respond to the most significant events of our time – the threat of nuclear war, over-population, the computer revolution, the possibilities and abuses of medical science, the ecological dangers to our planet, the consumer society as benign tyranny – topics that haunt our minds but are scarcely considered by the mainstream novel.¹⁵⁰

Literary, film, and television sf texts are perfectly capable of posing awkward questions, of challenging their audiences to face new worlds, new philosophies, new experiences. The film *Contact* (1997) is a prime example of this, and we might also recall the most daring vision of futuristic life emerging from the French auteurist *Nouvelle Vague*: Godard's *Alphaville* (1965). This French 'new wave' (and its mannerist 1970s American equivalent), with its confused temporalities and idiosyncratic perspectives, parallels the 1960s New Wave in science fiction literature. Caldwell's 1995 study of

televisuality concentrates upon the 1980s expressionistic trend in mundane realist television series, such as *Miami Vice* and *Moonlighting*, but he also cites alternative-reality series like *The Next Generation* and *Twin Peaks*. He compares their specialist and individualistic tendencies to this idiosyncratic era of authorship, and makes an important comparison to the other realities demanded by science fiction.¹⁵¹ In combination with Bazin's oft-repeated notion of the fundamental principle of film as a kind of visual desire,¹⁵² we move a step closer to realising that the moving visual arts are perfectly capable of offering this illusive cognitive estrangement.

With the social placement, preoccupations and characteristics of modern genre sf identified, we can now consider how these stories originated and how they have evolved. The potential offered by the mytho-historical and futuristic vocabulary and discourse of sf forms a central part of this thesis. The next chapter briefly illuminates the general form and content of sf literature and film, tracing a path from its literary roots in the epic speculative fictions of ancient Babylon, through the Romantic novel (particularly the Gothic) to its present manifestations in classical and post-modernist science fiction. It also examines the creation and imagery of a relatively recent epic mytho-history – that of the modern United States.

- ¹ Discussed by Brian Stableford, John Clute and Peter Nicholls, "Definitions of SF," in Clute and Nicholls, 311.
- ² Arthur C. Clarke, *Astounding Days: A Science Fiction Autobiography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1989), 11.
- ³ Broderick, 3.
- ⁴ Stableford, Clute and Nicholls, 311-314.
- ⁵ Aldiss and Wingrove, 446.
- ⁶ Parrinder, *Criticism and Teaching*.
- ⁷ Broderick, 4.
- ⁸ Kathryn Cramer, "On Science and Science Fiction," in *The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard SF*, ed. David Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer (London: Orbit Books, 1994), 24.
- ⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 3-4.
- ¹⁰ Broderick, 29.
- ¹¹ Steve Neale, *Genre* (London: BFI, 1980), 55.
- ¹² James Donald, *Fantasy and the Cinema* (London: BFI, 1989), 10.
- ¹³ J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (London: Dent, 1962), 44.
- ¹⁴ For example, Alan Williams, "Is a radical genre criticism possible?" *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9 no. 2 (1984):121-5.
- ¹⁵ Caughie, "Adorno's reproach," 127.
- ¹⁶ Gripsrud, 20.
- ¹⁷ Spencer, 35.
- ¹⁸ Broderick, 15.
- ¹⁹ Delany, *The American Shore*, 55.
- ²⁰ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: New York, 1975), 189.
- ²¹ Spencer, 38.
- ²² Culler, 140.
- ²³ Spencer, 39.
- ²⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, "Introduction" *Communication* 11 (1968): 2-5, and quoted in Spencer, 39.
- ²⁵ Spencer, 47.
- ²⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 2-3.
- ²⁷ Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000), 49.
- ²⁸ Stam, 49.
- ²⁹ Jurji Tynjanov, quoted in Stam, 49. See also Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1978), 66-78.
- ³⁰ Eagleton, 3.
- ³¹ Stam, 48.
- ³² Estrangement is also common to the fairy tale and folk tale, and indeed Harry Levin asks us to consider the folklore categories established by the Formalists as "... the standard situations" of science fiction. Harry Levin, "Science and Fiction," in *Bridges to Science Fiction*, ed. G. Slusser, G. Guffey, and M. Rose (Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 21.
- ³³ Stam, 48.
- ³⁴ Alexander Potebnya, quoted in *Russian Formalist Criticism: 4 Essays*, trans. and ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 5. Lemon and Reis refer to Potebnya's *Note on the Theory of Language*.
- ³⁵ Lemon and Reis, 5.
- ³⁶ Lemon and Reis, 12.
- ³⁷ Lemon and Reis, xi.
- ³⁸ Caughie, "Adorno's Reproach," 148.
- ³⁹ Roman Jakobson, "On Realism in Art," in Matejka and Pomorska, 40.
- ⁴⁰ Eagleton, 4.
- ⁴¹ Eagleton, 5.
- ⁴² Eagleton, 5.
- ⁴³ Eagleton, 6-7.

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- ⁴⁴ Eagleton, 7.
- ⁴⁵ Eagleton, 5.
- ⁴⁶ Eagleton, 6.
- ⁴⁷ Eagleton, 136.
- ⁴⁸ Eagleton, 136.
- ⁴⁹ Eagleton, 137.
- ⁵⁰ Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 377. Also known as "Concluding Statement."
- ⁵¹ "Classic Film Theory and Semiotics" in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 55.
- ⁵² Hill and Church Gibson, 55.
- ⁵³ Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Some Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," partially reprinted in *Contemporary Film Theory*, ed. Anthony Easthope (London: Longman, 1993), 54.
- ⁵⁴ Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth," in *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, ed. H. Feigl and W. Sellars (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949).
- ⁵⁵ Stephen Heath, "Jaws, Ideology and Film Theory," in *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2, ed. Bill Nicholls, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 509-514.
- ⁵⁶ Hill and Church Gibson, 56.
- ⁵⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 285.
- ⁵⁸ Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 10.
- ⁵⁹ Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 11.
- ⁶⁰ Larry McCaffrey, *Across the Wounded Galaxies: Interviews with Contemporary American Science Fiction Writers* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 3-4.
- ⁶¹ Spencer, 45.
- ⁶² Samuel R. Delany, "Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones," in *Driftglass/Starshards* (London: Grafton, 1991), 279.
- ⁶³ Heinlein's "Beyond this Horizon," discussed by Harlan Ellison, in Samuel R. Delany, *The Jewel Hinged Jaw* (Elizabethtown: Dragon Press, 1977), 34. See also James, 115. Now, decades after the literary notion was coined and imagined by countless transfixed readers, digital special effects allow us to see such a marvel of foregrounded background on television: the eponymous round gateway to other planets in *Stargate SG-1*, a doorway with a security mechanism that 'dilates.'
- ⁶⁴ The phrase comes from Samuel R. Delany, quoted in McCaffrey, 79.
- ⁶⁵ Delany, *Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, 79.
- ⁶⁶ Delany, *American Shore*, 60-61.
- ⁶⁷ Spencer, 45.
- ⁶⁸ Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 11.
- ⁶⁹ Thank you John Ellis, notes 22nd May 2000
- ⁷⁰ Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, 7-8.
- ⁷¹ James, 109.
- ⁷² Philip K. Dick "Prize Ship: (Globe From Ganymede)," in *The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick* Vol 1., (New York: Citadel Twilight, 1990).
- ⁷³ Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, 71.
- ⁷⁴ John Ellis. From notes and in discussion, December 17th 1999.
- ⁷⁵ Spencer, 37.
- ⁷⁶ Delany, *Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, 33.
- ⁷⁷ Parrinder, *Criticism and Teaching*, 21
- ⁷⁸ Darko Suvin, "On what is and is not an SF narration" *Science Fiction Studies* V/1 (1978), 45.
- ⁷⁹ Ebert, 92.
- ⁸⁰ Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal. Studies in Narrative and Structure, especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- ⁸¹ Parrinder, *Criticism and Teaching*, 19 and 21.
- ⁸² Parrinder, *Criticism and Teaching*, 21-22.
- ⁸³ Spencer, 37.
- ⁸⁴ Spencer, 37.
- ⁸⁵ Spencer, 37 and 38.
- ⁸⁶ Thanks to John Ellis for reminding me of this.
- ⁸⁷ McCaffrey, 6.
- ⁸⁸ Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 6.

- ⁸⁹ J.G. Ballard, "Introduction to *Crash*," *Re/Search* 8/9 (1984): 96.
- ⁹⁰ See in particular Jameson, *Postmodernism*, and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (London: BFI, 1992).
- ⁹¹ Parrinder, *Criticism and Teaching*, 21.
- ⁹² Stableford, Clute and Nicholls, in Clute and Nicholls, 159-61.
- ⁹³ Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), 5 and 100 respectively.
- ⁹⁴ Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Socialist Review* 80 (1985): 65-107.
- ⁹⁵ Joanna Russ, "Interview," *Khatru* ed., Jeffrey D. Smith, Baltimore Phantasmicron Press (1975), 3-4 and 47, quoted in Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 10.
- ⁹⁶ Spencer, 43.
- ⁹⁷ Rabkin, 81.
- ⁹⁸ Rabkin, 81.
- ⁹⁹ Rabkin, 82.
- ¹⁰⁰ Rabkin, 84.
- ¹⁰¹ Rabkin, 85.
- ¹⁰² Rabkin, 87.
- ¹⁰³ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (London: Panther, 1973), 19 and 154 respectively.
- ¹⁰⁴ Rabkin makes reference to Edward Sapir. See Dell Hymes, *Language in Culture and Society* (London: Harper and Row, 1964).
- ¹⁰⁵ Rabkin, 87.
- ¹⁰⁶ Rabkin, 87-8.
- ¹⁰⁷ Angenot, 9.
- ¹⁰⁸ Angenot, 9.
- ¹⁰⁹ John Ellis, in discussion, October 1999.
- ¹¹⁰ Myra Barnes, *Linguistics and Language in SF-Fantasy* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).
- ¹¹¹ Angenot, 18.
- ¹¹² Le Guin, *Left Hand of Darkness*, 159.
- ¹¹³ Rabkin, 88.
- ¹¹⁴ Rabkin, 88-9.
- ¹¹⁵ Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 174-5.
- ¹¹⁶ My thanks to Stephen Fender for this – from discussion as a student at Sussex in 1985-8.
- ¹¹⁷ In the *Deep Space Nine* episode "Little Green Men", the audience can understand both the Ferengi and the humans, but in-diegesis the characters cannot understand one another until the translator is mended and the assumptions lead to amusing misapprehensions.
- ¹¹⁸ Rabkin, 93.
- ¹¹⁹ Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), 5.
- ¹²⁰ Rabkin, 94.
- ¹²¹ Jorge Luis Borges, "Partial Enchantments of the Quixotic," in Rabkin, 94. Also known as "Partial Magic in the Quixote," in Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, ed. and trans. by D.A. Yates and J.E. Irby, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970).
- ¹²² Brian MacLale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987), 16.
- ¹²³ Parrinder, *Criticism and Teaching*, 23.
- ¹²⁴ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1944), discussed in Caughie, "Adorno's Reproach," 128.
- ¹²⁵ Spencer, 37.
- ¹²⁶ Reginald Bretmor, "Science Fiction in the Age of Space," in *Science Fiction: Today and Tomorrow*, ed. R. Bretmor (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 150.
- ¹²⁷ Rabkin, 97.
- ¹²⁸ J.G. Ballard, *A User's Guide to the Millennium* (London: Flamingo Books, 1996), 17.
- ¹²⁹ Just as television influences film, so film influences television. The film *Speed* (1994) is a good example of television technology being borrowed by film. The original 1960s series *Star Trek* made a highly successful move from television to film in the 1970s and early 80s, and as a result paved the way for the rebirth of *Star Trek* on television as *The Next Generation*. Other old television series are also crossing to cinema: *Lost in Space*, *The Avengers* etc., while series also create feature-length 'films for television', which have the closed structure of the cinema experience but are screened on television and not at the cinema. The four TNT-sponsored *Babylon 5* films fit into this category.
- ¹³⁰ Thank you to Edward James for these titles.

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PART TWO

Between the Darkness and the Light – Sublime Speculations

Between the Darkness and the Light – Sublime Speculations

The previous chapter identified the stylistic elements of sf, along with its social and cultural location. This chapter now considers the possible origins and ancestry of sf, locating its progenitors within classical tales of exploration and discovery, and examining the relationship between sf and myth. It also identifies the linguistic and thematic norms associated with the heroic epic. Stories of quests, explorations, and the ongoing search for knowledge can be traced through the ages; they remain important facets of our arts, narrating the development of cultures and civilisation. Many early speculative fictions provide parallels with modern fictions of exploration and discovery, and thus help us to define the sf genre in the terms of its typical or over-arching thematics. The language of these texts is also important; its arcane structure and its syntax are similar to the linguistic juxtapositions explored in the previous chapter. Just as modern sf demands we see new things, and map ourselves anew, so the use of ancient and elusive forms of language allow us to experience manifestations of an elusive and shifting mytho-historical past – so far removed from our present life as to sometimes demand similar negotiations to sf. The effect of this is to (re)create old worlds for us to explore anew, simultaneously encouraging a growing sense of familiarity, which allows us to proceed more readily than we might with a modernist or sf text. In sf their combination can be highly potent, permitting us to explore new worlds without losing the vital link between these worlds and the world we inhabit.

The first part of this section, **The Old World**, demonstrates how the ancient heroic voyages and epics of the classical world, together with their idiosyncrasies of expression, fulfil an important role in the creation of a recognisable collective mytho-history. It also examines the Romantic (notably the Gothic mode), as a significant contributor to the development of science fiction. It combines these within its oeuvre in order to evolve into the paradoxical Romantic and intellectual form in which it exists

today. Although this analysis is primarily concerned with mythological structures, including progression, repetition, and superficial difference, it also introduces us to another element important to my argument – the Sublime, or the sense of wonder. This major criterion of the Romantic infuses art and literature with a sense of destiny – spiritual and/or physical – an approach apparently in opposition to many concepts discussed in the previous chapter, most notably the idea of cognitive estrangement connected to sf and fantasy by Suvin. However, although the two certainly offer different approaches to the genre, they are not mutually exclusive, and their combination provides sf, and *Babylon 5* in particular, with a fundamental distinguishing element.

In “The Artificial Infinite” (1995), Scott Bukatman notes that images of the American frontier emerging from the Rocky Mountain School share a degree of transcendentalism similar to the special effects in sf films like *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). This chapter suggests that Bukatman’s argument, which is specifically about the sfx work of Douglas Trumbull, can be taken further. Notably, through the sense of wonder (a mindscape or landscape of the sublime) and its allied sense of destiny, modern sf is capable of taking on some of the resonances and values of visual representations of the frontier. I am not arguing that the western genre has been completely *replaced* by sf, but rather that it shares a specific use of the sublime. The western’s inherent ideologies deny it the opportunity to explore beyond certain boundaries which do *not* limit sf. The western genre has an intrinsic inability to take up the challenge of encountering and cognitively considering ‘new worlds’ of different cultures and civilisations in relation to its own social representations. It looks constantly to the future, but its potential achievements are denied by its fundamental ideological schisms. This is clearly demonstrated by the demise of the western as film and television in the 1970s, in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate when the artificial homogeneity of American society was shattered. Once it began its critique of the conquest of the West, the fragile and relatively new mytho-history of the USA was irretrievably fractured. The western could only decline. John Hellman argues that this prompted the search for a new representation of the mytho-history, one ultimately located in fantasy narratives such as *Star Wars* (1977).

Therefore **The New World** briefly abandons sf, but not the future, nor the sublime. It considers instead the creation of a relatively new mytho-history, examining the rise and fall of the western genre and the importance of the frontier to the American psyche. Crucial to this dissertation is the conquest of North America and the vision of the West – particularly as represented in painting and film. It is an epic of the modern world. The sublime, and/or a sense of wonder, infuses much frontier art, literature, and film of the United States, enhancing the motivation to explore, and creating an implacable sense of divine destiny. As Jorge Luis Borges notes in the *Paris Review*, whilst “literary men seem to have neglected their epic duties, the epic has been saved for us, strangely enough, by the western ... saved for the world by, of all places, Hollywood.”¹

However, the mise-en-scène of the new western backdrop or ‘set’ possesses its own narrative of natural history, one that combines uneasily with the mythical drama to create a second landscape. The plotted narrative, the story of the action, is that of a peaceful, pioneering scenario, an image of divinely sanctioned expansion. This masks the actual violence of the process, that of culture over nature, which is depicted within the other narrative, that of the natural mise-en-scène. Too rooted in the anachronistic binary ideologies of its formative era, the fatal limit of the 20th century western is that the closure of the frontier condemned it to merely narrate re-vamped versions of its finite 19th century history. As a result, it can never truly speculate. A pursuit of this argument to its potential conclusions is beyond the bounds of this dissertation; nevertheless, I agree with Hellman that it is natural, perhaps essential, for American cinema to embrace a futuristic genre in order to reassert its national mythology. Likewise, I extend Bukatman’s argument to demonstrate that there are clear links between the images of the sublime in ‘frontier’ art and the sense of wonder infusing images of space.

The Old World:

Before we travel to future worlds, we must return to the world of antiquity in order to locate the origins of speculative fiction, and join Lester del Rey, who argues that

at least some of the roots of sf can be traced to the most ancient examples of literature.² These early writings are not in any way sf as we know it today, but such stories of the ancient world involve speculation, fabulous journeys, myth, and legend. All of these find their way into the literature of European civilisation, and for very specific reasons, are utilised by sf. As del Rey suggests, this means that sf can claim a partial heritage, which is “precisely as old as the first recorded fiction. This is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.”³ Our idea of the epic comes to us from Ancient Greek, where it signified a long narrative, usually a poem in an elevated style, generally describing the adventures and exploits of superhuman heroes. These primary epics are the oral traditions of a nation, and involve myths and legends – often defining great exploits in nationhood. Their mythological nature allows for their various manifestations to co-exist – thus there is no one version of *Gilgamesh*, which differs in detail between Sumerian and Akkadian texts.

The fullest version of *Gilgamesh* located to date is indeed the first recorded story with an author’s name attached. Written in the Akkadian language, and found in the library at Nineveh,⁴ it comes from twelve damaged stone tablets bearing the name of Sin-leqi-unninni, an incantation priest and master scribe of the Kassite period. How much of the work can be genuinely attributed to him is uncertain, but Mesopotamian tradition generally ascribes authorship of the Nineveh version to him without serious question.⁵ This version is believed to have formed part of a collection held by the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (669-633BC). Gilgamesh himself was a king of Uruk (Erech), part of Babylonia on the Euphrates river, in what is now Iraq, in about 2700BC. Tablet 1 describes the eponymous hero and indicates the narrative pattern ahead, that of journeys to distant and dangerous and unknown places, as the following extract demonstrates:

He is Gilgamesh, perfect in splendour
Who opened up passes in the mountains
Who could dig pits even in the mountainside
Who crossed the ocean, the broad seas, as far as the sunrise,
Who inspected the edges of the world, kept searching for eternal life,
Who reached Ut-napishtim the far-distant, by force,
Who restored to their rightful place cult centres (?) which the flood had ruined.
There is nobody among the kings of teeming humanity
Who can compare with him
Who can say ‘I am King’, beside Gilgamesh?
Gilgamesh (was) named from birth for fame

Two thirds of him was divine, and one third mortal.⁶

Other fragments of stories and myths about Gilgamesh are written in cuneiform, and date from around 2000BC, far older than those found at Nineveh. Indeed, the Sumerian language, the disappearance of the Sumer people, and the discovery and collation of the myths of Gilgamesh are in themselves fine fare for the aficionado of speculative fiction.⁷ The oldest extant text found to date survives on the Sumerian clay tablets, written in a language which apparently bears no resemblance to any other. Not only do these poems predate Homer's epics by at least 1500 years, but also they relate a tale of immense tragedy and moral anguish. Gilgamesh and Enkidu, his wild friend and companion, seek knowledge and an escape from human mortality. When Enkidu is killed in battle, in terrible grief Gilgamesh travels beyond the realms of the living world, driven by the desire to restore the life of his friend. He eventually finds Ut-napishtim the far-distant, who tells him:

'Since [the gods made you] from the flesh of gods
and mankind,
Since [the gods] made you like your father and
Mother,
[Death is inevitable (?)] at sometime, both for
Gilgamesh and for a fool
.....
Nobody sees Death,
Nobody sees the face of Death,
Nobody hears the voice of Death,
Savage Death just cuts mankind down.
.....
The Anaunnaki, the great gods, assembled,
Mammitum who creates fate decreed destinies
with them.
They appointed death and life.
They did not mark out days for death,
But they did so for life.'⁸

Shown the secrets of the gods, Gilgamesh's brave search for restoration and immortality is fruitless; no sooner is the answer – a sweet-smelling flower – in his grasp, than a serpent snatches it away: the quest is futile.⁹ He returns to Uruk a mortal man,

unable to restore to life his great companion, Enkidu. In time, Gilgamesh too, dies. As archaeologist N.K. Sandars says in her introduction to the epic:

The gods, who do not die, cannot be tragic. If Gilgamesh is not the first human hero, he is the first tragic hero of whom anything is known. He is at once the most sympathetic to us, and most typical of individual man in his search for life and understanding, and of this search the conclusion must be tragic.¹⁰

Although an author's name may well be associated with later examples of the epic mode – Homer's *Iliad*, for example – there is little doubt that the stories themselves are compiled by a variety of authors from a variety of origins. The secondary (or 'literary') epic in European literature is modelled on the primary epic. It includes many of its features, but was generally written by a single author for a literate audience. Virgil's *Aeneid* (approx. 30-20 BC) counts as a secondary epic – a tribute to Homer's *Odyssey* and ascribed to a single author. In the modern sense of the word as 'long' (or ambitious), 'epic' could be applied to a great many novels, such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869), and Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), which of course draws heavily upon *The Odyssey*. However, these are not epic in a primary sense in that none of them, nor many other works since perhaps Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667/1674), offers the national myth-making conventions of the classical epic. Nor do these texts utilise even superficially an additional feature common to many primary epics – the appearance of a *deus ex machina*. In Ancient Greek theatre this was literally the mechanical means by which a 'god' was sometimes lowered onto the stage in order to intervene – aiding the protagonist in his ventures and allowing him to escape from the most impossible situations – essentially, to visibly assist in the unfolding of the plot. The supernatural machinery of a godlike force is lacking in *War and Peace*, which is heavily concerned with the realities of everyday life, and the ironic *Ulysses* also lacks any divine intervention. As we shall see, in *Babylon 5* we have not only tragedy on an epic scale, but also a degree of objectivity, and a *deus ex machina* in Lorien.

In the heroic or epic mode, the narrative generally follows the pattern of a quest, the emphasis lying upon encounter and illumination, on action and adventure. Often an incredible and fantastic journey or voyage is part of the tale, emphasising not only the

experiences of the journey, but the splendour and awe of remote, unknown places. One need only look at the immense success of films like the *Indiana Jones* series to recognise the enduring potency of this combination in any action-based genre. *Gilgamesh*; tales of *Sinbad's* voyages; Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (800BC); Virgil's *Aeneid*; the Icelandic *Elder* (Poetic) and *Younger* (Prose) *Eddas* (c.1200AD); *Beowulf*; the medieval French *chansons de geste*;¹¹ and Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth century *Le Morte D'Arthur* etc., all contain these elements, and many share themes similar to those of modern sf.

Assyriologist Dr. Stephanie Dalley's analysis of Akkadian literature notes that Homer's *Odyssey* "includes a story about a man's direct contact with the Underworld," and she concludes that the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* possibly:

shared in part a common background. ...[e]choes of stories from both the Greek and Akkadian compositions are found in the *Arabian Nights*. The Tale of Buluqiya bears resemblances to the Epic of Gilgamesh which are too close to be dismissed as coincidental.¹²

Similarly, the tale of the Calypso in book five of Homer's *Odyssey* bears close resemblance to the story of Siduri and Gilgamesh, and the third and fourth voyages of Sinbad resemble the encounters of Odysseus with the Cyclops and Circe respectively. Dalley concludes that these "points of contact between the stories ... show clearly that the traditional tales were reused and adapted for different ethnic and geographical settings by ancient and medieval story tellers, by Semites and by Greeks"¹³ Numerous medieval travel books also recount tales of this type. Whilst these and earlier stories are not of course science fiction as we recognise it, they are speculative fiction, and thus are their cultural equivalent. In combination with the advances of modern science they provide the basic literary patterns we find in today's science fiction.¹⁴

Many of the stylistic techniques found in these early stories are repeated in later epic tales, and although some of the patterns in *Gilgamesh* or *Beowulf* (for example), do not survive the translations, they can be identified in the original. Writing of *Beowulf*, Michael Alexander notes that many of the epic's clinching points are "made in epigrammatic juxtapositions which are usually untranslatable."¹⁵ According to Dalley, Akkadian literature also revels in punning and wordplay, some of which is crucial to the

plot. At other times it is “highly esoteric and would only have been appreciated by expert scribes.”¹⁶ Dalley goes on to explain that the Akkadian texts are enlivened by “alliteration, rhetorical questions, chiasma, inclusio, similes; verb pairs with contrasting tenses; a build-up of tension through repetition with slight variation; fixed epithets and formulaic lines.”¹⁷ This tradition continues in our literature. Although it is not epic, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* echoes this, particularly in “The Franklin’s Tale”. Here the humour is reliant upon the reader’s appreciation of rhetoric and *gentillesse* (the latter represented by the Franklin’s pilgrim companion, the Knight, rather than the sorry perversion of it in the Franklin’s sensational story of Averagus, Dorigen, and Aurelius).

Writing of this style has thrilled readers for centuries in the form of poetry and fables, and (post) modernist writings continue the trend today, playing with linguistics. These stories function not only as tales, but also as highly stylised means of *telling*. The elegant complexities of their ironic games are oftentimes noted only by specialist readers (Dalley’s expert scribes, for example, who would doubtless have befriended the Formalists) – although the stories can be enjoyed by all who read them. So the patterns of innovative and stylish syntactical juxtapositions remain a constant, although they have evolved as the dominant method of communicating stories has shifted from oral to written and visual. Equally, it should be remembered that much of what creates such poetry, to our modern ears, is simply the use of an exotic and arcane syntax, as Jakobson and Tynjanov warn us in their discussions of poetic language.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the sf writer’s recourse to this is in itself important, as we shall see.

In his introduction to *Beowulf*, Michael Alexander reminds us that an epic requires other components. According to him, the epic is:

universal, taking in all of life and representing it in such a way that the general truth of the presentation is universally recognised. Its scope should embrace war and peace, men and gods, life and death in a comprehensive and encyclopaedic way. And its presentation should be objective, its scenes, events and characters should form an interconnected and ‘solid’ reality, being presented from a consistent and impartial viewpoint.¹⁹

Similarly, Northrop Frye underlines the importance of impartiality in the epic when he notes how *The Iliad* demonstrates that:

This is useful to remember, because such literature links us psychologically to the history and mythology of the past, and the language of this literature repeats the same patterns and devices such as can be recognised in *Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad*, *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. They create a plausible alternative reality, a parallel universe of meta-mythology into which, given the right codes and in recognition of them, we will happily transport ourselves at any time.

Thomas Disch suggested that sf was arguably little more than a branch of children's literature. Children's fantasy literature encourages us at an early age to recall these ancient traditions, and some of the most engaging stories come from novels for younger readers. William Croft Dickinson's *Borrobil* (1944), Susan Cooper's *Dark is Rising* (1965-77) sequence and Le Guin's *Earthsea* stories all rely upon this mytho-historical base and at specific times adopt an arcane style of language more appropriate to the epic or heroic mode, signalling their apartness. This can be done through either description or characters' speech. In this extract from Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), the modern English of Susan contrasts sharply with that of Cadellin (Merlin) the Wizard. With it, we are introduced to an entirely new, yet very old worldscape, plugged instantly into that hazy evocation of myth and history in its casual reference to Beowulf's foe Grendel, and to the Norse Armageddon of *Ragnarok*. Likewise the language with which Garner surrounds the ordinary, everyday speech of Susan, is poetic in structure, further verifying the sense of other-worldliness in this nether-Alderley tale:

"But what is he?" said Susan, pale with the memory of their meeting.

"He is, or was a man. Once he studied under the wisest of the wise, and became a great lore-master; but in his lust for knowledge he practised the forbidden arts, and the black magic ravaged his heart and made a monster of him. He left the paths of day, and went to live, like Grendel of old, beneath the waters of Llyn-dhu, the Black Lake, growing mightily in evil, second only to the ancient creatures of night who attend their Lord in Ragnarok. And it is he, arch enemy of mine, who came against you this day."²³

Our constant recourse to time and space as a single conceptual sphere allows us to readily accept encounters with extraordinary avatars – incarnations such as Cadellin. The archaic syntax transports us back with the character to the time of legends from whence

s/he came, or brings those legends alive to us in our present time, as happens in Garner's books. There are key words – locations, names – and because they have only a shifting connotational meaning, they can be easily accepted into new contexts. In *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, for instance, the name "Brisingamen" is reminiscent of Nordic legends (the necklace of the Brislings worn by Thor's wife Sif). Names such as "svart-alfar" and "Svartmoot" link us to the Nordic names and traditions that have filtered into the general public consciousness via Snorre Sturluson's *Eddas* and Britain's substantial Viking heritage. In turn "Llyn-dhu," "Cadellin," and "Merlin" evoke the traditional vocabularies of the Celts and Britons. To children they are just names, but their exoticism is memorable, and they contribute to the catalogue of evocative mytho-history to which adults refer when they enjoy the cultural arts. Our myths are not set. There is not just one version of the legend of King Arthur, nor of the *Arabian Nights*, nor *Gilgamesh*, etc., and because the folk-tales from which these stories arise were originally of the oral tradition (and are therefore greatly flexible), we have no difficulty in accepting an adaptation to the *mise-en-scène*. It is seen simply as another manifestation of an old friend, and we incorporate it into a familiar, growing, mytho-historical meta-narrative.²⁴ Equally, the use of a language poetic and arcane to us, but in keeping with another era, signals difference, yet simultaneously reassures us with a vague sense of the familiar.

The combination of elements is important here. Most epics involve tragedy, a personal disaster via *hubris* or another fatal flaw (*hamatia*), or a more general but equally terrible downfall like that of Troy. In *Alien Encounters* (1981) Mark Rose suggests that our histories and fictions of terrible ends of cities, civilisations, and individual protagonists are important to our sense of time. Whereas mortality has always mattered – Gilgamesh's journey to the next world to restore Enkidu, the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, etc., ably demonstrate this – time itself has not been blamed until relatively recently. Instead, the gods were at fault, and Mark Rose notes when and how the change occurred:

Like our modern sense of space, our sense of time has its roots in the Renaissance. In that period the shift in focus from the long and continuous life of the community to the evanescent moment of the individual resulted in a new sense of time as the antagonist of man, the brutal agent that devours beauty and life... We create fictions of endings to give

meaning to time, to transform *chronos*, mere passing time, into *kairos*, time invested with the meaning derived from its goal. Time without beginning or end, undifferentiated boundless time without meaning, is utterly inhuman time.²⁵

Our continuing quest to create these “fictions of endings,” and to then rationalise them, is easily exemplified. In November 1996 the early evening news on BBC1 reported that the Palace of Cleopatra had been located in the harbour at Alexandria. Historians had known it lay somewhere in the area for centuries, had sought its location for decades, but only recent innovations in infra-red sensing allowed its rediscovery. In 1992 Sir Ranulph Fiennes discovered the lost city of Ubar in the Omani desert. The fabled source of frankincense, Ubar was hailed in the tenth century by historian al-Hamdani, as first among the treasures of ancient Arabia. The ruins appear to predate every known site in southern Arabia. According to the *New York Times International*:

In the Koran, Iram, possibly Ubar, is described as the ‘many columned city ... whose like has not been built in the entire land’. But it came to have a reputation and fate not unlike that of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible. Condemned for their sinful and unrepentant lives, the Koran relates, the people in Iram were destroyed by Allah.²⁶

Ubar’s cataclysmic destruction, recounted also in the “Arabian Nights” must have occurred towards the end of the Roman period, historians say. At any rate, the expedition found evidence of its cause. The site’s buildings were built over a huge limestone cavern which at some point in the distant past collapsed, plunging much of the city into a gaping hole. The ruins were eventually buried in drifting sand.²⁷

Geographically rediscovered cities like Ubar, Babylon, Knossus, Troy (and other lost civilisations) are not so much buried by the sands of time as merely separated from us by their remoteness. Humanity still yearns to locate cities like Ubar, we still dream of the fabled Atlantis, we maintain the desire for digging up new histories and with them, new futures, and potentially astounding discoveries. Missions to the Moon and Mars, whilst gathering scientific knowledge about the origins of the Universe and life in our solar system, are also hopeful explorations of possible ancient and fallen civilisations. The pleasures we derive from these efforts come partly from fear, from thrill-seeking. The risk to mind, body and soul is frequently stressed by additional myths which build up around the original legend of that which has been lost. A common example is the fear of

an ancient curse transported to the discoverer, exemplified by the story of Howard Carter and the Earl of Caernarvon, who discovered the tomb of the Egyptian boy-king Tutankhamen in 1922. Concomitantly, there occurs a rationalist search for answers – as the discovery of the limestone cavern beneath the collapsed city demonstrates: myth and rumour become scientific evidence. This leads us to the other pleasure, one derived from the promise of great treasure lying within. The treasure used to be gold or jewels, now more often than not it is information – both equate to power.

Since the industrial revolution the sciences have continued to open new doorways in the sands of time. Speculative fiction has drawn on these possibilities, and continues to do so, providing a conduit for the vicarious exploration of fantastic worlds. For example, archacology is the reason for the tale of H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), whilst palaeontology encourages the expedition in Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912). Geological theories of a hollow earth with openings at the poles allow explorations by authors such as Edgar Allan Poe in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), and Jules Verne in *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864). The latter provides not only a subterranean adventure story with a scientific premise, but a trip back through time from the fin-de-siècle wasteland of Iceland's Snæfells volcano, via the legendary lost city of Atlantis, to Italy, a country long considered to be the cultural and spiritual centre of Western civilisation. Ballard's latter-day version of this, *The Drowned World*, takes a slightly different and darker tack, offering the Earth itself as a time machine, with the whole planet (d)evolving via a geological and biological time-warp to a place somewhere "between the Palaeozoic and Triassic eras."²⁸

As new technologies continued to develop in the 1800s so there was a shift in scientific interest away from archaeology and geology towards physics and astronomy, from the Earth and the past to the solar system and the future. The "lost race scenario" remained popular and from 1920 onwards it moved beyond the lost worlds at the poles, inside the earth, or in its jungles. It became possible for authors to create fabulous new means of travel, where the technology itself was as important as the places to which the explorers journeyed. Jules Verne's Nautilus in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1870) is an early version of this. With the advent of film came more. Georges Méliès'

films often included fantasy travel scenarios, the most famous of which is his *Trip to the Moon* (1902), whilst the 1930s US serials such as *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* ensured that this gadget-oriented sf expanded on a galactic scale.

The focal point of our modern equivalent is undoubtedly *Star Trek*'s USS Enterprise, NCC 1701. Renamed, but in an identical role, the ship is also the focal point for the latest outing: *Voyager* (1995-2001). Crews come and crews go but the starship remains an interstellar icon, a constant manifestation of the Federation and its values in uncharted space. Indeed, at the narrative heart of *Star Trek* is Captain Kirk's love for his ship. The pivotal points in the films *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982) and *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984) do not lie only in the death and resurrection of Mr Spock, the Vulcan Science Officer, but rather in their parallel. The films linger respectively upon the destruction of the Enterprise at the planet Genesis, and its rebirth at Earth's starbase as the Enterprise NCC 1701A. The death and rebirth of the vessel is thus given equal dramatic weight to the death and rebirth of its First Officer.

The ongoing mission of the Enterprise in *Star Trek* clearly stems from the epic journey, but it also draws upon the epic voyage's fascination with technology epitomised by the works of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and others of that ilk. *Voyager* resorts to the tried and tested formula, flinging a new exploratory vessel into the Delta Quadrant, millions of light years away from charted Federation space. It is no coincidence that the starting point for *Voyager* is the failing former Cardassian space station that became the Federation outpost *Deep Space Nine*, itself introduced by Picard and the Enterprise 'D' from *The Next Generation*. At a stroke the former questing manifestations of the original *Star Trek* are connected with the newer ventures. The fate of the USS Voyager echoes a theme initiated in sf television by the 1960s series *Lost in Space*, but Captain Kathryn Janeway's mission in this unmapped quadrant of the galaxy is essentially the same as that of Captain James T. Kirk²⁹ in the original *Star Trek* series. It is a quest for the knowledge that will permit a triumphant return home and requires a loyalty and devotion to the ship itself above all else. The Maquis rebels pursued by Voyager in the first episode "Caretaker" are rapidly absorbed into the crew: Chakotay, their commander, becomes Janeway's trusted first officer, whilst engineer B'anna Torres becomes Voyager's Chief

Engineer. The rest of the Maquis crew knuckle down, and any ideological differences are dealt with briefly and subsumed within the general principles of Starfleet. The ship creates a community.³⁰ The only lasting and potentially dangerous rebellion comes from the Bajoran Seska, who turns out to have been a physically-altered Cardassian spy in the first place. Even in the Delta Quadrant, seventy years from home, the ideals of the Federation dominate. Voyager is quite literally and metaphorically the vessel containing them and Voyager's welfare is paramount; its technology and the advances enforced by the very situation in which the crew finds itself create further scientific innovation. This kind of gadget-oriented sf allows for an extension of the ancient and fantastic heroic voyages of Odysseus and Sinbad in a context often more plausible (via a kind of 'natural law' or 'common sense') than that of pure myth or fairytale. Jason's Argonauts have become Janeway's Astronauts.

So we can see that the heroic epic is still influential in sf, and the quest for knowledge (technical or otherwise), is a prime focus of these epic journeys. But the epic is not the only mode utilised and honoured by sf narrative. In *Intersections* (1978) Wymer, Calderonello et al., suggest that the rise of science fiction proper can be "broadly defined as a literary response to the rise of modern science."³¹ Equally, the rise in fantasy in the 1950s and again in the 1980s can be seen as a reaction to the new technologies, the space race, information technology, the computer age, and a heavier reliance upon machines – most of us remaining in near ignorance as to their operational intricacies. This bizarre power, obtained through a near-abdication of specifically identified personal control, spawns a desire for simpler things more attuned to the world itself, and our sense of nostalgia incorporates both the more technical and industrial revolutions as a kind of structuring absence. In the more fantastic literature this allows recourse to tales of magic, alchemy, and mysticism, the science and ideologies of yesterday. And of course, the success of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy in the 1950s spawned an entire industry of would-be high fantasy writers.

According to American critic Robert Scholes, speculative fiction "returns deliberately to confront reality" in the form of allegory, satire, fable or parable.³² Following the scientific discoveries of the 19th century, humanity was able to speculate

and contemplate as never before. A book that does precisely this, and one generally considered to be the first post-industrialist sf work, is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Many people like to take *Frankenstein* as the origin of science fiction as we know it today. It is more sophisticated than Ann Radcliffe's earlier, ghostly *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and less flamboyant than the flagrant exoticism of Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) – the latter of which has more in common with *The Arabian Nights* and Piranesi's fantastic architecture than with European Gothic. However, *Frankenstein* owes much of its atmosphere and gloomy mise-en-scène to the Gothic, and so this early sf text provides us with a link. Its framework and its themes still operate significantly today within sf, and it links us with the more traditional literary pleasures of the past. Of the Gothic mode, Brian Aldiss says:

emphasis was placed on the distant and unearthly Brooding landscapes, isolated castles, dismal old towns, and mysterious figures carry us into an entranced world from which horrid revelations state... Terror, mystery and that delightful horror which Burke connected with the sublime, may be discovered ... in science fiction to this day.³³

The Gothic was originally rather short-lived; Jane Austen even mocked it in *Northanger Abbey* (1818). But interest was renewed with vigour upon the arrival of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which is perhaps as much about progress as it is about bloodlines. Here, Van Helsing's international group of modern democrats, replete with scepticism and scientific knowledge, is pitched against the ancient mystic powers of a once noble Eastern European bloodline. This also shows strong signs of the sf to come: detection, logic and a willingness to comprehend, accept, or at least explore things unknown.

Traces of the Gothic can be found in books as diverse as Ballard's *The Drowned World* and Gene Wolfe's *Urth of the New Sun* series (1980-87). *Blade Runner* (1982) offers a visual neo-Gothic Los Angeles and Richard Paul Russo's novel *Inner Eclipse* (1988) provides a kind of cosmic *Heart of Darkness*. And the Gothic lingers splendidly in Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan* (1946) where the castle Gormenghast and its hovel appendages spread across an ill-defined landscape, blurring with the land itself.

Gormenghast, that is, the main massing of the original stone, taken by itself would have displayed a certain ponderous architectural quality were it possible to have ignored the circumfusion of those mean dwellings that swamped like an epidemic around its outer walls. They sprawled over the sloping earth, each one half way over its neighbour until, held back by the castle ramparts, the innermost of these hovels laid hold to the great walls, clamping themselves thereto like limpets to a rock. These dwellings, by ancient law, were granted this chill intimacy with the stronghold that loomed above them.³⁴

The more psychological aspects of the Gothic can be located in much American literature. It is noteworthy that Poe's haunted castle, the House of Usher, crumbles and disappears in a mire, apparently unsustainable by the atmosphere and landscape of America, devoid as it is of castle ruins, and distant and unearthly legends like that of Vlad the Impaler. American Gothic has moved to the darker corners of the mind. Earlier manifestations are found in Melville, Hawthorne, and Henry James, and later, with more religious overtones, it can be found predominantly in the work of the southern bible-belt authors, that of William Faulkner, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor.

A useful example of the Gothic influence in sf can be found in John W. Campbell's novella "Who Goes There?"(1938), re-worked in film form as *The Thing (From Another World)* (1951) and again in 1982 as *The Thing*. Essentially it posits the notion of a hybrid Frankenstein's monster/Dracula meeting up with humans in the unforgiving environment of the South Pole. An Antarctic expedition discovers a crashed spaceship and a frozen extra-terrestrial whom they rather naively thaw out and bring back to life. The creature turns out to be a shape-shifter, a sort of galactic vampire, able to absorb any living creature and outwardly to become like it. The expedition then has to discover which amongst them is the alien and kill it before it kills them, or worse still escapes to wreak havoc upon the warmer, more populated climes. This ensures a detective quest, and quite literally, a process of elimination. The simultaneously horrific and yet mesmerising description of the creature brings to mind the undead, and thus the Gothic, as the second passage, from *Dracula*, demonstrates:

(1) Eagerly Blair was stripping back the ropes. A single throw of the tarpaulin revealed the thing....The room stiffened abruptly. It was face up there on the plain, greasy planks of the table. The broken haft of the bronze ice-ax was still buried in the queer skull. Three mad, hate-filled eyes blazed up with a living fire, bright as fresh spilled-blood, from a

face ringing with a writhing, loathsome nest of worms, blue mobile worms that crawled where hair should grow-- ("Who Goes There?" 1938)

(2) There lay the Count... Even the deep, burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated. It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood; he lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion....There was no lethal weapon at hand, but I seized a shovel which the workmen had been using to fill the cases, and lifting it high, struck, with the edge downward, at that hateful face. But as I did so, the head turned, and the eyes fell upon me, with all their blaze of basilisk horror. ... The last glimpse I had was of the bloated face, bloodstained and fixed with a grin of malice which would have held its own in the nethermost hell. (*Dracula* 1897)³⁵

More recently, the film *Alien* (1979) may well be read by Feminist theorists as a Freudian uterine odyssey, but the outward appearance of humanity disguising otherness – John Hurt's ill-fated Kane, and more importantly Ash, the cyborg – leads to the same kind of encounter we witness in *The Thing*. *Blade Runner* (1982), a tenuous but provoking film version of Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* asks an even more disturbing question: how do we know what human *is* when it is *non*-humans who display the greater humanity? The protagonist, Deckard, spends the entire film chasing down the replicants, forever diminishing our sense of his humanity. The film poses other questions: how are we supposed to react to these, our creations, and how are they supposed to react to us, their creators? As the dying Nexus 6 replicant Roy Baty says to Tyrell: "It's not an easy thing to meet your maker." Thus these tales, with their themes of demonic possession, the undead/vampirism or (in)humanity, and the creation of life bring us back to *Frankenstein*, occasionally via *Dracula*. Their adherence to the fear and wonder of the sublime creates the fascination – the danger is that they ask for contemplation rather than analysis, but nevertheless the potential for exploration is there.

However, the quotation from Aldiss refers to more than the shadowy sense of the Gothic mode. It mentions also Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). In doing so, it identifies a major Romantic concept and criterion, and an elemental facet of sf: the Sublime. Burke creates an important category in the sublime; to him it reveals the overlap between pain and

pleasure. He places terror at the heart of the sublime, but points out that it produces delight when it does not pose too close a threat to us, saying:

When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.³⁶

Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*... counts artistic representations, tragedy, for example, within the sublime. Immanuel Kant, whose *Analytic of the Sublime* (1790) rather overshadowed Burke's earlier and more simplistic writings, defines more clearly its psychological effect as:

at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason.³⁷

In *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, Peter Nicholls and Cornel Robu express concern that the sublime in sf is often manifested as something childish, or as a mere plot device for introducing something alien, or something "very, very big".³⁸ However, as Robu suggests in "A Key to Science Fiction: The Sublime", the sense of wonder drawn from the sublime can offer much more. Robu notes that for "twentieth century sf, man is no longer sustained 'between two infinities' but 'between three infinities'," and draws on Blaise Pascal's 17th century belief that the "human condition is sustained between two abysses." Robu quotes Pascal, who argues that:

he who regards himself in this light will be afraid of himself, and observing himself sustained in the body given him by nature between those two abysses of the Infinite and Nothing, will tremble at the sight of these marvels; and I think that, as his curiosity changes into admiration, he wil[l] be more disposed to contemplate them in silence than to examine them with presumption.

For, in fact, what is man in nature? A Nothing in comparison with the Infinite, an All in comparison with the Nothing, a mean between nothing and everything. Since he is infinitely removed from comprehending the extremes, the end of things and their beginning are hopelessly hidden from him in an impenetrable secret; he is equally incapable of seeing the Nothing from which he was made, and the Infinite in which he is swallowed up.³⁹

Robu goes on to suggest that in sf there is a third infinity, a new perspective, one afforded by the juxtaposition of scale – “the infinity of inexhaustible complexity and variety at the ‘average’ level, at the level of ‘human’ size and common macroscopic perception.”⁴⁰ So there is not just the Nothing and the Infinite as Pascal argues, there is also the Complex. According to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, each infinity is characterised by its own effects “not in the sense that they belong to it alone – but in the sense that it is on its particular scale that these effects become sensible or even dominant. Like the Quanta in the Minute. Like Relativity in the Immense.”⁴¹ Robu suggests that if this third infinity is

acknowledged in the field of literature, the aesthetic concept of the sublime may operate also in the case of cyber-robots, mutants, exobiology (xenobiology), time travel and chronoplasty, parallel universes, doubling and cloning, ecology and technology – practically in all major sf topics and motifs.⁴²

It is perhaps over-ambitious of Robu to contend that the sense of wonder is a key to the essence of sf. The sublime is not a panacea for some heady definition of the genre. Nevertheless, it is most helpful in locating its influences, and vital to visual sf’s later aesthetic stylistic tendencies, as I will demonstrate in the following sections. The sublime has long been associated with Gothic and sf, although the word itself is seldom used. The sense of wonder replaces it: indeed Hartwell believes that the very appeal of sf lies “in its combination of the rational, the believable, with the miraculous. It is an appeal to the sense of wonder.”⁴³ As Nicholls and Robu point out, “the concept of the sense of wonder may be necessary if we are to understand the essence of sf that distinguishes it from other forms of fiction, including most fantasy. The diamond is real and cuts.”⁴⁴ It is an exploration of the very schism created by the name ‘science fiction’, and reaches its apotheosis in sf film, television and art. In this sense, it also connects us immediately with the experience of the heroic epic.

The New World:

This is where we may find it helpful to examine the creation of a relatively new heroic epic and mytho-history, one which demonstrates a unique fascination with both the future and with the sublimity of its landscape – that of the United States of America. The story of the frontier, the western, thrived in pulp fiction for a century, and cinema and television for a period of some 60 years. André Bazin called the western “...the American film par excellence.”⁴⁵ Indeed, whereas any country may make gangster films, musicals, war films, comedies, etc, the stylised work of Sergio Leone notwithstanding, the western remains uniquely American. Its role is to recreate a romantic, idealised version of the American frontier, and the iconography is highly specific. Its demise in film, like that of the musical, mirrors that of the studio system, but there are other reasons for its lack of presence today. As cinema-history the western suggests a unified culture where people pull together, and it does so to a greater extent than any other genre. Hollywood’s sustained commitment to genre film-making spanned the Depression to the Cold War, a time when Americans had to pull together against a clearly defined common enemy, be it economic, military or political. In the early 1960s, the influence and input of filmmakers working outside the Hollywood system (like Leone, for example), brought about a new vitality and commercial viability to genre film, but they also took advantage of the growing tension between classical myth-making and the modernist impulse for demystification. Classical forms were pushed to the limits of narrative logic and ideological coherence, and these new films contained subtexts which openly questioned the very basis of the homogeneity of their generic values.

With economic prosperity and world super-power status following World War 2, American society became increasingly factionalised: people continued pulling, but no longer in the same direction. Racial unrest, the sexual revolution, the Vietnam War and a growing cynicism towards politicians after Watergate could only ever eventually surface in Hollywood, and the western, the apparently collective fundamental ideology of the USA made manifest, was a prime candidate for the articulation of such concerns. Films

such as *Death of a Gunfighter* (1959), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *MacCabe and Mrs Miller* (1971), and *Heaven's Gate* (1980) all comment upon the anachronisms of the frontier in modern America. *The Green Berets* (1968), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) all demonstrated precisely how inappropriate it was to hold on to an anachronistic ideal of American history. By the end of the 1960s Hollywood's output of westerns was insignificant in comparison to its numerous productions of the previous 40 years. *Ulzana's Raid* (1968), *The Wild Bunch*, *Little Big Man*, and *Soldier Blue* (both 1970), and the few other westerns which did reach the screen, offered stories which could more easily be seen as commentary on the tragedy of Vietnam, or the wanton destruction of the native American civilisation and fraudulent mythology of the American frontier, rather than elegiac or nostalgic remembrances of a glorious pioneering past.

Since then, the demise has been almost complete: there are only occasional revisionist westerns, such as *Young Guns* (1988), *Dances With Wolves* (1990), and *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993). The sole, continuous excursion into the western comes from the attentive *homage* of western icon Clint Eastwood, yet with *Space Cowboys* (2000), even Eastwood has turned his attention skywards. When genre cinema began to offer clear counter-culture statements in the 1960s, television took over as the purveyor of a unified culture, and its output of westerns was high, with series like *Rawhide* (1958-65) and *Gunsmoke* (1955-75). Newer serials such as *The Virginian* (1962-69), and its 1970 sequel *Men From Shiloh*, *The High Chaparral* (1967-71), and *Alias Smith and Jones* (1970-1) survived briefly into the 1970s, but there were pitifully few series compared to the considerable numbers in the 1950s. At the start of the 21st century, apart from occasional mini-series like *Lonesome Dove* (1985) the western has all but vanished.

Yet for over a century, the creation and perpetuation of idyllic images of the frontier era was central in much American art, in literature, film, television, painting and photography. It was the epic story of the forging of a new nation. It spoke not of the present, but of the future. Between the 1820s and the Civil War, Congressman and Senator Thomas Hart Benton encouraged the push away from Europe towards a destiny in the west, not just to California, but across the Pacific Ocean to Asia. Benton was not alone. Less than fifty years after finally dispatching the British from New Orleans in the

overlooked 1812-14 war, the Union was torn asunder by the secession of the Southern States. Hellman notes that the:

decisive conclusion of America's struggle over its identity in the Civil War has brought a renewal of the national sense of mission. Emerson saw the South as having turned away from American ideals, and the war as deciding 'whether we shall be the new nation, the guide and lawgiver of all nations'.⁴⁶

In *The Gettysburg Address* (1863), Lincoln referred to America as a "nation, under God" which would "have a new birth of freedom."⁴⁷ A reinvigorated sense of purpose and national destiny found its home in the west, and a new unifying enemy was identified in the indigenous Americans, notably the Plains Indian nations, who fought desperately against the rapid white settlement and increased industrialisation of their lands. In 1871, Walt Whitman's "Passage to India" prophesied the "culmination of American westward progress in regaining of civilized man's lost harmony with nature,"⁴⁸ and portrayed America's "purpose vast" as being fulfilled in "the rondure of the world at last accomplish'd." This was not just for the purposes of trade and exploration, but for the completion of "God's purpose from the first."

Reckoning ahead O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd,
The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyages done,
Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd,
As fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother
found,
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.⁴⁹

As Hellman argues "...springing from shared cultural impulses, Whitman's poetic vision, like Benton's political one, articulates aspects of the mystical and millennial significance East Asia early held in American myth."⁵⁰ He also notes that the progress of the once more *United States* is beautifully articulated by the building of the Union Pacific Railway, which, in 1869, provided the long awaited highway to the Pacific later eulogised by Whitman's poem.

After the frontier's closure in the 1890s, Americans sought to vicariously re-attain the spiritual essence of this short-lived version of their early society.⁵¹ In the western they recreate a mythical narrative which exists beyond a real time and place, where there are

few social restraints, and where society can reinvent itself in a democratic or egalitarian form, in the broad terms of the prevalent Judaeo-Christian ethos. In *Horizons West*, Jim Kitses identifies the appeal of the 'West,' suggesting that:

from time immemorial the west has beckoned to statesmen and poets, existing as both a direction and a place, an imperialist theme and a pastoral utopia. Great empires developed ever westward; from Greece to Rome, from Rome to Britain, from Britain to America. It was in the West as well that the fabled lands lay, the Elysian fields, Atlantis, El Dorado.⁵²

The myths of any culture often offer keys to decoding elements of what can be perceived as a national identity, a collective psyche. As Bukatman notes, the "vast reaches of the American west seemed to test the will of the nation's new citizens, and the emerging technologies of industrial capitalism were extraordinarily suited to the colonization and economic exploitation of these territories."⁵³ Popular tales of the American west chiefly project the image of an independent frontiersman, situating such individuals within an intensely masculine narrative dependent upon an incredible human confrontation with implacable elements. Kitses suggests that the myth provides a "shifting ideological play," and identifies the common dialectic immediately when he asks if the West is:

a Garden of natural dignity and innocence, offering refuge from the decadence of civilisation? Or is it a treacherous Desert stubbornly resisting the gradual sweep of agrarian progress and community values? ...these warring ideas were clearly at work in attitudes surrounding figures like Daniel Boone, Kit Carson and Buffalo Bill Cody, who were variously seen as rough innocents ever in flight from society's artifice, and as enlightened pathfinders for the new nation... If Eastern figures such as bankers, lawyers and journalists are often either drunkards or corrupt, their female counterparts generally carry virtues and graces which the West clearly lacks. And if Nature's harmonies produce the upright hero, they also harbour the animalistic Indian. Thus central to the form we have a philosophical dialectic, an ambiguous cluster of meanings and attitudes that provide the traditional thematic structure of the genre.⁵⁴

Whilst the variants of the frontier myth frequently hinge upon such ambiguities, the myth is nevertheless reliant upon a stable landscape in which its fluctuating scenarios may be dramatised. I would argue that three stages of landscape are evoked in literature, painting and film of the American west, and that they form the *mise-en-scène* for the three stages of the frontier myth itself. The chasm between the abstract concepts of

'wilderness' and 'civilisation' to which Kitses refers, and the dichotomy inherent in the bridging, fusion and development of this into a recognisable frontier mythology, can be traced in the American arts from the late 1600s.

The wilderness of the New World was initially viewed as the land of the devil, but simultaneously as a potential garden for the new Americans. This was also the first stage in the political and aesthetic creation of a mythical journey ever westward, into a luminous, golden-infused landscape – a home to the Millennium Empire. Early settlers were lured to America by reports of a fertile and lush land, a new Garden of Eden. Indeed, many reports were couched in Biblical terms, listing flora and fauna in a manner reminiscent of Genesis. The realities were less romantic, and the views of stalwart Puritans such as William Bradford and Cotton Mather were typical, displaying hatred, or at the very least, ambivalence, towards the American wilderness. In 1693 Bradford viewed the New World as a "hideous and desolate" place and grieved that he and his followers could not go, as had Moses, to "the top of Mount Pisgah to view from this wilderness a more goodly land."⁵⁵ A few years later, Cotton Mather describes the New Englanders as "a people of God settled in those that were once the Devil's territories,"⁵⁶ and, in *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), marvelled at their strength and faith in the face of such persistent adversity.

The writings and lectures of Frederick Jackson Turner in the late 1880s and 1890s re-articulated the thoughts of Benton and Lincoln, but more importantly, they enthusiastically associated the wilderness with the development of desirable 'American' qualities. "Out of his wilderness experience," Turner suggested, the American man "fashioned a formula for social regeneration – the freedom of the individual to seek his own."⁵⁷ At the turn of the century, Theodore Roosevelt spoke of the necessity to not only remember pioneering values, but to develop them as fundamentals of American history. In short, the combination of nostalgia and political propaganda ensured that the wilderness became fashionable. Simultaneously, the conquest of the West was gradually shaped into an idealised, custom-made mythology, which Turner, and Roosevelt (and his Harvard associates: Owen Wister, author of *The Virginian*, and the artist/sculptor Frederic Remington) found infinitely preferable to the somewhat more inglorious reality.

As Philip French points out, it is ironic that the three Ivy League friends all headed west in the late 1800s, Remington for his health, the other two as ranchers.⁵⁸ They failed miserably to create lives for themselves and promptly began reshaping the visual, ideological and literary history of the West we know today. They, above all others, are responsible for creating the 'Wild West' frontier, using it as a means of reinvigorating what they felt to be an insipid *fin-de-siècle* city-bound United States.

At first the American landscape appears to be little more than a mere backdrop, a convenient frontier location in which essentially 'portable' European mythical narratives may be enacted. As Roderick Nash says in *Wilderness and the American Mind* "the combined weight of Classicism, Judaism, and Christianity"⁵⁹ weighed heavily upon the shoulders of the European immigrants. The spiritual test offered by the dangers of moral degeneracy in a wilderness condition, combined with the social horrors of Europe from which these people had fled, drew rapidly to the belief that an imaginary middle ground, an agriculturally-based community, was paradisiacal.⁶⁰ In *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur pre-empted the second, pioneering stage of the myth when he asked "What then is an American, this new man?"⁶¹ Crèvecoeur, who lived in the relative rural calm of upper New York State, suggested the new man of America would emerge from a pastoral idyll that eschewed both the artificial limitations of social stratification and the degeneration of moral and social values in a complete wilderness condition. This might be called the first stage of the myth, America as pastoral idyll. The arena created by James Fenimore Cooper's five *Leatherstocking Tales* further establishes this belief. Cooper's paradigm was later adopted by writers as a fantasy resolution of the nature/culture dialectic, but as Stephen Fender remarks, referring here to *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826):

Cooper's famous antinomies – the good and bad Indian, the good and bad outlaw, the 'dark' and 'light' woman, the 'natural' and rapacious use of the environment – are not allegories for timeless verities of the human spirit, as in a pastoral romance ... to be resolved at the end in fictional harmony, but dialectical oppositions of particular moments in history.⁶²

Fender goes on to say that Georg Lukács praised Cooper for capturing in literature the historical moment when the “colonizing capitalism of France and England destroy(ed) physically and morally the gentile⁶³ society of the Indians which had flourished almost unchanged for thousands of years.” Indeed, central to the politics of American westward expansion – the Manifest Destiny – lies the attitude towards the country, its civilised landscape and its wilderness. Fender alludes to the “‘natural’ and rapacious” use of the environment. As Frances Fitzgerald points out in *Fire in the Lake* (1989), to many Americans the wilderness was there to be conquered, used and therefore ordered, whereby it would receive the ‘benefits’ of civilisation:

To the American settlers the defeat of the Indians had seemed not just a nationalist victory, but an achievement made in the name of humanity – the triumph of light over darkness, of good over evil, and of civilization over brutish nature.⁶⁴

Such an attitude is representative of the second, ‘pioneering’ stage of the myth. This involves a transformation of the landscape, characterised by a conflict with nature which forces drastic changes to the eco-culture. It also involves the destruction of the highly developed social system of the indigenous Americans: a mass extermination of humanity at the behest of civilisation itself. The wilderness, inclusive of those living within it, was subject to annihilation – only scattered relics of the past were to be left in the wake of the new American trail west. Fender’s reference to Lukács highlights the irony of this situation. The frontier clash was temporary, the frontier itself transient, the gun-toting heroes and villains so beloved of the western film holding sway over small towns for only the briefest period after the Civil War. Perhaps one of the most poignant westerns to note this is the elegiac *The Law and Jake Wade* (1956), where the ‘Wild West’ action takes place in a High Sierras ghost town. The camera caresses the insouciant buckskin and denim-clad Clint (Richard Widmark), who leans lazily against a tombstone, smoking a cigarette. An outlaw, but also a dreamer and a romantic, he is at peace with his wilderness landscape. Less favoured by Surtees’ camera, blocking both the sun and Clint’s future, is his more soberly dressed former partner, the solid, engaged, and socially dependable lawman Jake Wade (Robert Taylor). Wade shoots Clint, who dies with arms

outstretched, Christ-like: even as the western articulates its preoccupations, the frontier is already lost. The 'Wild' West is conquered, civilised and abandoned.

The pioneer's traversal of the frontier leads not only to changes in the western landscape but to an education of the pioneer, which in turn precipitates yet more change. In the words of Turner, the American frontier "is the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization," a point which takes the colonist:

from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe.... Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of the Germanic germs The fact is that here is a new product that is American.⁶⁵

The egalitarian appeal of this myth suggests that both newcomers, and/or the unknown, would be welcomed unequivocally, whereas in truth such difference meant absorption or extermination. Here the ideology of an increasingly industrial United States is masked by the pastoral idyll of the frontier myth. The influx of pioneers leads inexorably to a new series of settlements, of towns, and their appendages. Towns spring up where there is land to be utilised and exploited, mined, ranched or farmed. A capitalist economy rapidly develops along the lines of communication (rivers, railways, road networks) and, as well as continued investment from both the new western financiers and the established Easterners, so come varying strata of wealth and poverty. The reinvention of precarious society in the cultivated wilderness, masked by the euphemism of the Manifest Destiny, leads not to the much vaunted egalitarian social state but a replication of the stratification and artifice that had led the new American peoples to abandon Europe.

This leads to the third stage of the myth, which depicts a western landscape that has suffered an exploitative regeneration through violence; it has undergone a process forcibly incorporating nature into culture.⁶⁶ Even in the third stage, the process of incorporation is not complete, yet only from this precarious encroachment can the previous stages be viewed and put into perspective. Only limited areas of the western landscape have been exploited or developed, forming microcosms of the corporate East. Vast regions lie untouched, representatives of earlier stages, or virgin territory, and the

coexisting facets of the myth are exemplified in an early scene from *Heaven's Gate* (1980). The (third 'incorporated' stage) Stockholders' Association hired gunman Nate Champion (Christopher Walken), a Polish immigrant who has Americanised his lifestyle and his name, rides past the new migrants' wagons (the second 'pioneering' stage) on the road to Sweetwater. They are heading towards their new farmstead homes (the 'pastoral' first stage), in a sublime landscape of pristine magnificence (a proto-generic stage: the untamed wilderness).

Yet the scenarios depicted in American art, literature, and film do not depict a battle between nature and culture, but a battle between facets of what culture deems to be nature. Elements of the sublime, including the indigenous population, are set against one another in a battle to the death. A background of such animalistic brutality heightens the positive aspects claimed by a peaceful re-invention of society. The third stage also successfully masks, with violence, the savagery of that same heavily industrialised process, which, according to Patricia Limerick in *The Conquest of the West* (1987), has been falsely hailed by successive generations as the ultimate tale of democratic success.⁶⁷ This indeed is the myth of the West.

The process of transforming the American landscape from a dark and uncharted wilderness (the 'devil's territories') – thus making it ripe for charting, clearing and infusing with light – creates a semi-surreal landscape scattered with symbols and icons representative of both nature and culture, or more complexly, both. *Bend of the River* (a.k.a. *Where the River Bends*) (1952) typifies this kind of representation, most notably in its scenes with pioneer wagons, and settlers clearing the land to a stirring, semi-religious voice-over. Here only a drastic alteration to the eco-culture facilitates new agri-culture, a process paralleling the symbolic conflict between non-domesticated and domesticated men, which in turn permits the completion of the new agricultural civilisation. At this time the western landscape ceases to be one of reality, and instead becomes an illusion, a composite of what the West as symbol has come to represent.

Intrinsic to all of these compositions is the process of mise-en-scène. Within the mise-en-scène of post-bellum American art there is a gradual desertion of realism for idealism and mythicism, best illustrated by artists emerging from the Hudson River

School – the likes of Thomas Cole and Frederick Church. The mythical qualities described above were embraced by Albert Bierstadt and later heavily reinforced by the sculptures and paintings of Frederic Remington and the films of John Ford and Howard Hawks. Bierstadt's later work is particularly redolent of this false history. In *The Incorporation of America* (1982), Alan Trachtenberg says that as:

an invention of the cultural myth, the word "West" embraced an astonishing variety of surfaces and practices, of physiognomic difference and sundry exploitations... The Western lands provided resources essential as much to industrial development after the Civil War as to cultural needs of justification, incentive and desire. Land and minerals served economic and ideological purposes, the two merging into a single, complex image of the West; a temporal site of the route from past to future, and the spatial site for revitalizing national energies. As myth and as economic entity, the West proved indispensable to the formation of a national society and a cultural mission: to fill the vacancy of the Western spaces with civilization, by means of incorporation (political as well as economic) and violence. Myth and exploitation, incorporation and violence: the process went hand and hand.⁶⁸

Trachtenberg suggests that American ante-bellum landscape painters, notably those of the Hudson River School, were responsible for "a body of work which lent to the American terrain an almost mystical power. They depicted nature as the stage of dramas of growth and decay, or aspiration and defeat – and invested it with emotions appropriate to visions of national destiny."⁶⁹ But even as Bierstadt and his fellow artists painted increasingly secure and increasingly mythical images of the West – so the frontier itself was changing, moving, fading. Bierstadt's pictures of the now (contentiously) submerged Hetch-Hetchy Valley are a testament to this change. According to Roderick Nash, by the 1900s a growing cult was echoing the murmurings of Thoreau, Emerson and Crèvecoeur, believing the frontier and the pioneer past to be:

responsible for unique and desirable national characteristics. Wilderness acquired importance as a source of virility, toughness and savagery – qualities that defined fitness in Darwinian terms. Finally, an increasing number of American invested wild places with aesthetic and ethical values, emphasizing the opportunity they afforded for contemplation and worship.⁷⁰

There is also a psychological link, as Scott Bukatman has noted, between the use of 'effects' in American frontier art of the mid to late 1800s and the 'special effects' we

find in some American science fiction, which is pertinent to *Babylon 5*. It is a call to the sublime – to the sense of wonder. The natural American landscape is one notably lacking in the comforting, enclosed and secure Claudian vista so familiar to European eyes. American landscape artists were fond of allowing some kind of context, often in the shape of a solitary observer or ‘staffage’ figure (Fig. 1, between pp110-111), one utterly absorbed in contemplation of the wondrous landscape. As de Chardin and Robu argue, relative scale is of great importance in such compositions.

Certainly in *American Light* (1980) John Wilmerding notes that nineteenth century American painting became “immersed in nature.”⁷¹ The power of a movement that found literary expression in Thoreau and Emerson’s transcendental sublime was greatly increased in pictorial art of the East coast Luminist painters, such as John F. Kensett and Fitz Hugh Lane, whose pictures were mostly of Boston and New England coastlines and merchant vessels. (Figs. 2, 3 and 4) The Luminists proper came from New England, and they concentrated their efforts on areas notably east of the Mississippi; so they were not the only artists to capture America’s sublime landscapes. Nevertheless, according to Earl Powell “the sublime experience was transformed into a new mode of landscape expression: the transcendental sublime setting was augmented by the transcendental sublime sensibility, a sensibility that founds its roots in man’s internal perception of time and space.”⁷² Their work, like that of Thomas Cole (Figs. 5 and 6) and the Hudson River School, was contemplative, silent, philosophical, an artist’s rendition of Emerson’s words:

Standing on the bare ground, - my head bathed by blithe air and uplifted into infinite space – all mean egotism vanishes.... In the wilderness I find something more clear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.⁷³

The career of German-born Albert Bierstadt covers the major period of western expansion, and offers a fine example of the manner in which the American landscape was gradually manipulated into a composite, and the transcendentalism with which it was imbued. Bierstadt made several trips across the west, crossing the ever-expanding frontier. One of his early western pictures, *Surveyor’s Wagon in the Rocky Mountains*

(c.1859), shows a minimal human presence. (Fig. 7) The ill-defined, rough landscape provides a basic expression of nature's sublimity, thus re-articulating that the rift between nature and culture that is prevalent not only in American folkloric tradition, but also in that of Germany and other European countries.

Caught half way up a mountain during a thunderstorm, Thomas Cole wrote of the experience in his journal, saying: "Man may seek such scenes and find pleasure in the discovery, but there is a mysterious fear [that] comes over him and hurries him away. The sublime features of nature are too severe for a lone man to look upon and be happy."⁷⁴ Cole's experience makes clear that in such a situation the landscape becomes totally incomprehensible, the human eye longing for something other than the frightening challenge of uninhibited elemental forces and the chaos of the wilderness. Bierstadt's painting expresses just this problem, one which confronted explorers and settlers in the West. *Surveyor's Wagon* creates a sense of alienation, providing nothing but disorientation for the viewer. There is a loss of visual coherence; the picture is not a vista, there are no artificial restraints encircling the view or providing recognisable boundaries. It is a panorama, but an unusual one: there is no means of mapping the landscape nor of orienting oneself spatially, and thus the sense of perspective is lost. Nor is there any relief in Bierstadt's use of palette. Strange, pallid colours divide the painting into two distinctive sections: the prairie and (in an overture to his later work) the mountains/sky. The landscape is dreamlike in both the foreground and background, as if the only reality is the area of ground where the animals stand with their wagon. All other areas are like a mirage. There is no movement, no motion, the narratives of both the *mise-en-scène* and of the surveyor are frozen.

Wind River Country (1860) shows a more detailed landscape, and also demonstrates Bierstadt's growing manipulation of both perspective and content in the service of theme and ideology. (Fig. 8) The picture is a panorama but it has the same enclosed and secure qualities of a vista and its warm colouring, dominated by browns and gold tones is welcoming, almost nostalgic. It is what John Conron has called a "composite vista."⁷⁵ A composite vista is not a real landscape painting of an actual place, but instead a collection of images and narratives, gathered and re-located into a single

picture, carefully balanced with a false but strong sense of human perspective. It is as if key components of Monument Valley, Yosemite and Yellowstone, the Catskills and the Rocky Mountains co-exist, side by side, diminished and isolated: they are the sublime wonders of the Wild West, framed and tamed.

The angle from which *Wind River Country* is presented is elevated, which simultaneously diminishes the landscape and reduces any threat it may contain. A foregrounded escarpment leads across the front of the picture towards a strip of rocky land set at right angles to the cliff-edge. A broken tree, struck by lightning, still lives, its flourishing leaves and assertive stance making it not a symbol of decay but instead one of growth and regeneration. Every inch of the foreground is depicted with extraordinary clarity, denoting how well-mapped and charted the terrain is – and thus how very secure. Towards the left side of the picture is a bear, eating a fallen deer, yet the size and positioning of the drama mediates its sublime elements, and the natural (or Darwinian) theme is similarly suppressed through its historical sense. The animals are well defined, but sufficiently distanced from the actual ‘front’ of the scene to be effective as perspectival guides whilst not appearing as dominant features. Nor is the deer in the process of being stalked or killed by the bear, its death occurred in the past: the danger is over and the action of the piece is historical. As a result our eyes are drawn beyond the natural drama, along the escarpment, and past the unclear (uncharted?) middle ground which is in turn encompassed by the distant hills and mountains. The painting achieves a sense of enclosed spaciousness, something demonstrated more fully in Bierstadt’s later works. The well-defined foreground is a well-mapped and safe area, the backdrop is the achievement of the West, depicted with greater clarity than the ill-focused middle ground, suggesting not only that the security left behind in the East could be reclaimed in the West, but that the unknown area is limited.

More than simply enclosing the picture, they afford the sense of both purpose and direction. The well-defined mountainous background represents the West, and it offers the destruction of the visual recession (the middle ground). The aspirations associated with the West are represented through an elevation of landscape, while a sense of divine destiny and potential glory is symbolised in quasi-religious splendour by the beckoning

golden glow of the distant, snow-capped peaks. The narrative is not only one of subdued conflict within nature, but also of survival. The pastoral warmth and glow in which the landscape basks attest to the security and serenity of the ‘wilderness’ scene. *Wind River Country* suggests not just an Edenic park through which pioneer migrants might travel, but also a descent into a primitive and unknown area from which the pioneer may emerge transformed and invigorated – and an American. *Wind River Country* is waiting for Crèvecoeur’s new man: it is Turner’s Frontier Thesis pre-empted.

The Oregon Trail (1869) offers us a frontier with human involvement. (Fig. 9) The diffusely golden warmth of the skies is repeated by opalescent leitmotif in the sentinel-like rocks and the wagon canvas. It depicts a land “still hidden in the haze of tomorrow, and we know that all is serene and success is predestined, as if a benevolent hand were guiding the caravan through the idealised American landscape.”⁷⁶ This is a Republican picture, a beacon illuminating the path for pioneers. The perils of the overland journey are dismissed in favour of a heart-warming picture of destiny, as overloaded wagons rumble towards the heavenly western glow, leaving in their wake only token cattle skulls and, more tellingly, felled tree trunks. In this he is unlike Thomas Cole, whose ambivalence towards expansion, and increased industrialisation, is clearly expressed in corresponding works such as the pastoral *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn* (1837) and *River in the Catskills* (1843) which show the influx of people and industry across the previously pretty landscape. (Figs. 5 and 6) These pictures move from what Barbara Novak calls “mythic time to human time.”⁷⁷

Bierstadt portrays his immigrants as neither utterly destructive nor as having an apparent desire to ‘civilise’ the middle western landscape. These pioneers are not moving from “the ideal to a more pragmatic encounter.”⁷⁸ These people are mythical pioneers passing through a mythical terrain, learning from its redemptive qualities, through a violent process which is heavily masked, changing and carrying the best of the values they have gleaned from their experiences to their new homes in the West. The *mise-en-scène* Bierstadt creates in this picture is a composite of American scenery – mountains, forests, plains, rivers – and a native American encampment (barely visible, to the centre right) in Bierstadt’s work always suggestive of the untainted wilderness. His

use of the indigenous population maps the increased white encroachment. Initially his Rocky Mountain canvases were scattered with encampments and pastoral close-ups of Wakiups in idyllic, golden-hued woodlands, yet there were no figures of mountain men, or pioneers, no signs of the new American landscape. Novak argues that this absence of figures carries a loaded meaning:

Bierstadt's scenes of uninhibited nature, i.e., *Lander's Peak*, penetrates what Ludlow called nature's 'sacred closet'. Man has not yet entered Eden. Sublimity belongs only to God. We know that the idea of Creation – of a primal and untouched nature – had an immense resonance for the American psyche. The uninhabited landscape amplifies this thought... (one type of figure can be introduced into this landscape without disrupting this – the Indian, who, as a function of nature, symbolizes its unexplored state. The Indians in Bierstadt's landscapes represent nature, not culture).⁷⁹

In *The Oregon Trail* Bierstadt's use of the indigenous camp as a marginalised symbol of inhabitation establishes that the native inhabitants were at one with nature, working with the land rather than against it. As the pioneers travel beyond the camp, they leave an area and people from whom they have garnered the ability to survive. Serving in many ways as a transcendental link with the sublime, the native Americans symbolise a nature-oriented civilisation and a strongly controlled essence of the wilderness.

Writing on July 10th 1859, Bierstadt enthused over Yosemite and the West he had discovered, saying:

Art could not wish for a better subject. I am delighted with the scenery. The mountains are very fine... They are of granite formation, the same as the Swiss mountains, and their jagged summits, covered with snow and mingling with the clouds, present a scene which every lover of landscape would gaze upon with unqualified delight... We see many spots in the scenery that remind us of our New Hampshire and Catskill hills, but when we look up and measure the mighty perpendicular cliffs that rise hundreds of feet aloft, all capped with snow, we realize that we are among a different class of mountains.⁸⁰

Bierstadt clearly felt a particular affinity for Yosemite Valley, now the National Park. *Valley of the Yosemite* (1864) is just one of his many pictures of the area. (Fig. 10) Here the land bathes in a twilight glow – and notably many of these frontier pictures are of late afternoon, evening, and sunset, a point to which we will return later. Here, Bierstadt's light is that of a warm, soporific, Edenic haze. The actual source of light is

hidden, although a shard of icy and brilliant white glances off the sheer buttress of El Capitan. But warm yellows and golds dominate, permeating the scene by leitmotif in the clouds, river, rocks and trees. Deer drink peacefully at the water's edge, while a stag watches over them. The only signs of decay are natural: a tree struck by lightning lies rotting in the water, another storm-damaged tree leans reluctantly towards the ground. But their companions stand proudly erect, proffering branches and leaves towards the sunlight glow. It is a picture of light, of luminosity, and despite some painterly overtones it is possibly the closest to Luminism that Bierstadt ever came in his Yosemite depictions. He mediates the sublimity of the Yosemite valley through a use of warm colours and restraint. The West is still distanced, obscured not only by the bulk of El Capitan, but also by the luminous white light which emerges from behind the cliff face. There is a strong sense of the transcendental here, not only in the light, but also in the cloud formations.

The use of clouds as sublime or religious rhetoric is a feature Bierstadt shares with other American artists. In *Nature and Culture* Novak suggests that these "cloud combinations were not used unconsciously ... the sky itself, especially in a tradition singularly devoted to the concept of light as spirit, was studied closely ... its symbolic duties were fully understood."⁸¹ She goes on to point out that:

rather than adapt the clouds to their needs, the American landscapists carefully studied the clouds so that they could choose those forms, tones, opacities and transparencies that best served their structural and aesthetic needs. Thus Bierstadt repeated piled on extraordinary varieties of cumulus one on the other, to create a theatre of rhetoric beaming down tangible doses of sublimity.⁸²

So the tangible light offers another representation of the mediated sublime, the essence of God in the wilderness, and a security which is enhanced by the depiction of the mountains, which are marginalised in this work. El Capitan is diminished on the right of the frame, whilst the opposing peaks of the Sentinel Cliffs rise only a fraction more on the left. Thus instead of dominating the scene and in a sense threatening the security of the viewer, they act merely as natural boundaries which draw the viewer towards the golden-white glow at the river's bend, and as such are neither oppressive nor reduced to

insignificance. The Merced River is likewise tranquil and glassy, reflecting the amethystine mountains with unusual clarity.

This observation and meditation on nature was “considered virtuous because nature conveyed a ‘thought’ which was considered good. The very act of looking was considered by some to be an act of devotion.”⁸³ The elevated point of view creates what Albert Boime has called the “magisterial gaze.” This is a viewpoint which “embodies the exaltation of the nineteenth century American cultural elite before an unlimited horizon that they identified with the destiny of the American nation.”⁸⁴ It is the opposite of the common upward European “reverential gaze,” and by “always projecting the vision across the valley as a step ahead of the point where the viewer is located at any given time,” it supports the expansionist desires of the nation, offering a “commanding view” which is “the perspective of the American on the heights searching for new worlds to conquer.”⁸⁵

Having aided in turning the West into an ideological destiny, and Yosemite into a magnificent picnic garden, Bierstadt commenced ‘re-drawing’ history. *The Last of the Buffalo* (1888) was painted in a year when there were said to be 541 buffalo left in the United States.⁸⁶ It shows a battle between a native American rider and a buffalo, the nearby ground littered with the skulls of former kills, with a background of plains notably bereft of buffalo herds. (Fig. 11) The artist, in an undated clipping, claims that the picture depicts “the cruel slaughter of a noble animal now almost extinct.”⁸⁷ Yet, as Matthew Baigell points out, the indigenous Americans were not responsible for the mass slaughter of the buffalo herds, they mostly hunted for food, not for sport. The painting is what Baigell calls a “whitewash.” He claims that Bierstadt put:

a palatable romantic gloss on the scene by ignoring the true reasons for the passing of the buffalo as well as the Indian... We wonder if the Indian on the white horse will kill the buffalo before the latter gores the horse. We thrill to the old and now rapidly passing days of the frontier West when brute man fought brute animal. The painting is ...of the sort that became popular late in the century, especially in the works of artists such as Frederic Remington.⁸⁸

And indeed the mise-en-scène gives us every reason to agree with Baigell. It is in similar format to other Bierstadt pictures, with panoramic splendour channelled into

depth (rather than breadth), to maintain a sense of spaciousness. The single buffalo to the left of the foreground battle (omitted from a second version of the painting), balances the heavy action on the opposite side of the frame, and the intensity of gaze to some extent draws the eye away from the action towards the motionless and ennobled animal.

The attraction of the picture relies upon the hunt, the sublime and savage battle between the elements not accepted as essential to visions of the mythical/historical West. The third stage of the myth, the reinvention of society and its accompanying intensification of agriculture and industry is hidden. There is no recognition of the destruction caused by white America's organised, commercialised hunting and expansion to either the buffalo or the indigenous Americans. Bierstadt removes the white American influence from his frame and essentially depicts instead two minority groups. There is no attempt or apparent desire to portray the real reason behind the demise of either the buffalo or the native American.

In *The Last of the Buffalo*, Bierstadt combines the elements of his artist's rhetoric to form icons which could be perfectly in harmony with a sublime and mythical western panorama. The masking of reality by myth is both competent and absolute. By 1888, the original bewildering mise-en-scène of the western landscape was redesigned, allowing a coexistence of spaciousness and security; the audience could now gaze upon the reproduced face of nature and be thrilled, not over-awed. The frontier landscape Bierstadt depicted had become narrativised and its composite features contained a story of both survival in a mythical historical frontier and a panoramic vision of luminous sublimity.

The massive, fiery works of artists emerging from the Hudson River School and its descendants (such as Church, Moran, and Bierstadt) constructed "a visual rhetoric of the sublime far removed from the solitude and silence of the Luminists." Church and Bierstadt in particular offered landscapes of dazzling immediacy, and, more importantly for this dissertation, landscapes of *effects*.⁸⁹ Bukatman notes that while much of this:

immediacy was achieved through the hyperbolized detail of the rendering, the scale of the works was also meant to overwhelm the sensibility of the spectator. These representations of exotic landscapes in the American West or South America were too large and too detailed to be 'taken in' with a single glance: the spectator's gaze had to be put into motion in order to assimilate the work."⁹⁰

Such pictures were often put on show like fairground attractions, and the idea behind this was not new. Moving panoramic 'rolls' of western landscape had been created before: a fine example is Henry Lewis' *Mammoth Panorama of the Mississippi River*, an incredible 45,000 square feet of canvas. These panoramic spectacles were often accompanied by a commentary and music and they were, in effect, ancestors of the film travelogue.⁹¹ They were garish and brilliant studies of American progress, which Bukatman considers comparable to "the diorama and magic lantern show." Indeed, some of Bierstadt's work has been criticised for its distortions, its melodrama, and more frequently for simply being over-sized. It was suggested early in his career that he would perhaps do well to temper his enthusiasm with a modicum of restraint. As James Flexner suggests in *That Wilder Image*, the inflated size and style of Bierstadt and the Rocky Mountain School, so often mistaken for the most typical manifestation of its progenitor, the Hudson River School, offers critics "excellent clubs with which to belabor the less vulnerable Hudson River School."⁹² Bierstadt and his colleagues actually produced many small pictures, but *Domes of the Yosemite* (1867), an astounding 116" x 180" testifies to a certain unwillingness on Bierstadt's part to constrain his reverence for the "essence of natural wonders."⁹³

However, it should not be forgotten that the manner of exhibition in the nineteenth century differed somewhat to the means of exhibition with which we are now familiar. Thomas Patin reminds us of Louis Daguerre's invention of the diorama when he explains how:

the audience was seated, facing a huge rectangular landscape painting, while they watched a scene unfold before them. Through the use of controlled lighting effects, fog would lift or the sun would rise on a scene depicting a cathedral or rural valley, sometimes populated by animal life. In America the artist George Harvey painted what he called 'illustrations of the progress of our country'. These works were painted on glass and projected at a scale of fifteen to seventeen feet in a theatre or theatre-like setting by means of a device called a Drummond Light. This device operated not unlike modern-day slide projectors. ... Bierstadt considered Harvey's Dissolving Views as 'the greatest exhibition of the kind ever offered to the American public'.⁹⁴

Bierstadt, along with Cole and Church, had his pictures exhibited in the Great Picture convention. This style of exhibition, which was popular in America between the 1850s and 1880s, possessed features which, according to Iris Cahn, can be considered “pre-cinematic.”⁹⁵ The ‘audience’ of viewers “paid an admission fee, entered a darkened room, and sat on benches. Eventually a light source illuminated a single painting at one end of an otherwise darkened room.”⁹⁶ While pamphlets were available describing different areas of the works, several devices were used to examine the pictures themselves. Opera glasses or pieces of paper rolled into tubes were used to create what Novak calls a “distant intimacy” between viewer and picture.⁹⁷ The first of Bierstadt’s Great Pictures was *The Rocky Mountains, Lander’s Peak* (1863) (Fig. 12); Patin notes that it was exhibited “with all the trappings – a single picture exhibition, with a pamphlet, a souvenir engraving, guided tour, opera glasses, magnifying glasses, and tin tubes.”⁹⁸

Bukatman also points out how advances in paint technologies paralleled the technology-based expansion of America. As new means of transportation and communication allowed an ever-expanding and more secure frontier, new cadmium-based pigment production permitted Church to unleash “astonishing, bold colour experiments (special effects)...in depicting his twilight skies and volcanic eruptions.”⁹⁹ There is a sense of revelation in these pictures, a combination of luminism and phantasmagoric kineticism. (Figs. 13 and 14) Writing of Church’s *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860), Powell suggests that:

the subject of the picture is, literally, American Light, symbolic of the new world Apocalypse. It is a compelling work of art which combines two aspects of the new sublime, the traditional interest in nature as object and the transcendental concern for nature as experience, through color, space, and silence.¹⁰⁰

The sense of the transcendental, and the use of clouds and diffuse light as religious rhetoric, is a feature shared by these artists. Along with Church, Eastman, and Moran, Bierstadt’s creation and perpetuation of a God-given garden in the American West became not only an ideal of the West, but rather the acceptable image of the West. They were seldom pictures of the wilderness in any real sense, but the landscapes were

representative of what Novak calls "the myth of a bigger America."¹⁰¹ The composite vista is the perfection of this movement. As Miriam Hansen points out, the

mobilization of the gaze promises nothing less than the mobilization of the self, the transformation of seemingly fixed positions of social identity. This mobilization, however, is promise and delusion in one.¹⁰²

Hansen is discussing cinema's moving camera, but her comments are equally applicable to the kinetic images of the West created by Bierstadt and his peers. Perhaps it was partly an effort to overcome the difficulties of capturing the essence of the frontier on one reasonably sized canvas whilst simultaneously placating and retaining an element of respect from his critics, that prompted Bierstadt to paint so many representations of Yosemite. Some are small and fine in detail, others on a more grandiose scale, but many are from a similar vantage point – a slightly elevated view which acts as a suppressant for the elemental nature depicted. Each picture remains visually independent, but together the series creates what could be regarded as a kinematic process. It is a sequence tracing the effects of the seasons and light within the valley, a mapping of the landscape ranging from monumentalised panoramas to less overwhelming and more finely delineated composite vista and close-up works of selected valley highlights and details. The sublime here is a "tamed sublime rather than (one of) truly awe-inspiring, transcendent visions,"¹⁰³ and an actual series of frames offers a collection of pictures more easily assimilated by viewers. It is tempting for all of us to attempt to take in an entire picture, but with the American landscape, we cannot, and fall back on what are essentially vignettes within the picture: in Bierstadt's case features of his composite landscape. Using each landmark as a perspectival guide, it becomes easier to confront the wilderness as a whole. As Novak suggests, such:

overtures to sublimity in America's early history paintings were readily transferred to the landscape, and lead to a study of artistic rhetoric, that style of formal declamation which is the appropriate mode for public utterance. Such a study also involves a consideration of art as a spectacle. Persisting late into the nineteenth century, this art had a clear twentieth century heir in film, which rehearsed many of the nineteenth century's concerns.¹⁰⁴

The western, regardless of its presentational medium, is American mytho-history. It is a primary epic – the struggles of a people to exist in a hostile New World, to create a future for themselves, to survive despite overwhelming odds, and to create a new nation. Time and time again in westerns the representative of the domestic, of culture and civilisation – the woman – says that one day this new land will be a fine place for a home. Even in the desolate Monument Valley of *The Searchers* (1956), some day the wilderness will be a garden.

In 1862, as the American Civil War tore into the Union, Abraham Lincoln made his second Address to Congress and remarked that the “dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present.”¹⁰⁵ Equally, it can be said that many of the icons and ideologies of the western are inadequate to the concerns of the late 1900s and early 2000s. Nevertheless, the legacy of the western lives on, in both its sense of destiny, and in the sublime. With the *western* frontier closed, “Space, the *final* frontier,”¹⁰⁶ offers a fairly obvious alternative, or perhaps a mutation, with which to inspire the collective American psyche. Kennedy followed Roosevelt’s example and tried it with his technology drive in the 1960s: the ‘New Frontier.’ There can be little doubt that the magnificent Saturn 5 rockets which blasted into space during the 1960s and 70s were desperate symbols of America’s determination to resurrect its pioneering spirit and national pride after Sputnik sped across the night sky in 1957, shattering the USA’s post-war complacency.

This is not to argue that science fiction is just an askew glance at history littered with arcane ancient and exotic new languages thrown into an unknown future setting. Nor would I suggest that it merely relies upon ancient epics and legends for its themes – although it certainly draws upon them. Ursula K. Le Guin is scathing of storytellers who return to ancient legends for their inspiration.¹⁰⁷ In “Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction” she argues that sf is:

the mythology of the modern world – or one of its mythologies – even though it is a highly intellectual form of art, and mythology is a non-intellectual mode of apprehension. For science fiction does use the mythmaking faculty to apprehend the world we live in, a world profoundly shaped and changed by science and technology; and its originality is that it uses the mythmaking faculty on new material.... On this level, science fiction deserves the title of a modern mythology.... Most science fiction doesn’t, of course, and

never will. There are never very many new artists around. No doubt we'll continue most of the time to get rewarmed leftovers from Babylon and Northrop Frye served up by earnest snobs and hordes of brawny Gerbilmen ground out by hacks. But there will be mythmakers too. Even now – who knows? – the next Mary Shelley may be lying quietly in her tower-top room, just waiting for a thunderstorm.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless some of the best tales of speculation borrow, as stories always have, from their wondrous heritage. In the same way, the Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform mytho-histories of ancient Babylonia create a foundation for *Babylon 5*. The stories of conflict and arcane patterns of language found in these myths and legends are incorporated into the series' structure as an informing foundation, functioning verbally, visually and narratively. As Le Guin herself points out, the roots of our mythologies lie:

in our unconscious – that vast dim region of the psyche and perhaps beyond the psyche, which Jung called 'collective' because it is so similar in all of us, just as our bodies are basically similar. Their vigor comes from there, and so they cannot be dismissed as unimportant.¹⁰⁹

John Hellman suggests that the original *Star Wars* trilogy both repeats and alters American myth. "The fantasy that Lucas has presented ... is a redreaming of American memory that includes the Vietnam experience as a traumatic passage to a higher plane of understanding." Hellman believes that *Star Wars*, a fantasy constructed "out of a free use of previous myths ... offers a vision of Americans' opportunity, in the midst of a fallen mythic landscape, to take control of their destiny by taking control of their national consciousness... Americans can seek, through the mental rehearsal of art, a meaningful structure for the narrative of actual experience they will make their future."¹¹⁰ Le Guin echoes this when she suggests that "true myth" may function:

for thousands of years as an inexhaustible source of intellectual speculation, religious joy, ethical inquiry and artistic renewal. The real mystery is not destroyed by reason, You look at Apollo and he looks back at you. The poet Rilke looked at a statue of Apollo about fifty years ago, and Apollo spoke to him. 'You must change your life' he said. When the genuine myth rises into consciousness, that is always its message. You must change your life.¹¹¹

This then is the elixir, the vitality that sf offers. This is the powerful element that old and ancient fictional speculations can contribute to the strain of writing we recognise

now and label 'science fiction'. Science fiction draws upon specific elements from the oldest forms of literature: the pre-classical and classical heroic epic, the medieval epic poem, and the gothic novel all contribute to its narrative patterns. All fiction is heir and descendant to these tales in some manner, but although these ancient tales are in themselves not sf in any way, they specifically appeal to many of the same needs and emotions. They utilise many of the same mytho-historical referents and contexts in order to stimulate our fascination and wonder in a manner that mundane realist novel does not. The ancient epic affords us the voyage or journey of discovery, and a sense of destiny. Its exotic lexicon and discourse connects us to a fluctuating but recognisable mytho-history. The sense of wonder, the experience of the sublime associated with the epic is re-articulated in modern sf, and through a careful use of language, offers us visions of new worlds which require constant renegotiations, but which nevertheless remain plausible. In combination, the ancient and the new bridge the schism between fantasy and reality, linking past and present and future, creating new worlds which are familiar but unfamiliar, and demand acts of (re)cognition.

Bukatman points out that in the 19th century "America revealed its obsession with the relation between nature and human power and human destiny in prose, paint and politics."¹¹² Science fiction cinema has perhaps taken over from the western as a vital manifestation of the American dream, a visualisation of the ever forward-looking Manifest Destiny. Nature is replaced by the Universe, but the remainder of the relationship is the same. The location is perhaps less important than the perception of that location. So it was not without reason that Kennedy turned to the next frontier, space, in order to revitalise American spirits in the Cold War, and that Gene Roddenberry drew upon the frontier heritage of his nation, promoting *Star Trek* as a "Wagon Train to the stars."¹¹³ Perhaps it is most appropriate that in drawing upon the sublime, or the sense of wonder, and the voyaging traditions of the heroic epic, sf should find some of its most potent visual manifestations in spectacular cinematic art of the USA. In modern America, that same magisterial gaze and promise of destiny which infuses the work of the Rocky Mountain School and the Hollywood western, descendants of the extraordinary faith of Bradford and Mather, and the astonishing feat of Lewis and Clark, finds a natural home

in visual science fiction. Lincoln and Whitman suggest that is it not just for Americans themselves that this Millennium Empire should be fulfilled. As we will see, with *Babylon 5* that sublime destiny reaches apotheosis. The binary ideology upon which the United States was founded is finally and firmly rejected in favour of a more flexible approach – an approach for which the more ideologically fluid and open genre of sf is ideally suited. In *Babylon 5* we are no longer concerned merely with the fate of America, with race or colour or creed or gender, but with the fate of all humanity.

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- ¹ Philip French, *Westerns* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977), 6.
- ² Of course, all literature can be traced back in this fashion! It is particular aspects of sf and of the ancient texts I wish to contrast here.
- ³ Aldiss and Wingrove, 446.
- ⁴ There seems to be no agreed spelling for the city: it can be either Nineveh or Ninevah.
- ⁵ *Myths from Mesopotamia: The Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*, trans and ed. Stephanie Dalley (Oxford: World Classics, 1991), 47.
- ⁶ *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 51.
- ⁷ John Brunner's *Total Eclipse* (London: Futura/Orbit Books, 1975) springs to mind as a close parallel.
- ⁸ Tablet XI of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 107-109.
- ⁹ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, intro. by N.K. Sandars, rev.ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972): 117.
- ¹⁰ *Epic of Gilgamesh*, 7.
- ¹¹ Clareson, esp. introduction.
- ¹² *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 47.
- ¹³ *Myths From Mesopotamia*, 48.
- ¹⁴ Thomas Wymer et al., *Intersections: The Elements of Fiction in Science Fiction* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1978), 5.
- ¹⁵ *Beowulf*, trans. Michael Alexander (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), 162.
- ¹⁶ *Myths From Mesopotamia*, xvii.
- ¹⁷ *Myths From Mesopotamia*, xvii.
- ¹⁸ See especially Jurji Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," in Matejka and Pomorska.
- ¹⁹ *Beowulf*, 19.
- ²⁰ Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 139.
- ²¹ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, intro. Brian Stone (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), 21.
- ²² *Sir Gawain*, 163.
- ²³ Alan Garner, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (London: Armada Lion Books/Collins, 1972), 67.
- ²⁴ A modern day equivalent would perhaps be the stories of *Batman*, which exist in film, television, comic book, graphic novel and as animation. No matter what happens in one media incarnation, it can co-exist with other, radically different incarnations: the myth itself, the legend is strong enough to survive at its core.
- ²⁵ Mark Rose, *Alien Encounters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 96 and 99.
- ²⁶ Chapter 89 (verses 6-14) of *The Holy Qur-an* actually says:
 " Seest thou not/How the Lord Dealt/With the 'Ad (people).-
 Of the (city of) Iram/With lofty pillars The like of which/
 Were not produced/In (all) the land? And with the Thamaud/
 (People), who cut out/(Huge) rocks in the valley?-
 And with Pharoah/Lord of stakes
 (All) these transgressed/Beyond bounds in the lands.
 And heaped therein/Mischief (on mischief)
 Therefore did thy Lord/Pour on them a source/
 Of diverse chastisements
 For thy Lord is/Watchful.
- The Holy Qur-an* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Holy Qur-an Printing Complex., n.d.)
- ²⁷ *New York Times International*, vol CXL1, No. 48,867 (February 5th 1992): P A14L.
- ²⁸ Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 34.
- ²⁹ The 'T' stands for Tiberius.
- ³⁰ The story leads on from an occasionally visited thread in *Deep Space Nine*, where Maquis rebels have been trying to reclaim planets on which they had settled. Mostly Bajoran, but aided by various mercenaries, they continue the war with the Cardassians after the Bajorans, now allied to the federation, have accepted a peace treaty ceding some of the settled planets back to Cardassia. As a result the Federation steps in to stop its own citizens and the Bajorans from continuing their guerilla and terrorist activities. We first encounter Voyager as it sets off from Deep Space Nine in search of a particular rebel ship - commanded by Chakotay.
- ³¹ Wymer et al., 4.

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- ³² Scholes, quoted in James, 101.
- ³³ Aldiss and Wingrove, 42-44.
- ³⁴ Mervyn Peake, *Titus Groan* (London: Mandarin Books, 1991), 5.
- ³⁵ Don A. Stuart [John W. Campbell], "Who Goes There?" in *Towards Infinity: Nine Science Fiction Adventures*, ed. Damon Knight (London: Pan Books, 1970), 84-5. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 67-8.
- ³⁶ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 36-7.
- ³⁷ Quoted in Cornel Robu, "A Key to Science Fiction: The Sublime," *Foundation* 42 (Spring, 1988), 25.
- ³⁸ Peter Nicholls and Cornel Robu, "The Sense of Wonder," in Clute and Nicholls, 1085.
- ³⁹ Blaise Pascal, quoted in Robu, 27.
- ⁴⁰ Robu, 27.
- ⁴¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *La place de l'homme dans la nature. Le groupe zoologique humain* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1949), 28, quoted in Robu, 27.
- ⁴² Robu, 27.
- ⁴³ Hartwell quoted in James, 105.
- ⁴⁴ Nicholls and Robu, in Clute and Nicholls, 1084.
- ⁴⁵ Bazin: *What is Cinema?* vol. 2., 140-141.
- ⁴⁶ Hellman, 10.
- ⁴⁷ Abraham Lincoln, "Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg, November 19, 1863," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, vol 1., 2nd ed. (London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1985), 1465.
- ⁴⁸ Hellman, 9.
- ⁴⁹ Walt Whitman, "Passage to India" in *The Portable Walt Whitman* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), 278, 276, and 283.
- ⁵⁰ Hellman, 10. Hellman applies his argument in relation to Vietnam specifically, and the fascination with Asian cultures which permeates American history, but the desire for union (or reunion) across the lands of the Earth with America's new man guiding the fallen of the old world, reaches beyond the tragedy of the SE Asian conflict.
- ⁵¹ The following discussion of frontier imagery is a restructured and greatly expanded version of work drawn from Jan Johnson-Smith, "Devil's Doorway/Heaven's Gate: The composition of a mythical western frontier within the narrative mise-en-scène of American art and film" (Master's Thesis, Clark University, 1991).
- ⁵² Jim Kitses, *Horizons West* (London: BFI, 1970), 9-10.
- ⁵³ Scott Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 272-3.
- ⁵⁴ Kitses, 10-11.
- ⁵⁵ William Bradford, "Of Plymouth Plantation," in *The Norton Anthology*, 70-71.
- ⁵⁶ Cotton Mather, "Wonders of the Invisible World," in *The Norton Anthology*, 225-226.
- ⁵⁷ Frederick Jackson Turner, quoted in Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 146.
- ⁵⁸ French, 24-5.
- ⁵⁹ Nash, 21.
- ⁶⁰ For a discussion of the shifting perceptions of city culture and nature see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
- ⁶¹ J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters From an American Farmer* (London: Dent, 1983), 43.
- ⁶² Stephen Fender, *American Literature in Context 1620-1830* (London: Methuen, 1983), 192-3.
- ⁶³ Fender goes on to say that "gentile society" is not a "misprint for the 'gentle (much less genteel) society', but the translator's attempt to find an English equivalent for the German *gentilegesellschaft*. This is apparently a coinage made up (as I guess anyway, given that Lukács discusses Cooper's work alongside Scott), from the word for 'society' and *Gentil*, a loan word from the Latins *Gens*, a race or clan supposedly descended from a common ancestor and sharing a name and certain religious rites: so 'tribal society' would probably serve as a suitable substitute as an English equivalent." Fender, 192-3.
- ⁶⁴ Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire In The Lake* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 461.

- ⁶⁵ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in R.A. Billington, *The Frontier Thesis: Valid Interpretation of American History?* (New York: Robert E. Krieger, 1977), 10-11.
- ⁶⁶ The phrase come from Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).
- ⁶⁷ Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1987).
- ⁶⁸ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 17.
- ⁶⁹ Trachtenburg, 18.
- ⁷⁰ Nash, 145.
- ⁷¹ John Wilmerding, ed., *American Light: The Luminist Movement* (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1980), 98.
- ⁷² Earl A. Powell, "Luminism and the American Sublime," in Wilmerding, 72.
- ⁷³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *The Norton Anthology*, 827.
- ⁷⁴ Thomas Cole quoted in James Flexner, *That Wilder Image* (New York: Dover Press, 1970), 35.
- ⁷⁵ From classes at Clark University in 1989-91 with Professor John Conron.
- ⁷⁶ Matthew Baigell, *Alfred Bierstadt* (New York: Watson-Guption, 1981), 46.
- ⁷⁷ Novak, 163.
- ⁷⁸ Novak, 163.
- ⁷⁹ Novak, 189.
- ⁸⁰ Albert Bierstadt, letter dated 10th July 1859 in Gordon Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc/Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1974), 70.
- ⁸¹ Novak, 99-100.
- ⁸² Novak, 97.
- ⁸³ Patin, 44. He refers to Novak, 196.
- ⁸⁴ Boime, 38.
- ⁸⁵ Boime, 138, and 20-21.
- ⁸⁶ Interestingly, according to Gordon Hendricks, the picture was the stimulus for "the first official census of America's remaining buffalo. It is estimated that at the time of the discovery of America there were 60 million buffalo, and in 1850, forty years before Bierstadt's painting, 20 million.... Now, with the government's protection, the number has grown to 25,000." Hendricks, 291.
- ⁸⁷ Bierstadt, quoted in Hendricks, 291.
- ⁸⁸ Baigell, 64.
- ⁸⁹ Andrew Wilton, *Turner and the Sublime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 39.
- ⁹⁰ Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 276.
- ⁹¹ Novak, 22-23.
- ⁹² Flexner, 248.
- ⁹³ Hendricks, 246.
- ⁹⁴ Patin, 48.
- ⁹⁵ Iris Cahn, "The Changing Landscape of Modernity: Early Film and America's 'Great Picture' Tradition," *Wide Angle* 18 no. 3 (1996): 87/89.
- ⁹⁶ Patin, 48.
- ⁹⁷ Novak, 26-7, and 189.
- ⁹⁸ Patin, 48-9.
- ⁹⁹ Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 276.
- ¹⁰⁰ Powell, in Wilmerding, 90.
- ¹⁰¹ Novak, 18.
- ¹⁰² Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 112.
- ¹⁰³ Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 256.
- ¹⁰⁴ Novak, 19.
- ¹⁰⁵ Abraham Lincoln, "Annual Address to Congress," (December 1st, 1862), in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 5., ed. R.P. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 537.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Star Trek*, from William Shatner's voiceover for original series. My stress.

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- ¹⁰⁷ Ursula K. Le Guin, "Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction," *Parabola* (Fall, 1976): 42-47.
- ¹⁰⁸ Le Guin, "Myth and Archetype," 43 and 47.
- ¹⁰⁹ Le Guin, "Myth and Archetype," 45.
- ¹¹⁰ Hellman, 220.
- ¹¹¹ Le Guin, "Myth and Archetype," 45.
- ¹¹² Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 272.
- ¹¹³ Stephen Whitfield and Gene Roddenberry, *The Making of Star Trek* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), 23.



Figure 3. Fitz Hugh Lane

Fig 1. "Staffage figure" (on horseback) - Edward Bierstadt:

Yosemite Valley: Glacier Point Trail (1872?)



Brace's Rocks, Brace's Cove (1864)

Figure 2. Fitz Hugh Lane:

Becalmed off Halfway Rock (1860)



Figure 3. Fitz Hugh Lane:

Lumber Schooners at Evening on Penobscot Bay (1860)



Figure 4. Fitz Hugh Lane:

Brace's Rocks, Brace's Cove (1864)



Figure 5. Thomas Cole:

View on the Catskill, Early Autumn (1837)



Figure 6. Thomas Cole:

River in the Catskills (1843)

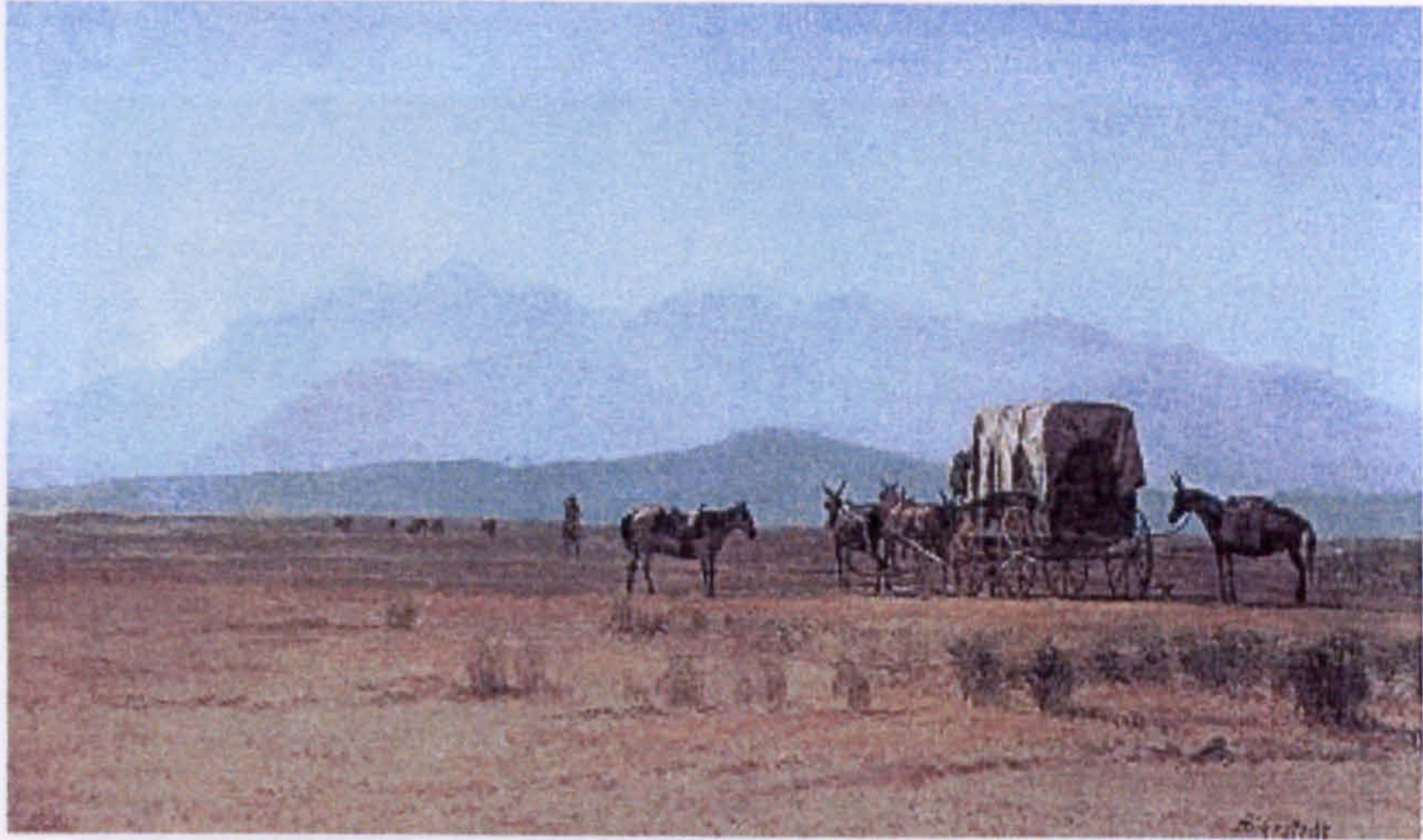


Figure 7. Albert Bierstadt:

Surveyor's Wagon in the Rocky Mountains (c. 1859)

The Oregon Trail (1865)

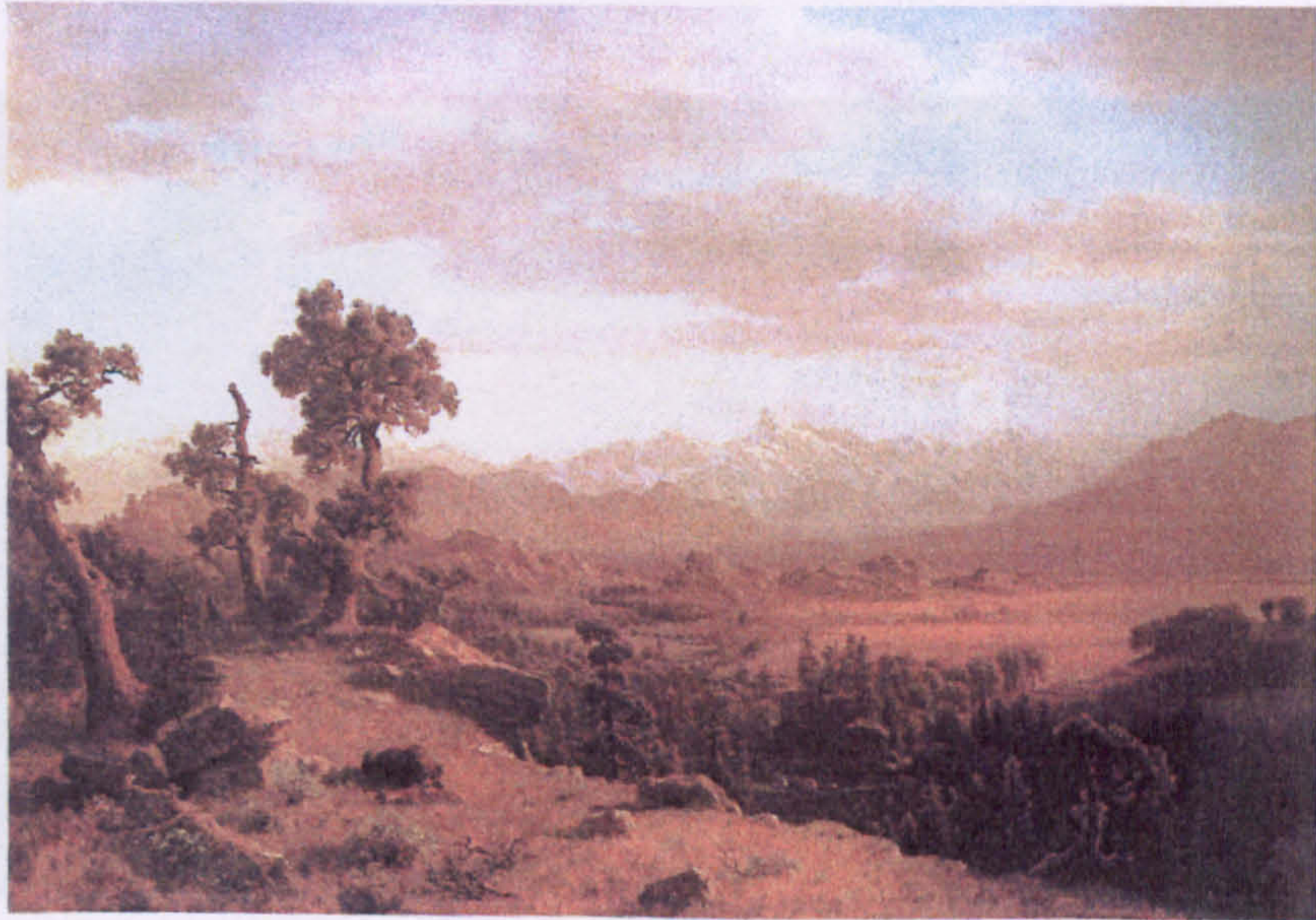


Figure 8. Albert Bierstadt:

Wind River Country (1860)



Figure 9. Albert Bierstadt:
The Oregon Trail (1865)



Figure 10. Albert Bierstadt:
The Valley of the Yosemite (1864)



Figure 11. Albert Bierstadt:

The Last of the Buffalo (1888)

Twilight in the Wilderness (1860)



Figure 12. Albert Bierstadt:

The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak (1863)

Figure 14. Albert Bierstadt:

Sunset in the Yosemite Valley (1868)



Figure 13. Frederick Edwin Church:

Twilight in the Wilderness (1860)



Figure 14. Albert Bierstadt:

Sunset in the Yosemite Valley (1868)

PART THREE

A Voice in the Wilderness – Television Narrative and Science Fiction

A Voice in the Wilderness – Television Narrative and Science Fiction

The preceding sections of this dissertation established the broad historical and mythological influences behind modern science fiction – notably the epic, the Gothic Romance, and the Sublime. They also explored sf's major identifiable linguistic and generic features, offering examples from literature, film, and television. Part Two noted how post-bellum American arts created and affirmed the belief of a future to the West – beyond the frontier – using the Sublime imagery of a divinely sanctioned Manifest Destiny. In some ways sf has a great deal in common with historical narratives like the Western; most importantly, it must establish a plausible time and place, and create an enduring, believable reality. Occasionally, sf authors rewrite the past – Philip K. Dick's novel *The Man in the High Castle* is an example of this type: his scenario changes the outcome of the Second World War, creating an Axis-dominated future. Sometimes the future visits our present in order to ensure what has already happened still takes place at the right time (e.g., *The Terminator*, or *Twelve Monkeys*). Mostly, however, modern sf is concerned with possible future histories, and therein lies its unique potential.

With the lineaments of sf now established, this chapter considers how its future histories may be articulated by broadcast television. **Television Narrative** examines how sf can formulate strategies to either challenge or compensate for broadcast television's traditional formats, including its tendencies towards excess verbiage, historical lack of attention to mise-en-scène, and its various mundane realities which, crucially for sf, rely heavily upon liveness, or at least the illusion of it.¹ It examines why until recently certain types of fictional texts, notably the sit-com and the soap opera (in the form of the episodic series and continuous serial) have played an important role in television schedules, thus encouraging a specific television style and format. Science fiction television generally adheres to these formats, yet still strives to break with the familiar, thus offering a type of

originality. Familiarity is on the side of the viewer, however: as we become more familiar with television series we may believe them to be less original. I ask why we place such a high value upon originality when, as Umberto Eco argues in “Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Post-Modern Aesthetics” (1985), the history of western art relies upon the *recreation* of specific art forms just as much as the ability to create afresh.²

Television and broadcast television are rapidly becoming separate entities; with the advent of new technologies our ability to create good quality visuals and more complex scenarios within television texts has changed. Not only does this require a different reading of television narratives, but with the arrival of the video recorder, our ability to read them has also changed. More experimental television drama shows, many influenced by cinema and made by film directors, were developed in the USA during the 1980s, collectively identified by John Thornton Caldwell as the phenomenon of **televisuality**. **Science Fiction and Televisuality** demonstrates how programmes became more complex in the 1980s, more demanding of their audiences, and developed particular styles, not only through the increasingly graphic nature of the modern medium (as opposed to the staunchly cinematographic nature of film), but also through a badge of individuality. These programmes were marketed as distinctive cult and/or boutique productions and the new narrative strategies facilitated by technological advances were offered with a flourish. This chapter argues that the successful production of televisual programmes with longer, more complicated, narrative threads and a greater use of visual imagery over verbal exposition in the mid-1980s facilitated the development of a groundbreaking series such as *Babylon 5* in the 1990s.

The suggestion that *Babylon 5* is groundbreaking brings us to another question – that of creativity within genre. Although this dissertation is not about authorship per se, it is concerned with originality and repetition; therefore, this chapter also considers arguments put forward by John Thornton Caldwell and John Caughie about authorship, genre, and production in television. Both authors identify individual cultural movements and specific moments in time. Caldwell (1995) is chiefly concerned with the period 1985-1994 in the USA, a period during which *Babylon 5* was planned and ultimately brought to the screens, whilst in *Television Drama* (2000), Caughie’s primary interest is British

television drama after 1945. The culture and period he discusses are superficially less pertinent, however he offers a useful characterisation in his identification of television's tendency towards the three modes identified by Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination* as features of the novel, rather than the epic. He also calls for a new way of seeing television authorship, which relates to the role of J. Michael Straczynski as creator/author/producer of *Babylon 5*. Caldwell and Caughie thus contextualise the production environment which may well have facilitated the creation of an epic series like *Babylon 5* and its producers' ability to market it as a distinctive, authored television text in the mid- to late 1990s.

Television Narrative:

Firstly, it may be useful to consider our broad expectations and experiences of the television medium, and how it has altered over the past twenty years with the advent of new production technology. In this way we can establish an idea of the general aesthetics of television drama. Whilst a variety of features are commonly associated with broadcast television, perhaps the most obvious, and thus the easiest to overlook, is its everyday nature. Television lacks the critical cultural status shared by other art forms; it is often considered a popular but inferior form of mass communication, a pulp medium lacking in importance – rather similar to the status of science fiction. However, unlike sf, this is due to what Robert C. Allen calls its “very ubiquity and the intricate ways it is woven into the everyday lives of so many people.”³ Television occupies a major space in our lives, in our living rooms and lounges, perhaps our bedrooms and kitchens.⁴ This places it in direct contrast to the non-domestic moving images of cinema – frequently and falsely considered television's close relative. Early comparisons between film and literature initially boosted film studies along a strange trajectory in search of a single author or ‘auteur’ (perhaps as a short term means of legitimising the newest technological developments as art) despite cinema's very obvious collective basis. Similarly, the

expectations of cinema have been placed upon the newer medium of television, and only recently has it successfully broken away from this unfortunate shackle.⁵

Television and cinema display two individualising but inseparable features which are particularly pertinent to my argument – firstly, the means of transmission and reception, and secondly, the question of narrative form. Cinema is a public performance; its viewers collectively experience a darkened space and a screen that visually dominates its environment. Its very completeness and size encourages close to total attention. In *Visible Fictions*, John Ellis suggests that:

cinema's image, its material quality, its size when projected and the concentration it requires and enables the viewer to have ... enables a particular development of representation in image and sound: one that is taken as realist, but is so only by convention. The cinematic regime of visual and aural representation is spectacular in its effects, because the effects are sure to be noticed.⁶

The common narrative patterns in popular film encourage this attention and suspension of disbelief. This urges the spectators to lose themselves in the 'real' experience of the text, whose structure is frequently denied through the effacement of the signifiers concerned, as explained previously. Importantly, in classical Hollywood cinema, the story attempts to be discrete, its narrative structure aiming for closure in the sense that we may be seeing only a portion of someone's life and experiences, but a portion which claims an ending – a resolution. We leave the cinema satisfied: the loose ends are neatly tied up, the relationships sorted out, and equilibrium re-established. Roger Thornhill's experiences before and after his four-day adventure in *North by Northwest* (1959) are largely irrelevant: the episode of his life concerned with Van Damm is brought to a satisfactory closure. Whereas much feminist criticism has argued that such Hollywood films do *not* offer actual closure – or at least only for the (frequently male) protagonist – by and large it is also true that the dynamic of the plot, which drives the narrative, *has* been satisfactorily concluded.

Other films may rely upon more open endings – did Butch and Sundance really die in the freeze-framed carnage at the end of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) or did one or both of them survive? We are reminded at the beginning that we are

watching a film when a caption states that “most of what follows is true.” The ending is appropriate and necessary to the legend: if Butch and Sundance are both dead, the myth surrounding them, the rumours that Butch set up shop and sold cash registers in Oregon, that he was *not* with Sundance in Bolivia at the end, risks destruction.⁷ The story opens with the sepia frames of an ‘old’ film and ends with a sepia film frame, a frozen picture of history and myth encapsulated as a single, timeless, enduring image. Nevertheless, the story is adequately complete. It is uncommon for films to require a second narrative as a means of support – *The Empire Strikes Back* is a famous example. Without its sequel, *Return of the Jedi*, it makes little sense, leaving the heroes maimed (Luke) and frozen (Han), and the fate of the rebellion open wide. To a lesser extent it requires the introduction of its predecessor, *Star Wars*, to explain its characters and their motivations. But the film was promoted as the second in a trilogy, so audience expectations were shaped *a priori*: closure was not anticipated, although the ending is still unusual.

The larger and more detailed high-quality images of cinema (a long-term problem for television’s historically small, murky and sparse mise-en-scène), aids the process of temporary and almost complete submersion in a discrete narrative. There is also the very immediate knowledge of having paid money for the experience – perhaps a secondary element, but in our ever-more consumerist and capitalist economy, a very good reason for paying attention! Television is also paid for, whether through cable, satellite, or an annual licence fee, but because the payment seldom occurs at the same time as the viewing, the effect is diminished. Of course Pay-Per-View and rental videos both affect this dynamic, but the events watched are usually one-off experiences (feature films or major sporting events) and thus they are visitors *to* television rather than being *of* television – in the sense of a drama series, news or documentary programme.

So, unlike cinema and other visual/aural entertainment media (such as the theatre or ballet or musical performance), television occupies a specific, domestic space. This does not make it an entirely private experience, however; it is often shared with members of the family or close friends. Thus, the ability of its audience to concentrate is considerably diminished by possible sounds from the doorbell, the telephone, or the sudden yearning for a drink. All of these create potential involuntary or voluntary

interruptions to viewing. According to Ellis, in combination with its historically low visual aesthetics, this creates a tendency to glance at television rather than gaze (a more sustained attention mode), which he associates with cinema.⁸ The remote control allows a different sort of interruption – surfing between niche channels, so that one person may watch the Grand Prix whilst another keeps up with the weekly soap omnibus. Television's immediacy and apparent intimacy create a "seamless equivalence with social life."⁹ Both Raymond Williams' idea of flow, which "severely compromises, and alters the separate texts that TV has manufactured," and the commodity Ellis ascribes to television, which "has very little to do with the single text," encourage and suggest a kind of segmentation in television formats. This is in direct contrast to the continuous, separate and progressive nature of film.¹⁰ The block advertisements of commercial television seem particularly to endorse and encourage this appearance of segmentation, but according to Ellis, public service broadcasting (he is discussing the BBC) is no different. He argues that:

programmes which have a high degree of coherence compared to news, advertisements, promotion material and title sequences can themselves be regarded as being composed of segments. Any fiction series or serial is prone to segmentalization, and the series and serial form the vast bulk of broadcast TV material almost everywhere.¹¹

Caughie notes that some programmes and channels are "more 'interrupted' than others, and, in some sense, an interruption which is expected ceases to be an interruption and becomes part of the pattern."¹² Equally, the effect of a commercial break in the middle of a film on television is "quite different from breaks in watching a chat show." Television drama, especially the single play, comes closer to feature films, but it is not unique in its "interruptability of its time."¹³ Traditions of oral narrative and theatre (Kabuki, Mystery plays, Shakespearean masques) all permit and even encourage these breaks. Even the novel is seldom read at one sitting, so in terms of popular culture, film is the odd one out. As a result, in many television genres there tend to be what Caughie has observed as a "segmented narrative form built upon the principle of interruption, organising expectation and attention into segments and a multiplicity of plot lines as a way of compensating for interruptability."¹⁴ Thus the fade-to-black of the six-segment 44

minute American drama may irritate us on BBC1, but we soon become accustomed to it, whilst in the USA, the commercial breaks are generally placed at appropriate moments because the flow of the narrative structure has been designed to accommodate them.

Television genre also functions in a different fashion to that of film and literature. It is not primarily identified by its thematic contents, i.e. as a thriller, western or comedy, nor by its form, as poetry, prose or play, but rather by its narrative distinctiveness – i.e., as sit-com, soap opera, documentary, or drama. Unlike film drama, where characters generally evolve through the conflict of the narrative, the television sit-com is identifiable in that its characters *never* change despite numerous external conflicts. At the end of each episode, the characters have not learned anything: the next episode sees them in precisely the same situation as before. The humour lies in the very inability of the characters to adjust and the audience's recognition of this. Ellis notes that recently sit-coms have evolved a slow-burn narrative strategy, such as the on-off romance between Ross and Rachel in *Friends*, or Niles and Daphne in *Frasier*. In fact, elements of this are identifiable in *M*A*S*H* (1972-82) with Margaret "Hotlips" Hoolihan's blossoming romance, for example, but like *M*A*S*H* itself, it was unusual in the 1970s. Nevertheless, regardless of these occasional threads, the basic dynamic of situation and character in the sit-com does not alter.¹⁵ In a detective drama, such as *Morse* or *Frost*, for example, the leading characters do not change; the detective procedure is constant, only the individual crime is new. Equally between the series, although the characters themselves are identified by certain unique traits (Morse's esoteric nature and love of classical music, or Frost's irascible, snappy earthiness), the procedures followed are invariable. The narratives offer the same degree of conflict and resolution, the pleasure coming from the collision of repetition and minute variation within the text.

Given the reproductive and repetitive nature of this process, it seems pertinent to suggest that there is a finite amount of expansion, transformation and subversion available to us – particularly within the confines of one series, whether sit-com, soap or drama. We certainly seem to enjoy repeated visitations to familiar scenarios – hence the enduring popularity of genre as a concept. Umberto Eco offers some reasons why, and also asks how we 'read' pieces of series, both episodic and sequential. Talking about

literature, film and television, he asks that if our society were to suffer some dreadful demise and only one episode of (e.g.) *Columbo* survived, as part of a series unknown to our future selves, how would it be read?¹⁶ More importantly, he questions why we should so be so quick to dismiss genre series, serials, and sagas – tales which are replete with redundancy, and which offer similar weekly or daily experiences.

Eco argues that perhaps (for Western culture) repetition and modulation have mattered at least as much, if not more, than has innovation. According to Eco, it is:

not by chance that modern aesthetics and theories of art ... have frequently identified the artistic message with metaphor... The modern criterion for recognising artistic value was novelty, high information. The pleasurable repetition of an already known pattern was considered by modern theories of art, typical of Crafts – not of Art – and of industry.

Thus we have at first sight a standard restatement of the two poles of the Aristotelian aesthetic table: the tangible, functional and environmental creations in architecture and design (high mimesis/low aesthetic value) versus the intangibility and desirability of music (low mimesis/high aesthetic value). However, Eco also suggests that a craft worker, or even a factory production line, may create “many tokens, or occurrences, of the same type or model.” The problem is that this process is not recognised by modern aesthetics as an act of creation, hence the distinction in Romantic aesthetics between major and minor arts, and thus, between arts and crafts. Art was considered to be that which created and imposed a “new paradigm, a new way of looking at the world,” whereas craft was considered to be simply the correct reproduction of a known process.¹⁷

Eco notes that the “classical theory of art, from ancient Greece to the Middle Ages” used the same term (*techne*, *ars*) for the work of “a barber or a shipbuilder ... painter or poet.” Innovation was not sought so frantically; rather, positive tokens of an everlasting type were appreciated as beautiful. And in this we discover one of the origins of the loathing modern aesthetics holds for the mass media and other, largely undifferentiated, industrial-like products. Genre film, literature, commercials, pop music were all seen as “more or less successful tokens of a given model or type ... and judged as pleasurable but non-artistic”. The products of mass media also frequently arrived in

series. This runs against the idea of artistic creation, and with their reliance upon repetition, lack of innovation, and hedonism, they were also seen as products of industry, “not as the provocative proposal of a new (and difficult to accept) world vision.”¹⁸

The defining features of mass media products, according to Eco, are repetition; iteration; obedience to a pre-established scheme; and redundancy (as opposed to information). Characteristics, vices, gestures, and habits all allow us to recognise Sherlock Holmes, Columbo, Mr Spock etc., and to consider them as our old friends. We are safe in the hands of the characters and their creators. Similarly, Eco explains that a “traditional detective story presumes the enjoyment of a scheme, the scheme is so important that the most famous authors have founded their fortune on its very immutability.”¹⁹ Thus the attraction of an *87th Precinct* or Maigret novel, or an episode from *Starsky and Hutch*, or *Star Trek*, or one of the Renault Clio “Nicole/Papa” advertisements is rooted in the gradual, continuous rediscovery of things that the readers/viewers already know and wish to know again. The pleasure, says Eco, comes from “the non-story ... the distraction consists in the refutation of a development of events, in a withdrawal from the tension of past-present-future to the focus of an instant, which is loved precisely because it is recurrent.”²⁰

Certainly mechanisms of this type are more frequently found in modern narratives than in the 18th century *feuilleton*, where development was required and characters pursued a series of oftentimes ludicrous adventures before meeting their almost inevitable demise. Eco suggests that this is because:

... the *feuilleton*, founded on the triumph of information, represented the preferred fare of a society that lived in the midst of messages loaded with redundancy; the sense of tradition, the norms of social life, moral principles, the rules of proper comportment in the framework of a bourgeois society designed a system of foreseeable messages that the social system provided for its members, and which allowed life to flow smoothly without unexpected jolts.²¹

Hence the “ ‘informative’ shock” of Poe’s short stories, or Ponson du Terrail’s *coup de théâtre*, provide us with the “enjoyment of the rupture.” Eco also wonders, given our contemporary society, with its constant change in standards and traditions, whether a narrative of redundancy offers a necessary or useful “indulgent invitation to repose, a

chance of relaxing”? He thinks not, arguing that the nineteenth century novel relied upon repetition just as much as our narratives do today. The patterns were the same, but the *devices* for making the expected unexpected differed: in this case, the tales of *Fantomas* close without successful catharsis. In the cinema serials, Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers make impossible escapes from death at the beginning of each new episode. Similarly, “Juve and Fandor finally come to get their hands on the elusive one when he, with an unforeseeable move, foils the arrest ... at the beginning of each episode [he] finds himself inexplicably poor and in need of money and, therefore, also of new ‘action’.”²² And so the cycle continues.

A different but complementary approach is suggested by John Caughie, who discusses television drama in relation to Bakhtin’s study of genre. This may help us to distinguish the more general question of repetition from the particular characteristics of broadcast television. Caughie is particularly interested in Bakhtin’s “use of the concept of a novelistic discourse to develop an approach to narrative which is historically resilient precisely because it is responsive to social, cultural and technological changes within society.”²³ At the heart of Bakhtin’s argument is the ‘chronotype’ – a specific organisation of time and space within the work and genre. The chronotype not only “defines genre and generic distinction,” as Holquist and Clark point out, but also establishes the boundaries between the various intrageneric subcategories of the major literary types.”²⁴ Bakhtin’s study of classical Greek narrative identifies “three spatio-temporal regimes which leave traces in contemporary narrative: romance ‘adventure time’, the ‘adventure time of everyday life,’ and ‘biographical time’.”²⁵

In the first chronotype, romance, the characters do not grow. Events, extraordinary or otherwise may block the path, but ultimately do not change the event promised when ‘boy meets girl’. Bakhtin characterises this chronotype as having “a technical, abstract connection between space and time, by the reversibility of moments in the temporal sequence, and by this interchangeability of space.”²⁶ In the second chronotype, the ‘adventure of everyday life,’ characters *are* affected by what they experience, and the “progression of change fixes the order of events, giving a materiality to space as the scene of transformation and metamorphosis: ‘Space becomes concrete and saturated with a time

that is more substantial’.” The final chronotype, biographical narrative, is the most complex. It places “character at its centre, organizing space and time around it, variously tracing time as a spiritual or intellectual journey through a symbolic landscape, unfolding character through a series of acts and deeds.” As Caughie points out, these chronotypes have “resonances for later forms of the novelistic, and particularly generic forms of popular narrative.”²⁷ They also function in direct contrast to the epic, and highlight programmes both popular and common on television in the period preceding and during *Babylon 5*’s life-span, whether sit-com, soap opera, or episodic/serial drama.

Caughie finds it helpful to consider film and television as modern extensions of the “same novelistic discourse into new media, new technologies, and new forms of transmission and reception.”²⁸ Eco also draws on this idea of the novelistic (particularly in his latter categories) when he discusses in detail our “era of repetition,” exploring what he terms the “largely inflated” concepts of seriality and repetition. There is a difference between the series, the saga, and the serial, between retake and remake, and it is important that these differences are clarified.²⁹ He breaks down repetition into four categories, as follows:

- 1) The Retake – here the successful characters from a previous story are recycled for exploitation - Eco offers the examples of Dumas’ *Twenty Years Later*, and the ‘to be continued ...’ versions of *Superman* and *Star Wars*. I would suggest that *Alien*, *Aliens* and *Terminator*, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* also belong in this category. The television versions of the films *Robocop*, *Logan’s Run* and *Planet of the Apes* also fit. Similarly, the various stories of Arthurian legend also belong in this category.
- 2) The Remake – this is simply the re-telling of a successful story, thus there are several film versions of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *The Fly*. “The whole of Shakespeare” says Eco, “is essentially a remake of preceding stories. Therefore, ‘interesting’ remakes can escape repetition”.³⁰

- 3) The Series – this works upon a restricted number of pivotal characters within a fixed situation. The narrative scheme does not change, and examples of this include *All in the Family*, *Columbo*, *Star Trek* (in its many guises). The series rewards us by allowing us to foresee events; we congratulate ourselves and are satisfied with the experience – yet this only happens because the author has constructed the narrative in such an obvious manner. Within this type of repetition is the ‘loop,’ which allows us to return to a character at different points in his or her life, thus we constantly have “new” stories at our disposal. Every episode enriches the characters within it, yet they only repeat their standard performance – *Charlie Brown* or *Calvin and Hobbes* would satisfy this criterion. Eco believes that in our experience of a series we are:

enjoying the novelty of the story (which is always the same) while in fact one is enjoying it because of the recurrence of a narrative scheme that remains constant. The series, in a sense, responds to the infantile need of hearing again always the same story, of being consoled by the ‘Return of the Identical’ superficially disguised.³¹

- 4) The Saga – Eco differentiates between the saga and series by the fact that the saga usually concerns a family and is preoccupied with “the ‘historical’ lapse of time.”³² Sagas can be continuous, following a character from birth to death, or branch out to include various descendants, each branch itself leading to new potential branches. *Dallas* is clearly a prime example of a saga, and in turn spawned *Knots Landing* to the Californian branch of the Ewing family. There is very little difference between the saga and the series; the disguise is simply in the ageing of the characters and the celebration of the passing of time. And as is the case with the ancient sagas, in our modern day versions:

the deeds of the gallant ancestors are the same as the deeds of their descendants. In *Dallas*, grandfathers and grandsons undergo more or less the same ordeals: struggle for wealth and for power, life, death, defeat, victory, adultery, love, hate, envy, illusion and delusion.³³

In *Dr Who: The Unfolding Text* (1983), John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado suggest that television provides “three predominant forms of fiction – the single play, the

series and the serial.” Deriving from the theatre and cinema, the single play has become a rare thing on our screens (more so since technology has moved from live broadcast to recorded broadcast), but the series and serial bear more examination. *Dr Who*, notably a science fiction programme, overlaps the categories of series and serial, prompting Tulloch and Alvarado to suggest a new typology for television. This consists of four categories: the continuous serial, the episodic serial, the sequential series, and the episodic series.³⁴ For a considerable period of time, the episodic series has been television’s mainstay, each episode consisting of:

complete and discrete narratives with only the main protagonists and main locations (offices, homes) providing continuity between episodes. Examples of episodic series abound in the television production of many countries of the world, for examples, *Starsky and Hutch*, *Minder*, etc., etc.³⁵

Taking the detective series as a focus, from the 1960s onwards examples abound. Programmes such as *Softly, Softly*, *Ironside*, *Bergerac*, *Kojak*, *Hart to Hart*, *Inspector Morse*, *Profiler*, and *Diagnosis Murder* all demonstrate this provision. The continuity in *Hart to Hart* comes not only from the main characters, Jennifer, Jonathan, Max (and Freeway the dog), but also from Max’s voice-over narration during the title sequence, although each episode remains discrete. In other series it also emerges from a continuity of location (i.e., *Morse*’s Oxford, *Ironside*’s San Francisco, *Kojak*’s New York). Occasionally there are double episodes, such as *Diagnosis Murder*’s “Vanishing Act,” but these are simply longer discrete stories, mostly made as end of season specials, and they often act simply as a hook with a cliff-hanger ending to the first part, anticipating the audience’s return for the next season.

Just as cinema uses typecasting as a short cut to character exposition, so the episodic series uses audience identification with protagonists/stars to maintain high viewing ratings. The other three categories of television narrative all pose “an enigma at the end of most episodes (with a consequential lack of narrative closure), thereby using narrative structure to draw an audience back for the next episode.”³⁶ Tulloch and Alvarado point out that these are close to the episodic series, but “each episode constitutes a complete narrative structure and experience.” They suggest that *Dallas* and

Knots Landing fulfil the requirements of this category. However, there is a difference between the multi-layered threads of *Dallas* and *Knots Landing* and the discrete narratives of episodic programmes such as *Bergerac*. Such programmes may use new incidents to draw back their audiences, but these act more like a trailer for the next episode than a continuous thread. Episodes may be missed or seen out of context without any damage to the narrative coherence, whereas I would suggest that the more complicated story lines of a series such as *Dallas* lend themselves less easily to occasional viewing. This is actually more reminiscent of what Tulloch and Alvarado characterise as a continuous serial, capable of running infinitely, and possessing “multiple narrative strands which are introduced and concluded in different temporal periods. There are therefore multi-layered narrative overlaps.”³⁷

Programmes such as *Dynasty*, *EastEnders*, and *Brookside* fit this pattern, one that we generally associate with soap operas. These appear as both prime time television and morning/afternoon shows, and are a mainstay of television schedules today. The origin of the soap opera lies in US commercial radio of the 1930s, and herein lurks the key to one of its most notable features – its remarkable reliance upon excess and redundant verbiage. *Painted Dreams* is generally thought to be the first example of the daytime (dramatic) soap opera and its success led rapidly to a great many similar serials,³⁸ sponsored by companies like Colgate-Palmolive, hence the name.³⁹ With the arrival of television, the genre continued its development within the new medium. Soap operas may superficially cover a variety of scenarios, but Robert C. Allen identifies several elements common to the form:

1. absolute resistance to closure (of narrative)
2. contemporary setting and emphasis on what we might call domestic concerns
3. didacticism
4. produced for and consumed by women... most of whom spent their weekdays at home, managing households and taking care of children.⁴⁰

I would add excessive reliance upon ‘wordy’ expositional scripts (typical of pre-1980s television in general but more so of soaps), to Allen’s list, and Jostein Gripsrud suggests that the third category of Allen’s criteria no longer exists as the openly didactic character from early soaps. Rather it has transformed: the didactic function for the

audience remains but is “not dependent on an overt didacticism in the programme.”⁴¹ Gripsrud bases this deduction partly upon the conclusions of Herta Herzog, whose 1941 study of daytime sketches shows that:

the stories became an integral part of the lives of many listeners. They are not only successful means of temporary emotional release or escape from a disliked reality. To many listeners they seem to have become a model of reality by which one is to be taught how to think and how to act.⁴²

With often complex and implausible story-lines – everything seems to happen to everyone all the time – the stresses and strains of everyday life are compressed into half hour or hour-long episodes of life in *Brookside*’s Close or the Square in *EastEnders*, or the high life of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. These soaps are primarily concerned with fluctuating personal relationships, which provide the basis for their dynamic energy.⁴³ They therefore offer a variety of incidents, each incident from a variety of individual perspectives, whether these be as witness, or rumoured half truths, whilst the cause and effect and the explication of each incident is repeated on several occasions, creating a high degree of redundancy. Alongside this is what Ellis calls ‘co-presence’, a sense that the characters are living their lives at the same pace and at the same time as we are. Recorded close to their transmission, soap operas are able to keep up with current events and concerns.⁴⁴ For instance, the massive celebrations of Millennium Eve were echoed in *EastEnders*’ double wedding and Millennium party for Melanie and Ian, and Barry and Natalie. Immediately prior to the Euro 2000 football match between England and Germany in Charleroi, *EastEnders* showed the local pub’s co-owners Dan Sullivan and Frank Butcher setting up a huge television set in the Queen Vic, and the regular characters getting involved in the rowdy pre-match atmosphere. This was carried to the extent that the Italian DiMarco boys were ‘winding up’ their neighbours by not supporting England – echoing concurrent tabloid themes of questionable footballing prowess and matters of national loyalty.

The incorporation of such narrative strands allows a form of what Ellis has called “working through” – a means of allowing people to “explain and interrogate their actions.” This is the modern equivalent of the didacticism in older soaps and dramas:

instead of an older character explaining what is morally right or wrong, a general consensus is offered which actually allows no real conclusion. If, for example, public discussion, whether through newspapers, documentaries, or current affairs programmes, speculates about:

the motives of destructive housebreakers and the feelings of their victims, the soap opera that incorporates such a strand will show the event taking place in a particular context, involving individuals known to some extent to the audience. The event unrolls in the soap, in a narrative time that is not dissimilar to that of the audience's lived time. ... We see the feelings of those familiar characters whose house is broken into and vandalised, but we also see the actions they take and the consequences of their actions. Narrative supplies a structure of cause and effect that complicates the emotional perspectives that talk has begun to supply. More complexity results, and more contradictions.⁴⁵

The number of soap operas in today's schedules, and their continued screening even in times of national crisis (i.e. during the Gulf War, whilst all other BBC programming except a rolling news bulletin was cancelled, BBC 1's Australian import *Neighbours* continued undisturbed), demonstrates the historical popularity of the serial form.⁴⁶ As Richard Paterson points out "there have been distinct shifts in character, style and setting. Medical soap operas such as *General Hospital* in the USA or *Emergency Ward 10* in Britain became a subgenre, while more recently the youth audience has been served by serials such as *Neighbours*, *Home and Away* and *Grange Hill*." Equally, the serial "has undergone different mutations in different territories."⁴⁷

Of most interest here is a format adopted in Brazil, Mexico, and other Latin American countries. According to Paterson "the telenovela emerged as the generic mutation, with a range of target audiences, stripped across a week so that every day a new episode is shown at the same time."⁴⁸ The telenovela developed from pre-Castro Cuban radio novelas such as *El Derecho de Nacer* (1946) and from 1964 onwards developed in Brazil and Mexico. The major difference between the South American and Anglo-American serials is the variety of settings and styles. More importantly, each is a finite narrative (generally of about one hundred episodes), with "a closed plot with a curve of dramatic tension that extends through the entire work, rather than being a basically endless series of closed episodes as in most US series."⁴⁹ This places the telenovela in

direct contrast to the eternal soap opera, able to draw on the most powerful of current social concerns for its fodder. Paterson explains how novela storylines:

tend towards the romantic and melodramatic with an emphasis on upward social mobility usually through romantic attachment, and they are expected to have a happy ending. At their most powerful they make political statements with potentially huge impact. *Roque Santeiro* broached the questions of myth, power struggle, and the role of the church in Brazilian society at the time of fundamental political change as the military government relinquished power. In Mexico there is even a tradition of the historical telenovela which will deal with a fundamental aspect of national history.⁵⁰

This reference to and familiarity with characters creates a sense of continuity if only due to cumulative effect. The actors who appear in one of the telenovela series invariably turn up in another, so just like the US and Australian soap stars whose characters are killed or who switch series, the spectator pleasure is not denied, since their reappearance is expected, albeit in a different role.

The telenovela also provides a useful reminder that it is not just the characters and the narratives that are revisited: the format is also repeated. Each instance of soap opera (or sit-com, or episodic drama series) offers a close variation of that which came before – a feature which Caughie, Williams, and Neale all identify as a kind of difference in repetition.⁵¹ Furthering this, in *The Dynasty Years* (1995), Gripsrud notes that soap operas “rely upon the reassuring repetition in their scheduling and contain a high degree of narrative repetition of a few basic plots.” Both the *feuilleton* in literature and the television soap opera place tremendous emphasis upon making the expected appear unexpected, so as to “cover up their repetitiousness.” In contrast to cinema and the single drama, instead of providing security through narrative closure, Gripsrud believes that they create “safe ground” in three ways:

(a) by demonstrating that endings do not really matter because everything basically remains the same anyway; (b) by providing an experience of wholeness ‘over’ and ‘across’ the narrative(s) by various formal means; and finally, (c) by offering various additional aesthetic devices which distract viewers’ attention from the significance of the disturbing underlying premises of the narrative(s) which still work as ‘bait’, as sources of fascination.⁵²

This is most apparent in the soap opera and is prompted by the sense of co-presence. As Gripsrud's research reveals, to *Dynasty's* audience its characters simply *are*: they co-exist with us. As a result a sort of parallel universe for soap characters exists, interchangeable but recognisable, and thus perennially reassuring. Different soaps running at different times will explore similar issues in a manner pertinent to their era; different but concurrent soaps will explore similar issues in similar ways in a manner pertinent to their era. Thus, there is a continual and powerful overlapping of both repetition and timeliness. This binds the viewer to a soap opera: as their own lives progress, so do the lives of the characters in the soap, and the more that a series explores topical issues in a familiar format, the more we respond to it and its characters. This can persist even when devotees watch individual episodes on videotape, because the process of going back, of revisiting, acknowledges the power of that binding-in rather than denies it.⁵³

So we have established the common patterns of television narrative and the rationale for adhering to them within the mundane text. Enduring though they are, the overlapping patterns of repetition and co-presence in television narrative *are* occasionally disrupted, and if we now turn to the genre which concerns us, science fiction, we can locate a clear example of how and where this break is successfully achieved. The long-running BBC series *Dr Who* (1963-89) offers a hybrid format: indeed, it forces Tulloch and Alvarado to create a new typology. Perhaps it also challenges Bakhtin and Eco's respective catalogues of forms – nevertheless, it still utilises similar techniques to those adopted by the mundane text, through which it also 'binds' its viewers. From November 1963 the eponymous hero, along with various companions, embarked on a series of adventures, each generally between four and six episodes long. Different actors played the character at different times, starting with William Hartnell and ending with Sylvester McCoy in 1988: there were also three film outings, starring Peter Cushing – twice – and Paul McGann. The first Doctor was a rather didactic and grumpy elderly man, and the third (Jon Pertwee) something of a dandy. The fourth, Tom Baker (who played the Doctor for the longest duration), established himself as an eccentric hippie, complete with floppy hat, long coat, even longer multi-coloured knitted scarf, and a love of jelly babies. This change of actor creates a refreshing element within the series. Explained as the Doctor's

ability to “regenerate” – essentially, to resurrect himself – it revitalises the programme by introducing an unknown yet recognisable quality. Each Doctor has his own character traits, although his essential personality is still ‘good’ and humanitarian, and the action remains based around the haphazard travels of his ship, that famous blue police box: the TARDIS.⁵⁴

The linkage between episodes and series is mostly tangential, but for one season, “The Trial of a Timelord” (1986) several episodic series were linked together as an adequately coherent greater narrative, requiring a more sustained period of attention and dedication by its audience. The chief means of maintaining audience interest whilst doing this is the same necessary means of creating interest in the development of any story, whether episodic or serial: suspense. In drama, suspense is created when the order of the narrative is switched around by plotting so as to delay the receipt of information. Using the following layout as a simple illustration, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson suggest that instead of stories progressing alphabetically from A to F, plotting means that we may find ourselves watching D-F, which in turn reveal A-C, as the table below explains.⁵⁵

Story	(A	Crime conceived		Plot
	(	B	Crime planned	
	(	C	Crime committed	
	(	D	Crime discovered	
	(	E	Detective investigates	
	(	F	Detective reveals A, B and C.	

Table 2.

The mystery this creates is a common enough feature of detective stories, and it works well as a motivational plot device in sf (and indeed, in other genres).⁵⁶ In this way it becomes a part of the story itself. Clues abound and must be located in order for the protagonists to discover what the alien wants and why, or to discover how the technology works, and what it does, etc. Todorov examines this in *The Poetics of Prose* (1977), discussing the function and typology of detective fiction. He demonstrates that the typical

crime narrative has two component stories: that of the investigation and that of the crime that created the investigation. He argues that detective fiction works in reverse, with prospection “taking the place of retrospection.” The reader is motivated by curiosity and suspense, not just “by what has happened, but also by what will happen next; he wonders about the future as about the past.” As a result, there is “the curiosity to learn how past events are to be explained; and there is also the suspense: what will happen to the main characters?”⁵⁷ As we will later see with *Babylon 5*, this exerts a powerful effect upon audiences, drawing them back again and again.

Science Fiction’s grandee, Isaac Asimov, also wrote detective fiction. In his sf stories Asimov uses the devices of delay and suspense, entwining them with the process of logical deduction. His positronic robots, the careful study of which continues in many of the stories courtesy of the steely robo-psychologist Dr Susan Calvin, are controlled by a safeguard: the Three Laws of Robotics. First made explicit in “Runaround” (1942), the Laws state that:

- 1) A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
- 2) A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
- 3) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.⁵⁸

“Runaround” uses the logic of the Three Laws to test human powers of deduction so that Speedy, the robot – who operates purely according to these laws – can save a group of astronauts from certain death. Many other Asimov tales engage in this kind of logical deduction. “Robbie” (1940), “Reason” (1941), “Liar!” (1941), and “Little Lost Robot” (1942) all deal similarly with the Three Laws.⁵⁹ The detective thread emerges more strongly in the other Asimov stories. *The Caves of Steel* (1954) and *The Naked Sun* (1956) bring together human detective Elijah Baley with R(obot) Daneel, and places them in a space-age noir landscape. Alfred Bester’s *The Demolished Man* (1951) creates a future world where the police are telepaths, but where detection must be carried out by methods similar to those of today due to a carefully constructed protection of civil rights. This creates a strange challenge for the detective, who is faced not with the detection of

who did it, but with the difficulty of gathering proof. It works rather like a *Columbo* mystery, where the pleasure for the omnisciently-endowed viewer lies not in discovery of the culprit, but rather in learning how our scruffy raincoat-clad Lieutenant will obtain the proof he needs to indict his sole suspect. Dick's novel *The Man in the High Castle* is an example of this story type, although the puzzle is literary rather than scientific. The future-history Dick bestows upon us is ultimately shown as one dictated not by Hitler, Mussolini, or Hirohito, but by the author, the man in the high castle. The kinds of stories mentioned above have as much in common with the kind of intellectual stimulation gained from puzzles or logic text books as they do with a more emotional or physical form of entertainment and, as such, offer a wonderful combination of the two pleasures.⁶⁰

Dr Who consistently provides clear examples of how devices such as these are used in television. In every episode, the time-travelling Doctor is called upon to discover who is responsible for what amounts to a disruption in the time-space continuum, and to perform tasks requiring tremendous powers of logical deduction. In "The Pyramids of Mars" Tom Baker's incarnation of the Time Lord must use pure logic to save himself and his human companion Sarah Jane Smith from potentially fatal traps – all of which are mental games – created to keep the ancient and evil Sutekh imprisoned in a pyramid on Mars. Outside sf, television's eponymous *McGuyver* takes inspired risks in order to extricate himself from numerous predicaments, but like Indiana Jones in the adventure film series, most of them are precipitated by his initial inability to think things through. In contrast, the Doctor relies entirely upon his intellect and powers of reasoning to emerge unscathed from encounters with Daleks, Cybermen, and other self-styled supreme rulers of the universe. The audience knows that he will succeed, but the delays between him encountering the problem and solving it, or between the appearance of the problem and his solution, act as bait. The audience is thus drawn back until resolution is achieved. Time travel stories such as *Dr Who* lend themselves particularly well to this combination of emotions: rather than a beginning and an end, there is only a continuous cycle.

Dr Who is a remarkable series which challenges the format and nature of television drama, if only in a limited way, whilst also drawing upon familiar sf scenarios and suspenseful plot devices. However, it plays another important role, functioning as a

modern myth for children and adults alike. During its thirty year run, each generation could identify its 'own' Doctor, but accept the others as 'genuine' reincarnations of the character. The sense of continuity is also accentuated because the story is all about *time* travel rather than just space travel: it has been possible for The Doctor to meet himself/himself on several occasion – “The Three Doctors” and “The Five Doctors”, for example. Equally, his enemies make return appearances, adding to the sense of continuity and familiarity. The Daleks and the Cybermen, the Master and the Sontarans encounter the various Doctors on numerous occasions, sometimes, confusingly, in a period *before* our/the Doctor's most recent encounter with them. The Doctor's temporal escapades thus create one of sf's unique disruptions to the narrative patterns of mundane television drama. This is a daring and unusual strategy, and as we will shortly see, one used occasionally, but to great effect, in *Babylon 5*. Whereas *Babylon 5* has greater ambitions in timescale and narrative form, the adventurous BBC series certainly demonstrates the potential for longer, more complex television narrative formats.

Tulloch and Alvarado characterise episodic serials such as *Dr Who* as having: "narrative continuity, but for a limited and specified number of episodes. The viewer has to see all the episodes encompassed within one title to understand fully the narrative structure and closure."⁶¹ They also note that it is not a common form, suggesting that *Out* and *The Prisoner* are two of the rare examples. I would add *Sapphire and Steel* to this list, and to play devil's advocate, it could be argued that a failed continuous series might become an episodic serial.⁶² *Blake's 7* maintains an overall thread for a while, but a very loose one – the fight between Blake and his crew, and Servalan and Travis is ongoing, as is Blake's quest to clear his name, and there are small groups of episodes pursuing a particular theme. However, within that context, each episode may be watched independently, so it fits the pattern of an episodic series rather better than one offering explicit narrative continuity. By the third and fourth series, the programme had lost Blake and its direction, and become a purely episodic adventure drama in space. Nevertheless, the episodic serial is an unusual form in comparison to the more common infinite continuous or sequential serial and the episodic series. Tulloch and Alvarado suggest that the latter rely upon audience identification with their protagonists or stars to retain

viewers; indeed, audience figures of any kind demonstrate that a considerable rapport develops between the viewing public and the characters of long-running series. The cliffhanger question of "who shot JR?" in *Dallas* occupied considerable tabloid newspaper space, running neck and neck with the current affairs of the period. So entrenched was *Dallas* in its audience's lives that eventually it became part of a social ritual. Indeed, in *Reading Television* (1978) John Fiske and John Hartley suggest that television functions as precisely this – a kind of social ritual in which "our culture engages in order to communicate with its collective self."⁶³

Fiske and Hartley also suggest that since the 1950s television has provided a modern version of the oral tradition. Once again this relationship brings us back to the bardic storytellers of ancient times, who provided a vital communicative link, passing on not just tales but also news and information. They argue that the bard operates as:

a mediator of language, one who composes out of the available linguistic resources of the culture a series of consciously structured messages which serve to communicate to members of that culture a confirming, reinforcing version of themselves. The traditional bard rendered the concerns of his day into verse. We must remember that television renders our everyday perceptions into an equally specialised, but less formal, language system....⁶⁴

So, long-running television series with socially immediate contortions of continually developing plot lines are effectively reproducing an ancient process. They reassure us of our collective moral values, but alongside this offer imaginary and heroic scenarios, drama and comedy, tragedy and melodrama. McLuhan considers that television "confers a mythic dimension on our ordinary individual and group actions. Our technology forces us to live mythically."⁶⁵ However, if this is so, in the soap opera the mythic dimension is more limited, concerned with the minutia of the 'us' and the 'now', rather than the future and potential of humanity as a whole.

Comparing television with ancient oral tribal traditions, Marshall McLuhan suggests that "we are back in an acoustic space. We have begun again to structure the primordial feeling, the tribal emotions from which a few centuries of literacy have divorced us."⁶⁶ McLuhan's choice of the word 'tribal' is important, and we will return to

it when we discuss cult television, but more important for now is the association with the oral tradition and the epic. Notably, it is a science fiction series, *Steven Spielberg's Amazing Stories*, which articulates this more clearly than any other television programme. The title sequence begins with a cave-dwelling family sitting around a fire, listening to a storyteller. As he speaks, images of action swirl around, whisking us through time and space, until the sequence ends. We are now facing a television set surrounded by a contemporary family, on which we see the cave-family listening avidly to their storyteller.

Television series have in common with the epic both an ability and a need to multiply incident, to embellish the narrative whilst simultaneously building the story. Equally, in the epic, glimpses of the past and future are gleaned through oracles, seers, or gods, and help to create a sense of destiny. Previously, television could only offer repeated information from a limited variety of sources – the built-in redundancy we still find in slow and verbose soap opera, or the sit-com characters' refusal to learn and progress. Flashbacks are impossible for live television, and flash-forwards impossible for any medium unless the narrative design is comprehensively pre-planned. Television's association with live broadcasts is in reality mostly a thing of the past; nevertheless, it is interesting that it still clings to the impression of live performances. As demonstrated with the soap opera, even when we are aware of recordings, as an audience we willingly collaborate in this deceit. In *Seeing Things* John Ellis highlights *Blind Date* as a prime example of this feature of modern light entertainment television, saying:

For several years *Blind Date* has been for many of the young and not-so-young British viewers the early Saturday warm-up for the real-life sexual rituals of the later evening. It has a sense of co-presence with its audience which is so strong that it is able to present itself as live and be taken as a live programme whilst its strong internal time-scale is clearly impossible. *Blind Date* has a strong sense of irony – its ritualized exchanges are riddled with a knowing archness – but in the matter of its sense of liveness no irony is present. Indeed, it depends upon its illusion of liveness for it to work at all for its audience.⁶⁷

The graphics and video highlights of last week's dates underline the real nature of the show, actually a clever combination of recording and live performance. So do the holidays taken in an impossibly summery Europe while we watch in the middle of November, the sudden changes in costume and hairstyles, and the pre-recorded comments

of the contestants as they sit in the studio, discussing their likely success or failure as a potential couple. Ellis observes how the internal time of the programme:

can be a total fabrication, one that could easily call into question the programme's claim to be happening 'now'. Yet it does not. *Blind Date* is a triumphant piece of popular entertainment, and the whole show depends for its connection with you the viewer, creating the sense of 'they're living what we're living'. This is why *Blind Date* deploys the rhetoric of liveness so effectively.⁶⁸

When television is not faking liveness through its programmes, it does so through its scheduling; even though many programmes are not live, by default their transmission must be. Nevertheless, the vast bulk of television today is pre-recorded; even the news, that one-time bastion of liveness, is reliant upon video recording as well as the time-honoured tradition of live reporting. Not only do news programmes use live footage, but because they are condemned to report incidents which have already occurred, they preempt reality, adopting the strategy of announcing what will be: "The government will release a report later today" or "At a meeting this afternoon, the Prime Minister will announce... ." News is televised in the present, and is mostly concerned with recorded images of events past, yet it paradoxically insists upon co-existing in the future: it does not just report historically, it also predicts the future.⁶⁹

How then, can we summarise an aesthetic of television? Broadcast television is certainly no different to other media in its dependence upon an established series of components, genres, and formats. Its fake or genuine liveness creates a sense of co-presence well suited to its domestic location. Its segmentation and active use of narrative redundancy is a means of compensating for any potential distraction. It relies upon the pleasure of repeated textual encounters, using minute variation in repetition, and multiplicities of infinite storylines or unchanging situations to entrance its audience. However, its tendency to provide secure and safe scenarios in its dominant dramatic forms, the sit-com and soap opera, suggests that it does not actively seek to stimulate intellectually, nor does it readily challenge the status quo, either ideologically, philosophically or visually. In the past it has mostly relied upon static formulae where action and words matter more than the *mise-en-scène*, because, as Caldwell argues in

Televisuality (and as we shall explore in more detail later), the quality and definition of the television image has been its weakest element.

Science Fiction and Televisuality:

With the general aesthetics of television identified, we can now turn to science fiction television, and in particular to Caldwell's phenomenon of televisuality. As *Dr Who* demonstrates, although sf can challenge the patterns of narrative format in television, it still utilises common television forms, and thus remains accessible. This creates a problem. Science fiction is a genre intent not only upon fracturing our sense of reality and creating a degree of cognitive estrangement, but also in tipping the balance between foreground and background in a manner alien to mundane texts. Science fiction would seem to require the very thing that television has traditionally lacked. In *Inside Prime Time*, Todd Gitlin quotes television executive Scott Siegler's bitter remark that "science fiction doesn't work on TV."⁷⁰ Given what we have established, this would seem to be true. However, from *Captain Video and his Video Rangers* (1949-1955) through *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64) to *The Outer Limits* (1963-65, and 1995-2000), science fiction has always maintained a presence on television. *Dr Who* lasted some twenty-five years, *Star Trek* has regenerated itself for four (soon to be five) separate series, with the exception of the original series, all renewed for seven seasons. Sky 1 spends over one-seventh of its output (over twenty-seven hours per week) on science fiction; there is also a dedicated cable and satellite channel, Sci-Fi. (See Appendix B). In a world where the overwhelming majority of mundane television series do not make it through one season, the renewal of such sf series suggests that Siegler is incorrect. What then of science fiction on the small screen?

At the beginning of this dissertation, I said that I would not be offering a thorough history of modern sf. The period with which I am chiefly concerned is the mid-1980s onwards, when *Babylon 5* was conceived. Nevertheless, it is worth taking our own brief time-trip through the 1960s to the 1980s, to see what was generally occurring in sf

literature and film, and whether or not the patterns were echoed in television. If we follow John Hellman's conclusions regarding *Star Wars* and its sequels, the revitalised genre of fantasy and sf in the 1970s onwards applied a tourniquet to wounded American aspirations post-Vietnam. At a time when the western was in rapid and fatal demise *Star Wars* offered the United States a new way forward, a new sense of destiny. It was a way of rearranging, if not re-writing, its national mythology in the same forward-looking way as the Western, but in a new arena, one not tied by historical detail. Gripsrud reminds us of an important conclusion from Todorov:

Like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong ... the existence of certain genres in one society, their absence in another, are revelatory of that [society's] ideology and allow us to establish it more or less confidently.⁷¹

Todorov's suggestion that the popularity of a genre holds clues to the ideological and cultural preoccupations of its producing society is useful. Certainly, the cultural earthquakes of the 1960s reverberated through sf as much as any other genre, but not to the same destructive degree as in the Western. Literature, in tune with other cultural movements (the Civil Rights Movement, the French *Nouvelle Vague* etc.), offered radical challenges to the establishment. The so-called 'New Wave' science fiction movement began in the UK at about the same time. In 1963, Michael Moorcock argued that science fiction writing lacked anything of interest. Ballard, that most visual of UK sf writers, joined in, arguing that the "biggest development of the immediate future will take place, not on the Moon or Mars, but on Earth, and it is inner space, not outer, that needs to be explored."⁷² Ballard is often credited with the creation of the term, but as Colin Greenland reminds us in *The Entropy Exhibition*, it was actually J. B. Priestley who introduced the concept, almost a decade earlier, in a 1953 essay for the *New Statesman and Nation*: "They Come From Inner Space."⁷³

British authors like Aldiss and Ballard explored this Inner Space, offering protagonists whose suicidal psychoses permitted a remarkable estrangement from reality. An overwhelming sense of fatalism permeates and distinguishes their work, and is most evident in that of Ballard. In contrast to this British psychological masochism, American

authors such as Harlan Ellison (later to act as consultant for *Babylon 5*), Roger Zelazny, Dick and Delany, were playing around with language, creating a dominance of style over narrative with their intensely self-conscious approach. Delany, responsible for the extraordinary “Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones” (1969), developed later works around linguistic and post-structuralist theories, and wrote of the language of sf in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* and *Starboard Wine*. Whereas the British New Wave was a concerted movement, headed by Moorcock, Aldiss and Ballard, the American equivalent was arguably merely a collection of authors pursuing individual, albeit similar, fictive goals. Nevertheless, its efforts allowed an escape from the dried-up and oftentimes childish tales of space ships, eroticised alien women, and interminable UFO invasions of which Moorcock and Disch complain. Its legacy was the authors of the 1970s, the likes of Joe Haldeman, Le Guin, and James Tiptree Jr. – a pseudonym of feminist author Alice Sheldon.⁷⁴ With them, came the rise of feminist sf and a resurgence of high fantasy – Moorcock himself having played no small part in the British market for wizardry and wild romance. In combination, this offers more open texts, which challenge the cultural and gender stereotypes found in much fiction, mundane or otherwise. This sf was very much the product of its era.

An important aspect of this disparate literary movement was that much of it brought sf back to Earth, just as Ballard had hoped. In doing so, it followed Asimov’s socio-historical chart of sf’s generic development, leaving behind adventure and technology and introducing psychological and social aspects, which continued into the politically conscious 1970s in film, mutating gradually into thematically clear social concerns. These took a variety of forms: abstracted and dislocated humanity in *THX 1138* (1971); the after-effects of germ warfare in *The Omega Man* (1971); ecological disaster and human tragedy in *No Blade of Grass* (1971) and *Silent Running* (1972); and – a horror for the wealthy USA in particular – a nightmare of mass starvation in *Soylent Green* (1973). A fine example of sf’s topical exploration of civil rights and racism emerges in Pierre Boulle’s *La planète des singes* (1963). The film version, *Planet of the Apes* (1968), visualises it well, thrusting Charlton Heston’s astronaut Taylor into a nightmare world where brutal apes rule a race of silent enslaved humans. We gain a

cryptic sense of time from the chronometer in the spaceship, but no verifiable location is given until close to the end of the film – only the evidence of a space journey and a predatory suspicion. The awful truth about human arrogance remains concealed within the cruel twists of Taylor's fateful experiences until that irretrievably shocking final scene. "Oh my God, I'm back. I'm home. All the time, it was – " Taylor cries, helpless, as that awful realisation dawns, and he stares up from the golden wave-swept beach to a fractured, sand-blasted Statue of Liberty.

The 1970s offered a period of modernist expression and idiosyncratic 'authored' experimentation in Hollywood, producing some of the most daring visions of the future. While Penn, Peckinpah, and Altman were playing with displacement in modern myth with gangsters (*Bonnie and Clyde*), westerns (*The Wild Bunch*), and film noir (*The Long Goodbye*), in the sf store John Carpenter's *Dark Star*, and Steven Spielberg's *Duel* all signified brave new worlds ahead. Michael Crichton's novel *The Andromeda Strain* (1971, filmed in 1973) basically offers the BEM (bug-eyed monster) at microscopic level, but counters the expectation of action with slow and painstaking scientific process. If, as Lawrence Alloway suggests, film suspense occurs when nothing is happening, *The Andromeda Strain* offers it by the bucketful,⁷⁵ and as Vivian Sobchack observes, the result is an "exceedingly suspicious and watchful" audience.⁷⁶

Westworld (1973) another Crichton script, and a superior version of his own *Jurassic Park* (filmed in 1993), demands just such an audience. It is a marvellous blending of the western and sf genres, demonstrating very clearly how similar the two could be, and yet how very much sf can generate estrangement. Taking up the theme of robot-gone-mad, Yul Brynner's black-clad cyborg gunfighter strolls enigmatically around the theme park of *Westworld* as if gunslinger Chris were awaiting the return of his *Magnificent Seven* colleagues – an indication of how inter-textual these films were, even in the 1970s, and perhaps indicative of the concurrent demise of the western itself. It also provides a demonstration of a growing unease with technology, one reminiscent of the robot Maria in *Metropolis*, and noted previously in *Colossus* (1969) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), amongst others, an enduring theme continued in *The Terminator* (1984) and *The Matrix* (1998). In a review of *Westworld*, Mead and Appelbaum suggest that

most sf film tends “to disguise, and thereby reveal more schematically, the social or psychological preoccupations of the moment.”⁷⁷ Mead and Appelbaum seem to suggest that this happens almost by mistake, but I would contend that sf must always do so. The worlds we create in our visual media are reflections of our own world, but they remain distinct: real and reflected, media mirrors society. Science fiction considers ways in which society’s dominant ideologies are expressed and perpetuated, and although sf narrative may be set in the future, it can only ever represent an extrapolation of the current fears, tensions and aspirations dominant in our world today. The precision of its descriptions is remarkable, and the parallel this shares with sf film is simple. Science fiction narratives permit a reflection of reality; film is a reflection of reality.

So it is notable that while the Western collapsed in the 1960s and 1970s, literature inspired sf films galore on the American big screen, mostly shunning alien monsters and space exploration for societal and environmental concerns. Their success was quickly taken up on the small screen. Television sf included: *Lost in Space* (airing from 1965); *Star Trek* (1966); *Time Tunnel* (1966); *The Invaders* (1967); *Land of the Giants* (1968); *Planet of the Apes* (1974); *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974); *The Invisible Man* (1975); *The Bionic Woman* (1976); *The Gemini Man* (1976); *The Man From Atlantis* (1977); *The Fantastic Journey* (1977); *Logan’s Run* (1977); *Battlestar Galactica* (1978); *Project UFO* (1978); *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (1979) – and so on. Certainly enough series existed for one or two seasons to suggest that sf’s broad scope is a subject seductive enough to invite creativity and audience interest.

However, while film and literature explored ecological and social issues very much in keeping with Asimov’s socio-historical pattern of generic development, television programmes remained closer to his adventure and technology dominant eras in theme. Other than those drawn from film or literature (like *Planet of the Apes*) they were mostly concerned with space/time travel, alien invasion, new technologies, etc. The Earth-bound series often bombarded their audiences with a lot of secret, brand new technology – *The Six Million Dollar Man*’s slow-motion bionics, or *Time Tunnel*’s massive whirring computers nursed through problems by grey-haired, bespectacled scientists in lab-coats. Unable to offer visual displays equal to cinema, they spent little

time on a complex, challenging mise-en-scène and followed instead Horace Newcomb's 'static formula – dynamic situation' pattern,⁷⁸ concentrating upon plenty of formulaic action set against a static starry backdrop, and lots of flashing lights. *Buck Rogers* in particular relied upon a cringe-making use (even then) of 1970s multi-coloured disco-rope lighting, and indulged not infrequently in disco dancing itself. Meanwhile, Buck's erstwhile associate, the lovely Colonel Wilma Deering, prowled around in skin-tight lycra bodysuits which one might consider slightly incongruous for a military officer of her rank – a sharp indication of the tokenist display of women on television at the time, despite the narrative's suggested equality of gender.

Turning to examine television more closely, and still in keeping with Asimov's pattern of evolution (if not its timescale), we can see that American television series of the later 1970s and 1980s gradually began to draw on social issues of their time. With less history than literature and film, the television medium simply required a little more time to work through the process. However these series demonstrated a growing preoccupation with ingenuity (not the least in dramatic performance) and commensurately, with technological advantages. In the era of the Cold War, the necessity of such advantage was played to great effect, and there was generally a constant military presence within series such as *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *Time Tunnel* and *Project: UFO*. This is continued today in shows such as *Stargate SG-1*, *Seaquest DSV* and *Space: Above and Beyond*. Many of the programmes articulated a steady underlying narrative of pride in American scientific and technological achievement, often underlining intellectual capability through fastidious detective work and logical deduction.

Like its literary companion, British television provided more politically critical programmes than its American counterpart, which took over the role of studio film as the chief purveyor of an apparently unified culture. Popular themes in UK series such as *Blake's 7*, *Changes*, *The Prisoner*, and *The Survivors* included the grim face of totalitarianism, issues of equality and civil rights, the dangers of technological advance, ecology – issues previously seen in the novels and films mentioned earlier. However, not all American sf shows were tacit Cold War propaganda, nor politically naïve, and it is impossible to discuss television sf without considering the phenomenon that is *Star Trek*.

The first series ran for three seasons from 1966-69,⁷⁹ and with its now famous split infinitive, the voice-over introduction (Video Extract 2)⁸⁰ announces its rationale each episode:

Space: the final frontier.

These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise. Its five year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life, and new civilisations – to boldly go where no man has gone before.

The driving force behind the original series, Gene Roddenberry, believes it was “probably the only show on American television that said there is a tomorrow, that all the excitement and adventures and discoveries were not behind us.”⁸¹ As Roger Fulton says, each story was basically “a morality tale, and the series maintained an indomitable faith in man as an essentially noble animal.”⁸² The major characters, Captain James T. Kirk, First Officer Mr Spock, the ship’s doctor, Leonard ‘Bones’ McCoy, and Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott transported down to various planets, weekly encountering strange new worlds and a variety of alien life forms. The show generally closed with a didactic message from Kirk to the aliens/planetary residents about the mistakes they had made and the errors of their ways, or an old fashioned military victory over either of the long-standing galactic enemies, the Klingons and Romulans. Nevertheless, Kirk and his crew also learned lessons, and showed their audience new ways of seeing. Roddenberry points out that by creating:

a new world, with new rules, I could make statements about sex, religion, Vietnam, unions, politics and intercontinental missiles. Indeed, we did make them on *Star Trek*: we were sending messages, and fortunately they all got by the network.”⁸³

Star Trek certainly broke with tradition: in Mr Spock it had a satanic half Vulcan/half human with pointed ears, as Kirk’s right hand man, Lt. Uhura, at Communications, was black, and the helmsman, Mr Sulu, was Japanese. In the second season, Mr Chekov, a Russian, joined the bridge crew, allegedly when a *Pravda* critic noted icily that the first nation to have a man in space was not represented.⁸⁴ At the height of the Cold War, this was forward-looking indeed, and the ambitions of the series were

equally bold. The pilot episode was rejected by network chiefs for being “too cerebral”, and aside from missing the point of Spock’s ears, they also rejected the idea of a woman (Majel Barrett) as the Captain’s second in command.⁸⁵ Equally brave is “The Empath”, which tests the boundary of television drama in its stark images of self-sacrifice and sado-masochism, whilst “Plato’s Stepchildren” famously features the first inter-racial kiss (between Kirk and Uhura) on US television.⁸⁶ Although *Star Trek* was cancelled at the end of the 1960s, its popularity amongst its fans remained undiminished,⁸⁷ and Paramount negotiated with Roddenberry for its return (in some form) from 1975.⁸⁸ Following the success of films like *Star Wars*, *Alien*, and *Blade Runner* in the late 1970s/early 1980s, the original crew made a bold return to the big screen in 1979 with *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Popular with new and old audiences, a revitalised and less idealistic television version arrived in the guise of *The Next Generation* (1987-1993), followed by *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) and *Voyager* in 1994.

Star Trek is not a soap opera, but it has undeniably created a universe: with so many series, episodes, and characters appearing since the original series, it would be impossible not to do so. Characters guest between series, adding to the sense of community and to fan amusement. For example, Mr Scott appears in *The Next Generation*’s “Relics,” an episode about a Dysonsphere, and a grumpy and elderly Dr McCoy appears in the pilot “Encounter at Farpoint,” performing the role of a good champagne and blessing those who sail in the Enterprise ‘D’. *The Next Generation*’s Enterprise was at hand to introduce *Deep Space Nine* via Captain Picard, whilst from the crew, O’Brien, Keiko, and eventually Worf, moved to the former Cardassian station to become regulars. Troi, Barclay, and Riker are all characters from *The Next Generation* who have appeared in *Voyager*, and the ship itself departed from the Deep Space Nine station in the first episode “Caretaker”.

Despite no preordained story arc in the *Star Trek* universe, there is a painless and natural expansion through the sheer volume of episodes. There are frequent references to the adventures of Kirk, Spock, or Picard in the later series. Even characters/guest stars who have played key roles can be used as the source of amusement and in-jokes. In “Q-less” (a first season episode of *Deep Space Nine*), the omnipotent alien Q turns up to

taunt Sisko, whose earnest and serious character he mocks, comparing him unfavourably with the more passionate Picard. He also makes repeated visits to *Voyager*, wooing Janeway, and creating havoc upon other occasions. Suzi Plakson plays Worf's memorably independent and strong-willed half-Klingon/half-human mate K'Ehleyr in several *Next Generation* episodes.⁸⁹ When she later guest starred as a member of the Q Continuum in *Voyager*'s "The Q and the Grey" she emerges second best from an argument with B'Lanna Torres, *Voyager*'s half-Klingon/half human engineer, and remarks archly how she truly admires Klingon women – "they're so spunky."

Special episodes, invariably created for some particular anniversary, reinforce this effect in the *Star Trek* universe. The most notable and technically/aesthetically impressive is "Trials and Tribble-ations", a 1996 episode of *Deep Space Nine* made for *Star Trek*'s 30th birthday. Using the need for time travel as a plot device – to ensure the past happened and to prevent an assassination attempt on the legendary Captain Kirk⁹⁰ – it returns to footage of a successful comic episode from the original series: "The Trouble with Tribbles". New computer processes allow the *Deep Space Nine* characters to interact with the original Enterprise's crew, with the result that the episode is not only technically impressive, but also manages to mock itself with in-jokes to which we, the (fan) audience, are privileged. We laugh at the intelligent and independent Lt. Dax's delight at the 'micro-skirt' she puts on, and the remarkable difference between very human appearances of Klingons in the original series and the deeply ridged exo-skeletal brow of Worf and his *Next Generation* Klingon compatriots. "We do not discuss it with outsiders" says a deadpan Worf, already suffering from the presence of small, furry trilling Tribbles – who dislike Klingons as much as Klingons dislike them. The episode also expresses a rare comment on its peers and competitors, casting a saucy jibe at *The X Files*. The time-travelling event (frowned upon by a Federation whose 1990s incarnation despairs of Kirk's 1960s maverick heroics) is investigated by two dour agents whose names are a play upon those of Dana Scully and Fox Mulder: Loxley and Dalmur. Just to underline the point, "Trials and Tribble-ations" immediately echoes *The X Files* graphic mission statement: "the truth is out there." When Sisko asks if the investigators are sure they "don't want anything" (to drink or eat), the reply is curt: "Just the truth, Captain."

The joke about *The X Files* is unusual in *Star Trek* terms, and the visit by *Voyager* to Earth in the 1990s in “Future’s End” is equally rare. For the most part *Star Trek* series solidly and enduringly insist upon an isolated existence, they are self-referential, but shirk from external reference. Occasionally, and particularly in the original series, there are references to human history, even the arts, but very rarely to science fiction, and any degree of self-awareness seems mostly reserved for the films. In *Deep Space Nine*’s “Far Beyond the Stars,” Sisko dreams he is a struggling black science fiction writer in the 1940s (although this portion of the narrative is about racism, not science fiction); in “Little Green Men” Quark, Odo and Rom are responsible for the infamous Roswell incident. In “Past Tense” a transporter malfunction sends the command crew back to a troubled San Francisco during the 21st century, but because this is still an unknown future to the audience, again there is little sense of historical and cultural continuity. *Voyager*’s “11.59” has Janeway remembering her ancestor Shannon O’Donnell at the end of the 20th century, and in “The 39s” the mystery of lost pilot Amelia Earheart is solved: along with various other people from 1939, she is revealed to have been kidnapped by aliens. Janeway also consults Leonardo da Vinci when she is suffering from stress, and during an attack by the Hirogen (“The Killing Game”) the holodeck is transformed into a World War 2 French Village resistance scenario. However, the choices are substantially distanced through time and myth, and yet again by their holographic status, so they remain loose and intangible. In “Bride of Chaotica” Tom Paris’ love of 20th century Americana asserts itself. He creates a holodeck adventure program called “Captain Proton” – clearly based upon the 1930s and 1940s sf strip adventures. However, even here, rather than referring to an actual television series, like *Flash Gordon* or *Buck Rogers*, a new one is created – thus stressing *Star Trek*’s reluctance to really connect with its (and our) own science fiction past.

Star Trek seems to fear referring to television, entertainment, and science fiction in general. In *The Next Generation*’s “The Neutral Zone” Data tells us that television “did not last much beyond 2040.” As 2040 approaches this becomes less likely, but the entertainment we see on the Enterprise and Voyager is live – musical recitals, plays, poetry readings. Picard reads actual books: he doesn’t download texts from the computer.

Watching film, video, or television, whether for entertainment or for education and news, is an apparently deviant activity – it is Tom Paris who adores these things and he is *Voyager*'s semi-reformed rebel. This creates a cultural desert, because a context is so hard to come by – *Star Trek* functions, quite literally, in a vacuum. By way of contrast, in *Babylon 5*'s opening episode “Midnight on the Firing Line” (1.01), Garibaldi spends what appears to be an entire day hunting for someone with whom to share “his second favourite thing in the Universe.” Ultimately he coaxes a bemused Delenn into joining him – to eat popcorn and watch Daffy Duck in *Duck Dodgers in the 24th-and-a-half Century*.

It is perhaps telling that the most politically correct version of Roddenberry's universe, *Deep Space Nine*, was complemented by a return to more traditional maverick adventurism in the shape of *Voyager*. With its mere five humans (Sisko, Jake, O'Brien, Keiko, and Bashir) *Deep Space Nine* offered a multi-planetary ensemble: Odo the shapeshifter, Kira the Bajoran, Dax the Trill, Quark the Ferengi, and Garak the Cardassian. It is a remarkable collective. *Voyager* is notably the first *Star Trek* series to have a female Captain, Kathryn Janeway – a colleague of mine jokingly identifies it as “the one with the woman driver.”⁹¹ He is right; Janeway's gender offers the only difference: in every other sense *Voyager* echoes the original series. In effect, after *The Next Generation*'s diplomacy, an early attempt at making political correctness interesting in space, with the advent of *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*, the *Star Trek* universe fragmented.

The problem was beginning to announce itself even during *The Next Generation*'s television run. In the fifth season's two-part episode “Unification” (1991), Captain Jean Luc Picard takes a message to now Ambassador Spock from his dying father, Sarek. Undercover and in enemy territory on Romulus, Picard roundly criticises Spock for his dangerous “cowboy diplomacy,” an explicit reference to the clear-cut ideology of the original *Star Trek*. However, by the end of the narrative, that same cowboy diplomacy has resolved the problem whilst Picard's more delicate diplomacy has faltered and failed. As *The Next Generation* finished, so *Deep Space Nine* began, offering a darker, politically astute and gradually more thread-based story based on a space station. Within a year, *Voyager* arrived, providing a nostalgic return to the grand old days of Kirk's considerably

less politically aware exploits. Forged in the heat of the Cold War and the new frontier politics of Kennedy, the *Star Trek* universe had no-where else to go. As Gareth Roberts observes, “born of the old order ... [it] has responded to the multiplicity of influences and pressures from within and without its culture by fracturing.”⁹²

Although the sheer volume of *Star Trek* episodes has created the illusion of a coherent, continuing story, the only real continuity is provided through its theme tune, opening credits, its characters and the vessels. This is a problem. It can be frustrating to watch the same characters on a “continuing voyage” suffering from wilful collective amnesia, failing repeatedly to make the connections the audience can make so very easily, and only occasionally selecting even any self-referential aspect of ‘history’. After five or seven years in space it is hard to believe that the crew could be quite so baffled when it encounters a new life force. Truly episodic series, such as *The Outer Limits*, avoid this problem because they offer entirely discrete narratives, the cast, scenario and dramatic dynamic are unrecognisable from week to week, only the theme, voice-over and series rationale creates the continuity. *Welcome to Paradox* (1998-) follows a similar format, but unifies its discrete stories through the location of its futuristic city, Betaville, and in *Twilight Zone* style, has an introduction from its latterday Rod Serling – Paradox himself. *Deep Space Nine* is a slightly different case, with its later development of a continuous story (it crescendos like a telenovela), and with it the ability to be explicitly self-referential. However, this is not so much a story arc as a complex and elongated thread: the threat of impending war with the Dominion and Cardassia. Mostly, the series is episodic and localised, it has no epic ambitions. Like *Star Trek* and *The Next Generation*, its sense of unity emerges chiefly from musical theme, main titles, characters, and the space station itself.

Science fiction has enjoyed a continual presence as episodic television, despite the medium's apparent resistance to the very things sf inherently offers. To a degree, it provides watered-down sf, alien locations and experiences which are seldom explored in a fashion that might create strong Brechtian distanciation or Suvin's dynamic of cognitive estrangement. The better, more daring shows, like the original *Star Trek*, at least grasped the potential for social commentary to which Roddenberry and Ballard referred earlier.

They occasionally took the contemporary issues of war, racism, sexism, and ecology, etc., outside of their own society, where they could be examined with less prejudice and subjectivity. Fulton says “its heart was in the right place,”⁹³ and without a doubt, *Star Trek* was the epitome of 1960s sf television, and the standard by which later sf series, including those from the *Star Trek* stable, are judged.

Babylon 5 is a very different proposition. It presented its pilot in February 1993, shortly after *Deep Space Nine*’s January premiere. To refresh our memories, it ran for five seasons (110 episodes plus pilot), offering a complex pre-planned finite narrative with tantalising flash-forwards and flashbacks that demanded a high degree of attention. With the exception of the first and final seasons, *Babylon 5* seldom offers anything remotely suggestive of a discrete episode. It changes its music and main titles each season (Video Extracts 3-7) kills off established characters, refuses to indulge in technological gloating, and absolutely denies redundancy in either its visuals or verbiage, yet paradoxically contains more cgi imagery *and* more complex dialogue than any of its contemporaries. Its stellar society is not some futuristic utopia: it harbours the same grim social, political, and ideological issues which haunt us today. What is done has an impact upon that which exists around it: nothing occurs in isolation, whether a drink at the bar, a joking aside, or a lie of political convenience. Its characters are not happy, settled, or content; they are in conflict with themselves and with those around them. They have frailties, addictions, dubious aspirations and remarkable courage. They evolve, life evolves – the universe of the story evolves. We follow them into fire, into darkness, and into death. Fail to watch an episode attentively, or worse still, miss it entirely, and quite literally, we risk losing the plot.

This leads us to the simple question of motivation: why? What suggested that such a radical departure from television practice (and in such an arguably remote genre) was remotely viable at this point in time? Straczynski suggests that it is simply because no-one had tried to do it before.⁹⁴ But before we examine the series in detail, we need to ask what encouraged those involved in *Babylon 5*’s creation to risk breaking with an undeniably popular, relatively successful and firmly entrenched novelistic-episodic television sf tradition? The next chapter considers precisely *how* this was achieved in

both narrative and imagery, but John Thornton Caldwell's study of 1980s American television offers some good reasons as to *why* it was viable in 1993. With new technologies and a new ability to offer clearer resolution and thus immensely powerful images, something quite remarkable was happening within television. Style was coming to the foreground.

In *Televisuality* Caldwell identifies a particular moment in television aesthetics and a distinctive movement in prime-time television practice, one that plays with the limits of what can be done "within the constraints and confines of the limited television frame."⁹⁵ Suggesting how these developing practices may be identified and grouped together as the phenomenon of televisuality, he explains how they challenge television's:

existing formal and presentational hierarchies. Many shows evidenced a structural inversion between narrative and discourse, form and content, style and subject. What had always been relegated to the background now frequently became the foreground.⁹⁶

This sounds very much like the function and operation of the science fiction narratives we explored previously. In television, it manifests itself in a variety of fashions, most notably in ways associated with the use of imagery, of *mise-en-scène*. George Spiro Dible, the president of the American Society of Lighting Directors, considers that whether he is "lighting for features, (or) lighting for television, the light is identical." Caldwell also quotes Oliver Wood, the director of photography for *Miami Vice*, who suggests that on television "you can't be Vittorio Storaro. But what you can do is like music."⁹⁷ Thanks to new minds and new processes, in the 1980s television finally came of age: it shifted from a predominantly verbal medium into a predominantly visual medium. The new film stocks and transfer technologies created what Caldwell calls "film-style video – programming practice, acting, and promotional considerations encouraged a second industrial mythology: program individuation."⁹⁸ For the very reason that was previously used against excessive style in television, Director of Photography (DP) Steve Lerner, working on *Beauty and the Beast* (1987-1990), points out that the team were proud because:

the cinematography is really very important to it. The producers feel strongly enough to give the director of photography a credit at the beginning of the show rather than at the end – and *Beauty* is the only episodic TV show that does it that way.⁹⁹

As Caldwell explains, advances made during the 1980s challenged the accepted murky and “weakened” visual style of television, arguing instead that “precisely because the TV screen is smaller than that of film, *producers need stronger stylization*” (his stress). In the case of *Beauty and the Beast* the series was not only stylish, it was also self-aware. As Lerner reminds us, the DP is given visible credit for creativity, and on the same level as the writers, actors and other “above the line” personnel. The show has a unique visual style, located around fog and halo-effect filters, coloured gels, heavy use of smoke, and directional lighting. At the same time, a “reduction in script verbiage challenges the most conventional wisdom about television style” – *Beauty and the Beast* scripts tended towards under thirty pages of dialogue for the one hour of drama (including commercial breaks) rather than the more typical fifty or sixty.¹⁰⁰ This shatters the traditionally wordy nature of television scripts, their sometimes painfully expository nature and overtly redundant dialogue, through which pre-1980s television frequently re-articulated what can now be articulated solely by the *mise-en-scène*. The former strategy is based upon the belief that low resolution image of television is “unable *by itself* to communicate essential narrative detail.”¹⁰¹

Caldwell identifies other televisual features in production values of the 1980s, suggesting that if “some recent programmes work by selectively intensifying their *mise-en-scène* around an identifiable look, others depend upon ... a more eclectic and selective use of visual codes better termed ‘masquerade’.” In effect, other shows were parodying or “playing off” cinematic styles.¹⁰² *Moonlighting* was a particularly keen perpetrator of this “retrostyling.” Stylistic references came to be an audience expectation, with the “dramatic content of an individual episode” in the later series “frequently tied to a specific visual style” – Greg Toland/Orson Welles deep focus, MTV, or film noir, etc..¹⁰³ These references did not just pay homage to mass film or television culture, but also to styles associated with “more marginal taste cultures, like independent film.”¹⁰⁴ Caldwell draws upon Newcomb’s use of “the tension between the static formula and the need for some generic change as a partial basis for his proposal that continuity is one of the chief aspects

of a television aesthetic.”¹⁰⁵ Arguing that during the 1960s and 1970s a “static formula – dynamic situation” dominated, Caldwell suggests in the 1980s television was busy challenging this, adapting and/or aping of the “mythology of cinema’s visual prowess.” This occurred to the extent that even noise and poor or grainy docu-film quality could be adopted into these new televisual codes:

The stylistic and presentational aspects are the very elements that change on a weekly basis, whilst characterization becomes the medium’s static and repetitious given from episode to episode. With *China Beach*, *thirtysomething*, *The Wonder Years*, *Quantum Leap*, *Northern Exposure* ... even less prestigious shows like *McGuyver*, the viewer is now encouraged to speculate before each episode about what the program might aesthetically transform itself into this week: documentary, dreamstate, oral history, music video, homage to Hollywood or expressionist fantasy.¹⁰⁶

There is another element here which helps create television where ‘style’ was something to be bought into. Just as those despotic silver pepperpots, the Daleks, and the self-absorbed computer Orac in *Blake’s 7* will be forever associated with Terry Nation, so *Star Trek* will be forever associated with Gene Roddenberry. Following his untimely death in 1991, Rick Berman took over the reigns of *The Next Generation*, and with Michael Piller and Jeri Taylor, expanded the franchise with *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*. Nevertheless, the association remains very much with Roddenberry: the name has entered into *Star Trek* mythology. Equally, the posthumous *Earth: Final Conflict* (1997-) is seldom known just as that, but rather as *Gene Roddenberry’s Earth: Final Conflict*. *Gene Roddenberry’s Andromeda* (2000-) is similarly titled; the cult marketing power of the Roddenberry name as a signal of production values, ideology, and association overrides the actual show itself. According to Caldwell, this is another feature of televisual programming, which can be located:

along an axis formed by relative degrees of authorial intent and manufactured notoriety. ... Part of the emergence of the quality myth in 1980s television was that television was no longer simply anonymous as many theorists had suggested. Names of producers and directors assumed an ever more important role in popular discourses about television. While Aaron Spelling and Norman Lear were already household names, other producer-creators like Michael Mann and Stephen Bochco began to be discussed alongside their actors and series in popular magazines and newspapers. As with American film in the

1960s, authorial intent played an important role as an indicator and guarantor of aesthetic quality in primetime programming of the 1980s.¹⁰⁷

As my reference to Terry Nation suggests, television has seldom been anonymous. Caldwell reminds us that “booming references to Quinn Martin and Mark Goodson-Bill Todson never left any doubt in the viewers’ minds about where their shows came from,” and by the 1980s producers like Stephen J. Cannell actually appeared in “dramatized filmed I.D.s tagged on to each of their episodes.” *Babylon 5* shares the identifying tag with these series – in this case the coveted “created by” at the end of the opening titles.¹⁰⁸ As Caldwell has noted, the expansion of television to a twenty-four hour multi-channel flood has created a potential monotony in the experience of viewing. A means of countering this emerges through boutique programming which:

constructs for itself an air of selectivity, refinement, uniqueness and privilege. The televisual excess operative in boutique programming then, has less to do with an overload of visual form than with two other products: *excessive intentionality* and *sensitivity* ... subtle orchestrations of televisual form that create the defining illusion of a *personal touch*.¹⁰⁹

In *Visual Digital Culture* (2000) Andrew Darley argues that “conceptions of genre (and authorship) are anyway being radically affected – outstripped, even – by the prevailing trends in contemporary visual culture.” Darley is predominantly interested in film, music videos and computer games, but given the dependence modern sf as film *and* television has upon digital visual effects, it seems useful to consider his conclusions. He suggests that in “many of the visual cultural practices of present day mass culture – long since saturated with (visual) mediation – intertextuality has become institutionalised as an aesthetic norm.”¹¹⁰ Here he draws on Thomas Schatz, who notes that the marketing and financial aspect of this is most notably apparent with blockbuster movies. They are designed as “multi-purpose entertainment machines that breed music videos and soundtrack albums, TV series and video cassettes, video games and theme park rides, novelizations and comic books.”¹¹¹ As a result of this, various fragments, styles and techniques are “constantly migrating between each of these and the other forms at play (i.e. TV series).”¹¹² For Darley:

when such texts are *already* – in the first instance – themselves thoroughly intertextual in character, then one begins to grasp something of the extent and structural reach of this new condition. A *familiarity* on the part of the spectator with previous texts, their styles, generic features, character tropes, and so forth, becomes a central feature of spectator involvement in current ones. Extra-textual reference recedes as such convolution and the complex circularity it involves takes over spheres of mediation.¹¹³

With the advent of increasingly complex digital image techniques, Darley suggests that there is an growing tendency to create sharper images, more “outlandish and yet more realistic by the same turn – impossible yet photographic (spectacle cinema, computer animation).” Authorship and genre would thus appear to be displaced by other aesthetic concerns – “the adjuster and the renovator.”¹¹⁴ *Babylon 5* is created by the new technologies that invade our lives ever more. Straczynski explains that “*Babylon 5* is perhaps the first series produced entirely as a slightly more advanced form of desktop television,” and although this is now more common practice, *Babylon 5* was certainly in the vanguard.¹¹⁵ The filmed episode is transferred to videotape, and then each take of each scene is digitised and edited on an Avid. When this is complete, the data is taken to post-production. The special effects are also produced through desktop work, and yet more pioneering work has taken place with the sets – many of which are virtual. The result of this is not just impressive science fiction scenarios and plentiful, convincing space battles, but also cheaper television. An hour of serial television such as *Space: Above and Beyond*, or *Voyager*, costs on average between \$1,000,000 and \$1,900,000. In contrast, *Babylon 5* costs considerably less than the licensed network-to-studio allowance of \$800,000, and according to Straczynski, was the first science fiction show to ever come in under budget during its first two seasons.¹¹⁶

Straczynski goes on to discuss the potential that such budget sf holds for television production. Comparing it to desktop publishing, he suggests that “instead of having a handful of monolithic studios, you may very well end up with dozens of boutique production companies capable of buying, selling and producing TV series.” He points out that this is useful to the writer, as it means more buyers for scripts, but again compares the potential situation to that of desktop publishing, when he warns that:

much of desktop television will be on a par with much of desktop publishing - eccentric, specialized, and often not very good. But it's a venue, it's coming, it's already real and it's going to need scripts like everything else.¹¹⁷

For programmes which create a very specific and challenging alternative reality, such as *Moonlighting* or *Wild Palms*, and especially for science fiction television, this kind of boutique production may simply be another way of describing Caldwell's 'personal touch'.¹¹⁸ The special effects co-ordinators, the matte artists, set and costume designers have as much to do with bringing the worlds of *Voyager* or *Babylon 5* to fruition as do the writers, actors and producers. Straczynski may well have been the driving force behind the series: he planned it for years prior to its pilot episode, wrote a majority of the episodes himself (ninety three episodes out of one hundred and eleven – including the pilot), and had input in the remainder. However, he also worked with a team of writers, directors, cast, and crew, many of whom he knew from previous collaborations, much in the fashion of the old studio system.¹¹⁹ He was available to discuss the work with fans on the Internet, name ships and transient personnel after those same fans, and posted countless emails with his responses to alternately inane and in depth questions.¹²⁰ It was an extraordinary marketing strategy and exemplified the personal and sensitive element Caldwell identifies – the fan/cast messages board on Paramount's *www.startrek.com* website could not compete with this. Put simply, this is not so very far from the system that enabled directors like Hawks and Ford to use a stable of actors and crew, and could only contribute to the sense of personal ideological and visual continuity within their films.

The association with fandom drawn upon by Straczynski is worth examining. Continuity and repetition is as much part of the phenomenon of fandom as it is an aesthetic of television. Fans relate to repetition and to a sense of the secure, the familiar, and the everyday, things which encourage a feeling of ownership. This a major feature of cult television, and science fiction, due to the open nature of its texts and its strong reliance upon potential rather than reality, seems to attract more than its fair share of fans, creating something akin to McLuhan's tribal following. Caldwell also identifies the tendency of prime time televisual shows to attract cult followings, citing series such as

Moonlighting, Miami Vice, Twin Peaks and *The X Files*. He suggests that they gained the appreciation of a dedicated fan following “not simply because they were visual, but because they also utilized self-contained and volatile narrative and fantasy worlds, imaginary constructs *more typical of science fiction*.” (my stress) He goes on to point out that:

like sci-fi, televisuality developed a system/genre of alternative worlds that tolerated and expected both visual flourishes - special effects, graphics, acute cinematography and editing - and narrative embellishments - time travel, diegetic masquerades, and out of body experiences. Such forms, simultaneously embellished and open, invite viewer conjecture.¹²¹

John Ellis suggests that during the middle years of the twentieth century the purchase of certain commodities “connoted difference in class, in social position, and in cultural aspiration.”¹²² Even as a child in the 1960/70s, I remember not being allowed to watch ITV. Insofar as my class-conscious parents were concerned, the disposable (and thus valueless) medium of television was bad enough, but commercial television was not just light entertainment, it was intellectually stunted light entertainment and thus inappropriate for us. When the VCR emerged, it too was seen as a means of entertaining the great unwashed – who knew no better, the poor souls. Commercial television and VCRs carried the same stigma as using milk without a milk-jug, or eating food in the street, and so forth. At the turn of the 20th century things have changed: appearance still matters, but it is purely superficial: class does not underpin it. Commodity now comes “in an increasing number of different guises: in special editions; different packaging; decorated with logos; or with subtly differentiated design. What matters now is ‘style’.”¹²³ Cable/satellite television offers ‘packages’ to suit image conscious ‘lifestyles’ in the form of grouped, themed channels. These in turn provide identifiable ‘boutique’ productions, programmes aimed at specific audiences, and creating specific worlds, like *Friends, Frasier, The X Files, Beauty and the Beast* etc.¹²⁴

As a result, the characters and the series in which they exist, like television itself, are commodities, and like other commodities television productions have a first-use value. We are willing to pay more to see something first; in our economic system, value is tied to time, and today television is no exception to the rule. Watching live Premiership

football has a greater value than to watch it live on television, but seeing it live on Sky has a greater value than to record it, or to glimpse only the highlights on “Match of the Day”: this is how premium channels can exist. Film is the best example, passing through thresholds of diminishing value from a world premiere to a first-run cinema release, to premium movie channels, to video release (first as rental, and then as purchase), to free-to-air terrestrial presentation. Walt Disney certainly understood the values within this principle from the outset, manipulating the market by restricting access to specific products – once the Disney brand name had been established as not only viable commercially but desirable publicly. His studio films were released for a limited period only, so that there were decades between the initial showing of *Fantasia* (1940) at cinemas and its rerun fifty years later. The same applies to videos of the famous cartoons; we are instructed to buy *The Jungle Book* (1967) or *The Aristocats* (1970) now, because they are only available for a limited period. Such commodities are thus at a premium.

For television programmes however, particularly for a series with predetermined narrative ambitions such as *Babylon 5*, there is a complication. Television series need to establish themselves in order to gain value and this takes a period of time not always allowed by the immediate demand for high ratings. The extraordinarily popular sit-com *Friends* is a good example of how this can develop successfully. Initially Channel 4 broadcast it as a late night twenty-something show. As its audience figures demonstrated a growing cult following, it was shifted to an early prime-time niche (which also expanded its audience demographics, whilst retaining its original following): now it is on almost continually, on both Sky 1 and Channel 4 as a mainstream programme. In order to be successful, this is almost essential. After its debut, a cult series needs to go through a period of mass availability in order for its audience to locate it for themselves. This poses a bigger problem for sf than for any other genre, since, as we established in Part Two, other genres tend not to share its derogatory social location and the channels open to it are reduced. ITV and (since the demise of *Dr Who*) BBC 1 seldom show sf unless in film form, leaving it to the already selective terrestrial channels of BBC2 and Channel 4. Sky 1 shows over 27 hours of sf per week and the Sci Fi channel is dedicated to repeats of

popular shows from the 1960s onwards, but their audiences are still limited in comparison to the potential terrestrial audience. (See Appendix B for sample listings.)

As television moves from terrestrial analogue to non-terrestrial digital, creating a division between broadcast and narrowcast (niche channel) television, the channels multiply and the extensiveness of television's structures becomes more apparent. Television now offers a wide variety of channels, programmes, and episodes, different seasons of different programmes may be seen on different channels at different times according to the funding available, and are thus at a premium with their fans. On Saturday nights in July 2000 the sixth season of *The X Files* aired on BBC1; on Sundays Sky One screened the seventh season. Terrestrial broadcast viewers waited a considerable time to see the final series of *Deep Space Nine*, which was shown on BBC2 from January 2001. Sky One completed its run of the seventh (final) season in early 2000, while the more cash-strapped BBC was repeating the third season. The corollary of this is that if you miss a programme and are unable to record it on video, there is a very good chance that you can watch it at a later date. However, the first-run value of an episode, and its promised narrative revelation/cliff-hanger etc., commands a fan value which equates to a financial value: to watch later means that its worth is greatly diminished.

The existence of a solid fan audience also allows considerably more flexibility with narrative strands, thus bringing us to the increasing narrative complexity of the mid-1980s onwards. The series that Caldwell discusses, particularly those like *Twin Peaks* and *The X Files*, heralded more than just a new style of cult television imagery. During the 1990s we also became accustomed to more sustained alternative worlds. Programmes experimented with a new kind of narrative, one demonstrating complexity, and possessing long-term threads, some of which may lie dormant over a period of time but which could be drawn together at various points within the series/seasons. So importantly, we were introduced to new kinds of stories, with longer narrative threads and mini-story arcs. These narrative patterns originated in mundane drama, with shows like *NYPD Blue* and *Hill Street Blues*. In the 1990s science fiction took up this trend. *Deep Space Nine*, *Space: Above and Beyond*, *The X Files*, *Stargate: SG-1* and the other sf series born during or after Caldwell's televisual era all share this tendency. However,

unlike the occasional single-season mundane drama which was plotted-out in advance – *Murder One* is a prime example – the earlier sf series’ *lack* of pre-planning leads to narrative inconsistencies and/or a need for rather extraordinary twists in plot and narrative in order to justify/explain previous occurrences. They also moved a small distance away from the redundancy of soap opera dialogue and the continual one-liners of the unchanging sit-com. *Dark Skies* (1996-7), *Space: Above and Beyond* (1995-6), and to a lesser extent *The X Files* (1993-), provide useful demonstrations of this penchant for threads and mini-arcs. The former two programmes also demonstrate the dangers of remaining too much of a cult show rather than entering, however briefly, into mainstream and more accessible programming schedules.

The ambitious *Dark Skies* was a conspiracy theorist’s dream, rumoured to be planned for five seasons, the diegesis of each spanning a decade. The first season covered everything from Roswell to the Beatles to Kennedy to Howard Hughes to Elvis Presley, all contextualised by an alien invasion, but its ratings were poor, its relentless associations pushed too far, and it failed to survive. *Space* was no different, although it was perhaps victim of the ratings for another reason, changing its story arc midway for a stronger, far darker line, more akin to the commercial and corporate deception of the *Alien* films. It also developed into a series more concerned with origins of life in the universe, whereas it began primarily as a war narrative merely set in the future (2063). Its concentration on military language and hardware – the hammerhead fighters, drop ships, and the carrier Saratoga – and the associated military experiences – boot camp, mine-fields, tanks, prison camps – in particular signal this. *Space*’s original premise had young Nathan West joining the marines in an effort to find his girlfriend, missing after aliens attacked the colony on which she and Nathan were to live. It suffered from Nathan’s questionable rationale in its early episodes, serving merely as a quest for lost-love and creating something dubbed “Melrose Space” by its many critics, before it hit the beaches running and found its way as a fine and thoughtful war drama in a futuristic setting. As it re-developed it allowed two older officers, McQueen and Ross, more narrative function, and as do many successful series, created an ensemble cast rather than relying so much upon its original three very young leads. It even changed its main title sequence to assure

us of its new approach, but to no avail. It had already lost its audience and was cancelled after just one season. It has nevertheless maintained a cult status, repeated twice by both BBC2 and Sky 1, and screened by the Sci Fi Channel in the USA (1998-9) and the UK (2000).¹²⁵

Of the three, *The X Files*, an updated version of *Project UFO*, is the most successful, and makes the most obvious use of a long-term thread – Mulder’s quest for his abducted sister – although as Stephen Keane suggests, by 1995 it had perhaps:

shown its hand and players too soon, revealing too much covert plot and too many covert characters from behind the shadows. Peaking too soon, it could well be that Chris Carter has had to compensate by overcomplicating the conspiracy.”¹²⁶

Notably more isolated episodes emerged in seasons five and six, whilst longer threads returned in season seven, as did a heightened degree of paranoia (common also to *Millennium*, *First Wave* and the short-lived 1998 series *Prey*). The traditional contract period for cast and crew working in American television drama is seven seasons; *Babylon 5* is unique in arranging a five year contract only – again underlining its predetermined narrative future. Even *The Next Generation* bowed out gracefully after its seventh season, although it made way for the darker descent of *Deep Space Nine* and the adventures of *Voyager*.

Deep Space Nine appears to contain a story arc, but it is not until the final two seasons that it asserts itself fully, and a great deal of time is spent in individual, light episodes, which detract from the overall narrative, rather than embellishing it in any way. In “Badda bing, Badda bang” in the midst of the final days of war against the invading Dominion, the crew have time to depart to the ever-useful holodeck for a kind of *Ocean’s Eleven* (1960) gambling escapade, helping out their friend, the holographic lounge singer, Vic Fontaine.¹²⁷ Even in the hands of the Dominion, Ezri Dax and Worf spend more time arguing about their relationship than they do in resisting their captors. There is also no strong sense of continuity, since the story was not pre-planned; thus elements which occur in earlier seasons jar with the conclusions reached. After seven seasons, and with intermittent contact with the non-linear and non-corporeal wormhole aliens, it transpires that Sisko is the child of one of them. Yet when Sisko first encounters the aliens they

apparently have no knowledge of him or corporeal life forms, of Bajor – of anything outside their wormhole. Coincidences abound, and the story climaxes in a sudden, final feature-length episode rather than arcing gracefully to a conclusion. This is not to detract from the power of episodic television, nor from *Deep Space Nine*'s latterly dark future vision, and its occasional disillusionment with Star Fleet hegemonic ideology. However, its critique is ill-sustained and purely character-driven – and thus less effective.

One of the main problems is that *Deep Space Nine* retains the novelistic approach of episodic television identified by Caughie: there is nothing epic (in *any* sense) about its struggles. It is simply about a group of people living on a space station, and their adventures, which happen to culminate in a war. It relates the loves and losses of Jennifer and Sisko, Sisko and Kassidy, Bashir and Jadzia Dax, Jadzia Dax and Worf, Worf and Ezri Dax, Ezri Dax and Bashir, Odo and Kira, Kira and Vedek Bareil, Vedek Winn and Gul Dukat. The war against the Dominion and Cardassia is invariably seen only in the terms of their experiences, not of its greater impact. *Deep Space Nine* does not attempt to leave the personal and the individual experience within a small cohort of officers. There is no reason why it should attempt to be anything else of course, the format is clearly successful enough, but this means that *Deep Space Nine* does not stand out particularly against the backdrop of other multi-narrative thread series.

More importantly, *Deep Space Nine* holds few surprises and seldom obscures information from its audience. In *Babylon 5* we stand with the uneasy alliance behind the “Conspiracy of Light,”¹²⁸ unaware of the military potential of its enemies and unsure of exactly *who* those enemies may be; at times, we are uncertain of Sheridan and Delenn's own methods and viability – certainly of their overall capability. Unlike *Babylon 5*'s Shadows and Vorlons (and even the Earth forces of President Clark, to whose thoughts and ambitions we are never made privy, and thus who remain mysterious and threatening), we share the plans, intentions, fears and confidence of *Deep Space Nine*'s invading Cardassians and Dominion forces. We know only fractionally less of their plans than the intentions of Sisko and his crew. Thus the audience is reassured that the Federation will succeed in its ambitions, if only because potential ways of escape and victory are shown to us on a frequent basis. It might not be by the end of each episode

that the problem is resolved, the alien defeated, the romance concluded, the lesson taught, but these events are only around the corner.

The insertion of long narrative threads within a series places a different demand upon the audience. Episodic series offer recognisable scenarios and continuity through their crews and vessels, but seldom demand knowledge of past episodes. *Stargate: SG-1* possesses continuing themes (such as the search for Daniel's wife and the aliens who abducted her, and the ongoing battle of the Tok'ra against the System Lords). Regardless of these threads, *Stargate: SG-1* still relies mostly upon the weekly episodic adventure, with occasional two and three-parters for variety, and the option to return intermittently to a previous theme. This then is not the same commitment as a soap, or mini-series, which offer frequent reminders via character discussions, expositional scenes, or introductory voice-overs ("last time on"). A series with longer narrative ambitions like *Space: Above and Beyond* expects still more commitment: the story and its complexities evolve slowly – and this is the risk: if it is initially pitched inadequately, its audience may have turned off before the story truly begins. The final few episodes of its brief season demonstrated a remarkably complex narrative philosophy, and in McQueen, created a character who forged an ideological break in the representation of the post-Vietnam soldier. It was too late: the initial dominant tale of lost love in space had already turned off viewers in their droves.

All of these post-1980s series are less explicit than older forms of television, expect more attention from their viewers and are thus perceived as more rewarding, more complex and perhaps indicate the potential for intellectual challenge within the television medium. As Caldwell suggests:

the morasslike flow of television may be more difficult for the TV viewer to wade through than film, but television rewards discrimination, style consciousness, and viewer loyalty in ways that counteract the clutter ... spectatorship in television can be quite intense and ingrained over time.¹²⁹

Babylon 5, lacking in overt redundancy – but brimming with clues and signposts to future events, and thus constantly hooking and re-hooking its audience's attention – is the epitome of the kind of television we can perhaps now expect. It rewards the careful,

committed viewer who watches it just once, and positively indulges those who enjoy repeated video screenings. And it co-exists, standing alongside soaps and series which rely upon redundancy more as a matter of style than merely as a means of involving their audiences. In *Television Drama*, Caughie notes that:

non-classical television drama which is accorded the status of art and which has an investment in the creativity and inventiveness of its authors – whether they be writers, directors, or producers – the unexpected comes to be expected: originality carries a higher premium within the system than conventionality.¹³⁰

Caughie proposes a new mode of authorship for television, one perhaps implicitly identified by Caldwell's study of televisuality. He suggests an author who can make:

conscious choices of form and meaning, aware of the limits of the system, the institution, and the language; who is invested with freedom and honoured for creativity, but whose freedom is constantly qualified by calculation: how much or how little difference can the system take in this context and at this time?¹³¹

I would argue that this is what Straczynski managed to do during the twelve year period when he visualised and gathered together his team to create *Babylon 5*. His major selling point is perhaps precisely what he suggests, that he dared to do what no-one else had tried, thus bringing novelty to the sf genre on television in the form of a pre-determined epic story arc.¹³² *Babylon 5* truly broke with tradition.

Caughie also suggests that in cult television there is more potential for a relaxed detachment and the possibility of “a space of engagement which is also a critical one.”¹³³ – Walter Benjamin's “absent minded” spectator/examiner applies to television as well as cinema in the new Millennium.¹³⁴ This is echoed in Brecht's desire for a spectator who watches and yet can still be critical – a critical detached engagement. “The time and space of television,” says Caughie:

seem to provide the conditions for the existence for such an engagement. ... the ‘everydayness’ of space works against the fantasmatic identification with the narrative space which one experiences in the cinema. While neither may produce precisely the estrangement effect which Brecht promoted in the theatre, they seem to me to produce the conditions for the detached engagement of irony.¹³⁵

Art television can suggest an intelligent audience, a critical and aware audience, cognisant of the potential creativity of an authored text.¹³⁶ This is another important feature of the epic of course, a sense of detached objectivity, and an awareness of this potential within television opens up new areas for dramatisation. Caughie's argument produces two results. Firstly, like art cinema, it suggests that art television is less bound by generic convention, and relies "less on an iconography of meaning which is already in place and which has become meaningful through repetition, and more on the articulation of meanings whose force lies in their difference and originality." This is Brechtian and Formalist territory, the process of estrangement and distanciation "central to the basic functioning of art," a process which allows us to see reality (whatever that reality may be) as if for the first time, or certainly as we have never experienced it previously. The second result is a problem for sf: shown week after week at the same time, with the same theme tune and mostly the same programme preceding it to set the mood, any "difference is absorbed with astonishing rapidity."¹³⁷ Thus, it is hard for a radical series to continue weekly and still offer what sf claims to offer. As we established at the beginning, science fiction creates imaginary worlds where the very ontological structures we take for granted are challenged at every step through the process of cognitive estrangement, meta-linguistics, and the foregrounding of the background – whether on the level of the minute or immense. Even to argue that the unexpected is expected is to argue that conventionality has set in. After a while, *NYPD Blue*'s zip pans are not as flamboyant and not as disorientating, the extraordinary is ordinary in *The X Files*, and the bizarre is quite routine in *Twin Peaks*. The exotic becomes insipid, mundane – the very antithesis of science fiction.¹³⁸

The nature of these television models nudges us towards concluding that science fiction can work well on television in episodic form, but that it is rather more difficult to sustain. The single text is no longer common to television schedules, and the long and complex but finite serial has never really existed. Television's constant repetition and multiplicity in both mise-en-scène and at the various levels of narration, and through its extensive structures (channels, series/serials, and episodes), creates a unique visual and aural world. Unlike cinema, television still relies upon a generic explicitness; whereas

since the 1970s cinema's genres have undergone a remarkable evolution,¹³⁹ television maintains an insistence upon identifying the sit-com, or the soap, or the drama. Traditional 'reality' within television relies upon a sense of the continuous and contemporaneous, yet it is paradoxically recorded and segmented, thus creating a visual and aural regime in contrast to the chiefly nostalgic and discrete nature of cinema. The series of realities associated with television have only recently changed, and as Caldwell has identified, they are manifested partly through an ability to offer increasingly elaborate and dynamic visuals, and also through the ability to sustain longer and more complex narrative threads.

This occurs partially through more recent commodity forms, such as video recording technology – which is again in contrast to the traditional association of television as a disposable commodity – and also through the newer technologies facilitating more complex visuals. Caldwell argues that television has taken the graphic route – layering its images, creating composites and using painterly effects (akin to those of Bierstadt and Church) – essentially doing everything it can to dismiss the accusation of shallowness made by “critics, detractors, and film production people because it is flat.”¹⁴⁰ Caldwell makes the connection between the worlds of his televisual texts and sf, and as I have argued in previous chapters, the foregrounding of the background, and inversion of everyday discourse, is precisely what is attempted by sf narrative. Given the visual benefits of the new technologies flourished by television producers in even mundane texts, it seems that rather than readily accepting Siegler's negative axiom, we would in fact be wise to regard television as a potentially ideal location for science fiction. Finally, it has come of age: not only can it tell stories of cognitive estrangement, it can deliver them with persuasively 'realistic' visuals.

Caldwell's arguments identify a major shift in the way the television audience is perceived. The writings of Williams and Ellis et al., on the nature of broadcast television and its potentially distracted viewers emerged before the time when the pre-recorded and iconoclastic stylised video-television in the form of series such as *Miami Vice* and *Moonlighting* began in the USA. These programmes drastically changed the nature of television, and they occurred during a period when American society was moving away

from general terrestrial broadcast channels to selective non-terrestrial narrow-casting. Here there is an increased opportunity to offer texts demanding more attention because the audiences have selected the kinds of texts they wish to view. Their interest is not guaranteed, but it is far more assured. Added to this, video-recording technologies afford more opportunity to record the programme and watch it at leisure, in peace and with full attention. Cult television is the order of the day: television itself has changed. In an era dependent ever more upon narrowcast television, we have video – we have the opportunity to watch and watch again. We select from the constant stream of trash and tabloid television the programmes that, as individuals, we believe overtly address us – those that ask us to be motivated and selective in our viewing.¹⁴¹ It is unlikely that we have, *en masse*, more time for television viewing. We do however, have far more from which we can select, and of necessity that requires more discrimination. Watching television on the cusp of the 20th/21st centuries is not inherently about distraction: it is about the *choice* to pay painstaking attention.

It would seem apparent that the Trekker, the Simpsons junkie, the videophile cannot exist if we merely offer a casual glance at television, but as John Ellis points out, the glance and the segment relate to each other: the segment is necessary if the audience's attention is even possibly divided. Information comes in small pieces, easily digestible and until recently, oft repeated in- and ex-diegesis. The feature of television differentiating it most strongly from film is its narrative segmentation and repetition. *Babylon 5* may have created a new form of complete narrative for television, but like other series emerging from the period of televisual experimentation, importantly it does not change the use of the segment. Each episode has six acts, including the trailer and tag, although they may be of varying lengths, and the episodic narrative rises intermittently to strong suspense to permit the commercial interruptions of American television.

This initially sounds insignificant; we have already established that patterns of narrative are designed to fit the segmented nature of commercial television, and writers for American television are well accustomed to five or six commercial breaks within their programmes. However, one of *Babylon 5*'s most daring episodes, "Intersections in Real Time" (4.18) sums up the narrative strategy of the entire series. The very pattern of

commercial television is used in order to subvert audience expectation and enhance the narrative situation. Here the 'real time' is the narrative of the episode, the interrogation and torture of John Sheridan, while the 'intersections' are the uneven commercial breaks. As a result we lose our sense of time as much as Sheridan does. When the interrogator tells him it is morning, we can only wonder whether or not he is telling us the truth: we have no frame of reference. The segmented narrative is a key feature of television, yet here, the use of it superficially destroys our ability to be reassured by reading it. This is a key feature of sf and is used throughout *Babylon 5*: our frame of reference, our ability to contextualise, is constantly challenged in some manner. Sometimes this occurs through the format of the episode, more commonly through the narrative, the imagery, and the ideologies they present. At the very time it is becoming familiar, it challenges the audience anew, visually, verbally or ideologically. The structure of *Babylon 5* is thus unlike science fiction as we have come to know it on television, although by any account it contains all of those elements we would associate with the genre, merely represented in a fashion which is unfamiliar.

Babylon 5 is *not* one of Caldwell's televisual products; many of his criteria for televisuality would not sit easily with its production and his discussion concerns particular programmes made in a particular era. If *Babylon 5* is not one of them, it *is* an heir to them, and was certainly made possible by their innovations. Indeed, it was conceived of at a time when they were at the height of their experimental reign. A finite series of 110 episodes plus pilot could not have been made prior to the period of televisual narrative experimentation of the mid-1980s/early 1990s. *Babylon 5*'s narrative structure makes it the first series to physically show what will or may happen in later seasons. It does not just to fall back on the past as detection in the form of a flashback, but also uses predictions – in the form of seers, visions, or flash-forwards. Just as the vanishing Babylon 4 exists in the past, present, and future for its crew, so *Babylon 5* also exists in all times. Previously, not only was there no technological ability to facilitate this kind of narrative, but the creation of a sustained alternative world had not been attempted outside of mundane narratives like soap operas and sit-coms. The advent of the 1970s/80s mini-series, like *Centennial*, *Roots* and *North and South* offered harbingers of what was

to come, but not even in mundane fiction has a finite, epic series of such complexity ever been attempted before on American television. A science fiction narrative such as *Babylon 5* was made possible because of the changes Caldwell identifies, and perhaps also because we constantly seek something which straddles that fine line between innovation and repetition. For an evolutionary and enigmatic series like *Babylon 5*, the careful construction of a specific scenario from the start is akin to the putting together of a jigsaw puzzle. An hitherto unprecedented degree of audience loyalty is required, but it is the end result of a trend which has now been in existence for over fifteen years. *Babylon 5*'s existence in the 1990s is facilitated by "very informed and motivated" viewers, who watch and buy into Caldwell's 'boutique' television.¹⁴²

There is one final point to consider here. In an 1980 article about Samuel R. Delany's technotopia, Theresa Ebert suggests that the icons and conventions of sf are dispersing, the very fictivity of the genre becoming its prime concern. Ebert argues that although mainstream sf literature still exists, a kind of metascience fiction has emerged, radically reconfiguring the genre, displacing the old dominant internally, because:

in terms of the writing conventions of science fiction, it is no longer effective – it has become 'automatized' – and externally, in the context of the culture at large, it does not generate the imaginative energies it used to – the development of space technology has made it an almost routine *real* thing! The 'dominant' of postmodern science fiction consequently, has shifted, and a new aesthetic and thematic hierarchy has been established within the genre according to which the very 'fictivity' of science fiction is its primary element. It is perhaps important to emphasize that during the course of such a change none of the (older) components of science fiction is completely lost.¹⁴³

Ebert's claim is that metascience fiction backgrounds the traditional story-telling function and foregrounds the literary and aesthetic functions. As she says, fictivity – the fiction-ness of the story itself – has become the prime concern of the more adventurous sf author. It therefore revitalises the genre at a time when it has begun to take its own 'created reality' for granted, a tendency epitomised by the hardware-obsessed writings of

Asimov, and the techno-babble of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.¹⁴⁴ More importantly, it does so in an era when actual space exploration has itself become mundane, part of everyday life – the 1999 Mars Polar Lander, the European Space Agency's Arienne commercial rockets, the gradual building of an international space station, the first space tourist – and when it is academically acceptable to study 'the future'. In opposition to Spencer's thesis, Ebert suggests that metascience fiction:

acquires its narrative force from laying bare the conventions of science fiction and subverting its transparent language of mimesis and believability ... it employs a self-reflexive discourse acutely aware of its own aesthetic status and artificiality.

So although examples of the old-style exploration of outer space still exist in sf, their relative position as hierarchical narrative elements within the scenario has altered. They now exist to serve as a background against which “ ‘real fictious’ discourses take place.”¹⁴⁵

In Delany, Ebert identifies a writer operating at the vanguard of sf. More importantly, her comment identifies sf literature of the 1970/80s as symptomatic of a mature genre, one which can stretch the plausibility of its reality to new extremes without fearing overly that its audience will be confused or alienated. This maturity can revitalise the genre and allow more flexible ideological approaches, ones that explicitly question the fundamental ideological underpinnings of the genre itself. In some cases this can bring about the demise of the genre – it can be argued that the western fell to this fate. I believe that signals of a mature genre are now occurring in 1990s television science fiction. Just as the structure of *Babylon 5* demonstrates a break with traditional patterns of sf television narrative, yet still utilises enough of them to remain accessible, so the narrative ideology and visual representations also offer their own challenges. Space exploration is still a major component of life for the characters of *Babylon 5*'s galaxy, but it is an accepted technical ability. More important to *Babylon 5* is the wonder of the universe, the wonder of life – and the understanding of it.

As we have seen, the only other consistent, although not necessarily the most exciting, images of space and the future come from *Star Trek*. The original series of *Star Trek* split an infinitive and boldly went where no man had gone before. *The Next*

Generation didn't go anywhere new at all, although at its best and to its credit, it tried occasionally to reconsider what life, the universe, and everything might mean. *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager* are trying to get back to a simpler time, to where they began, but they demonstrate very little interest in what goes on outside, in the universe itself. They are linear, directional narratives, offerings formed by Prime Directives, a Manifest Destiny, and an ideology belonging more to the 19th century than to the 20th century, and more to the 20th century than the 23rd. They are still wagon trains to the stars, but when these wagons are attacked by hostiles, they can only circle, burning. They have nowhere to go.

Babylon 5's tactical reworking of television challenges the status quo. It breaks with this vision of a linear manifest destiny to the sublime western horizon, suggesting instead that a wondrous destiny is not 'somewhere else' but is all around us: it is everywhere. Part of the wonder lies in recognising it, and in seeing anew – making the familiar unknown and the unknown familiar. Another part of that same wonder lies in its verbal and visual articulation, whether by neologisms, transformed language, or poetic and visual juxtaposition. The language and imagery of *Babylon 5* asserts its poetic nature unashamedly: no other sf series has ever really claimed such a right. Delenn's oft-repeated mantra: "I am Grey. I stand between the candle and the star. We are Grey, we stand between the darkness and the light" leads us to recognise this.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps we too are Grey, the Complex in Pascal and de Chardin's Minute and Immense, standing between the Nothing and the Infinite. It is this that *Babylon 5* contemplates, and we will explore how it is achieved in the next chapter.

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- ¹ See, for example, Ellis, *Seeing Things*.
- ² Eco, 161-184.
- ³ Robert C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 3.
- ⁴ Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- ⁵ A detailed examination of the differences between cinema and television is not within the remit of this dissertation. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, and *Seeing Things*, are two of many texts examining the two media, whilst the work of Christian Metz, amongst others, provides a more psychological approach to the reading to visual texts.
- ⁶ Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 57.
- ⁷ Larry Pointer, *In Search of Butch Cassidy* (London: Constable Publications, 1979), and Anne Meadows, *Digging Up Butch and Sundance* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), both provide fascinating explorations of the Butch and Sundance myth.
- ⁸ Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 128.
- ⁹ Stephen Heath, "Representing Television," in *Logics of Television*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 267
- ¹⁰ Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 118.
- ¹¹ Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 120.
- ¹² Caughie, *Television Drama*, 136.
- ¹³ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 137.
- ¹⁴ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 139. See also Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, chapter 7.
- ¹⁵ Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 120.
- ¹⁶ Eco, 183-4.
- ¹⁷ Eco, 161.
- ¹⁸ Eco, 162.
- ¹⁹ Eco, 162.
- ²⁰ Eco, 164.
- ²¹ Eco, 165.
- ²² Eco, 165.
- ²³ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 133.
- ²⁴ Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 280.
- ²⁵ Caughie, 2000, 134.
- ²⁶ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson, and ed. M Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 100.
- ²⁷ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 134.
- ²⁸ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 134.
- ²⁹ Eco, 166.
- ³⁰ Eco, 167.
- ³¹ Eco, 168.
- ³² Eco, 169.
- ³³ Eco, 170.
- ³⁴ Tulloch and Alvarado, ix.
- ³⁵ Tulloch and Alvarado, x.
- ³⁶ Tulloch and Alvarado, x.
- ³⁷ Tulloch and Alvarado, ix.
- ³⁸ Credited to Irna Phillips, the series began on October 20th 1930. See Gripsrud, 163.
- ³⁹ Robert C. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), especially chapter 5.
- ⁴⁰ Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, 137-8.
- ⁴¹ Grisprud, 165.

- ⁴² Herta Herzog, "On Borrowed Experience. An Analysis of Listening to Daytime Sketches," in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. IX/1 (New York: Institute of Social Research, 1941), 91, quoted in Grisprud, 164.
- ⁴³ In order to establish the traditions upon which *Babylon 5* draws, and those it subverts, this section of the dissertation is chiefly concerned with the *forms* of television programmes rather than their specific *qualities*. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the satisfaction provided by episodic/single drama, and that considerable work has been carried out concerning the potentially avant-garde and redemptive nature of the soap opera. See, for example, Tania Modleski, *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Methuen, 1982), and Charlotte Brunsdon, *The Feminist, the Housewife and the Soap Opera: Feminist Television Criticism and Soap Opera* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1995).
- ⁴⁴ This is perhaps less true of the glossy American series such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*.
- ⁴⁵ Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 109.
- ⁴⁶ Serial television is also cheap television, having a relatively low cost for drama output.
- ⁴⁷ Richard Paterson, "Drama and Entertainment," in *Television: An International History*, ed. Anthony Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 104.
- ⁴⁸ Paterson, 104.
- ⁴⁹ Dietrich Berwanger, "The Third World," in Smith, 319.
- ⁵⁰ Paterson, 105.
- ⁵¹ Neale, "Questions of Genre," and Williams, "Is A Radical Genre Criticism Possible?" discussed in Caughie, "Adorno's Reproach," 127.
- ⁵² Grisprud, 178.
- ⁵³ Thank you John Ellis. From discussion and notes, August 2000.
- ⁵⁴ TARDIS is an acronym for "Time And Relative Dimensions In Space".
- ⁵⁵ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 95.
- ⁵⁶ The origins of the popular detective/crime story itself may be laid at the feet of serials like Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859) and *The Moonstone* (1868), which notably also contained gothic elements.
- ⁵⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. R. Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 47 and 50-51.
- ⁵⁸ Isaac Asimov, introduction to *Robot Visions*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1990), 10.
- ⁵⁹ All of these stories can be found in Asimov, *Robot Visions*.
- ⁶⁰ Wymer, et al., 9
- ⁶¹ Tulloch and Alvarado, ix.
- ⁶² Tulloch and Alvarado suggest that *The Cres* fits this bill, ix.
- ⁶³ John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (London: Methuen, 1978), 23.
- ⁶⁴ Fiske and Hartley, 85.
- ⁶⁵ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message* (New York: Bantam, 1967), 114.
- ⁶⁶ McLuhan and Fiore, 63.
- ⁶⁷ Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 34.
- ⁶⁸ Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 35.
- ⁶⁹ Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 75-77.
- ⁷⁰ Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), 23.
- ⁷¹ Quoted in Grisprud, 167.
- ⁷² J.G. Ballard, "Which Way to Inner Space?" *New Worlds* 118 (May, 1962): 117.
- ⁷³ Greenland, 52.
- ⁷⁴ Sheldon also used Raccoona Sheldon as a pseudonym.
- ⁷⁵ Lawrence Alloway, *Violent America: The Movies 1946-64* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 44.
- ⁷⁶ Sobchack, 125.
- ⁷⁷ Gerald Mead and Sam Appelbaum, "Westworld, Fantasy and Exploitation," *Jump Cut* 7 (1975): 12.
- ⁷⁸ Caldwell, 377n.
- ⁷⁹ In the UK it ran for three revised seasons, beginning in 1969.

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- ⁸⁰ Apologies for the poor sound quality.
- ⁸¹ Roddenberry quoted in Roger Fulton, *The Encyclopaedia of TV Science Fiction*, 2nd ed. (London: Boxtree, 2000) 543.
- ⁸² Fulton, 543.
- ⁸³ Roddenberry in Fulton, 542.
- ⁸⁴ Whitfield and Roddenberry, 250.
- ⁸⁵ Whitfield and Roddenberry, 124.
- ⁸⁶ Although the series aired from 1969, "Plato's Stepchildren", "The Empath" and "Whom Gods Destroy" were not shown until 22nd December 1993, and 5th and 19th January 1994 respectively. For details see Fulton, 544.
- ⁸⁷ Stephen Whitfield remarks upon the extraordinary numbers of letters the studio received in 1967-8 when *Star Trek* was threatened with cancellation. Whitfield and Roddenberry, 1968, especially Part V.
- ⁸⁸ Chris Gregory, *Star Trek: Parallel Narratives* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 39.
- ⁸⁹ K'Ehleyr appears in "The Emissary" and "Reunion."
- ⁹⁰ Legendary to both Sisko's crew and to us, the audience, of course.
- ⁹¹ Thank you Richard Berger – and sorry, but I couldn't resist it.
- ⁹² Gareth Roberts, "The Philosophy of Balance," in *The Parliament of Dreams: Conferring on 'Babylon 5'*, ed. E. James and F Mendlesohn (Reading: Science Fiction Foundation, 1998), 49.
- ⁹³ Fulton, 543.
- ⁹⁴ J. Michael Straczynski, "The Profession of Science Fiction," 8.
- ⁹⁵ Caldwell, 83.
- ⁹⁶ Caldwell, 6.
- ⁹⁷ From "Small Screen Shooters: Four Distinguished Cinematographers Discuss the Craft of Shooting for Episodic Television," *Millimeter* (April 1988): 143, quoted in Caldwell, 83.
- ⁹⁸ Caldwell, 88.
- ⁹⁹ Steve Lerner, ASC, "Beauty and the Beast: God Bless the Child," in *American Cinematographer* (April, 1989), quoted in Caldwell, 89.
- ¹⁰⁰ Caldwell, 89.
- ¹⁰¹ Caldwell, 90.
- ¹⁰² Caldwell, 90-91.
- ¹⁰³ Caldwell, 91.
- ¹⁰⁴ Caldwell, 92.
- ¹⁰⁵ Caldwell, 377n.
- ¹⁰⁶ Caldwell, 92.
- ¹⁰⁷ Caldwell, 13-14.
- ¹⁰⁸ The words are stamped on the station itself in the opening credits to the fifth and final season, which some might consider a risky and self-indulgent fracturing of the fragile membrane between the viewer's reality and that of the narrative – especially in science fiction, which is already making strong demands of its audience's suspension of disbelief.
- ¹⁰⁹ Caldwell, 105-6. His stress.
- ¹¹⁰ Andrew Darley, *Visual Digital Culture: Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres* (London: Routledge, 2000), 139.
- ¹¹¹ Thomas Schatz, "The New Hollywood," in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (London: Routledge, 1993), 9-10.
- ¹¹² Darley, 139.
- ¹¹³ Darley, 140.
- ¹¹⁴ Darley, 140-1.
- ¹¹⁵ J. Michael Straczynski. *The Complete Book of Scriptwriting*, rev. ed. (London: Titan Books, 1997), 109.
- ¹¹⁶ Straczynski, *Complete Book of Scriptwriting*, 110.
- ¹¹⁷ Straczynski, *Complete Book of Scriptwriting*, 111.
- ¹¹⁸ Perhaps this is also akin to the 2000 commercial for the Citroën Xsara Picasso, which shows a robot drawing Picasso-style imagery over a silver car, then wiping it clean as its human supervisor wipes past,

only to scribble a signature on the side after he is gone – mass robotic production with a personalising signature.

¹¹⁹ Visual effects designer Ron Thornton, writer Larry DiTillo, producer John Copeland and executive producer Douglas Netter had all collaborated with Straczynski on *Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future*. See David Bassom, *Creating 'Babylon 5'* (London: Boxtree/Channel Four, 1996), 54.

¹²⁰ Ironically, not mine.

¹²¹ Caldwell, 261. Caldwell goes on to point out that even shows “like *Moonlighting* and *thirtysomething* and *Northern Exposure* - eventually became highly conscious alternative worlds after extended runs in primetime. As stardom transcended characterization and Hollywood gossip and entertainment discourse transcended the meager confines of plot, viewers came to expect stylistic volatility because of the shows’ highly visible pretence and personalities.” Caldwell, 262.

¹²² Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 63.

¹²³ Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 63.

¹²⁴ At the 1998 Neutral Zone Convention in Newcastle I was the guest of actor James Morrison (T.C. McQueen in *Space: Above and Beyond*). Discussing McQueen with Morrison and numerous fans, I was astonished by the combination of pleasure and hostility towards a paper I had written about his character. I found myself fêted by fans who loved the fact that I had written about him, but vilified where my reading of his character differed even minutely from their own: their collective reading rejected even small difference of opinion. Morrison, who had helped me considerably with the paper, experienced something similar – fans only believed ‘good’ things about McQueen (and Morrison). Few people were openly willing to entertain the rationale for an act of torture McQueen perpetrates on a Silicate in “The Angriest Angel”. The only way of justifying the action was to dismiss it as ‘out of character,’ and as a result Morrison was harried mercilessly about it in a question and answer session. But his answer – that the information obtained from it was necessary, and thus McQueen sacrifices his personal sense of honour for the greater good – was unacceptable. It didn’t fit with the image of McQueen the fans had jointly created in a form of media communality via the Internet, discussion groups, and personal interaction. In the same way as anxiety of possession curls icy fingers around one’s neck when a programme starts and the ‘record’ button on the VCR is pressed, in the familiar world of the fan, possession/control of that world is vital. For the fans, my (and more remarkably, Morrison’s) questioning of that control was simply unacceptable and the ‘script’ was rewritten appropriately. If the distinctiveness of the series is what differentiates the *Simpsons* fan from the *Trekker*, the *Space* McQueen fan from the *Stargate* O’Neill fan, then the ownership and comprehension of it creates a kind of cult hierarchy. The everydayness of television, the ‘thereness’ of the actors and characters creates a false intimacy and familiarity which only enhances that sense of possession.

¹²⁵ See Jan Johnson-Smith, “Of Warrior Poetics and Redemption: *Space Above and Beyond*’s T.C. McQueen,” *The Journal of American Culture* 21 no. 3 (Fall 1998): 47-62.

¹²⁶ Stephen Keane, “Time Past/Time Future: Reading ‘Babylon Squared’,” in James and Mendlesohn, 24fn.

¹²⁷ Vic Fontaine is played by James Darren, who starred in the sf series *Time Tunnel*.

¹²⁸ Draal, occupant of the Great Machine on Epsilon 3, tells Sheridan and Delenn that he has learned of their involvement in a “conspiracy of light” in “The Long Twilight Struggle,” (2.20).

¹²⁹ Caldwell, 26.

¹³⁰ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 129.

¹³¹ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 131.

¹³² *Murder One*, Steve Bochco’s finite series following a murder trial, attempted this, but the length was one season, and it drew on a variety of other stories along the way.

¹³³ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 139.

¹³⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 665-681.

¹³⁵ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 140.

¹³⁶ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 140.

¹³⁷ Caughie, *Television Drama*, 129-130.

¹³⁸ This is not to detract from the earlier discussion of Eco and the importance that Neale et al., place upon repetition and difference. The science fiction genre also relies upon repetition (mostly in format), but it also

combines this with originality in narrative content and imagery – a more continuous and subversive challenge than with other mundane dramas. To a great extent, the mutability emerges through poetic juxtaposition.

¹³⁹ The distinctive genres common to the period of the studio system have mutated into a more flexible and fluid use of generic icons and narratives – since Vietnam and the cultural upheavals of the 1960s/70s the hegemony of the single genre has collapsed: more frequently they are now blended, sf and film noir, comedy and horror, etc. This is not to say that they were not blended before, but the trend is more marked in post 1970s film-making. For a useful discussion of modern Hollywood film see *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), and Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

¹⁴⁰ Caldwell, 148.

¹⁴¹ Caldwell, 26.

¹⁴² Caldwell, 26.

¹⁴³ Ebert, 93.

¹⁴⁴ Although a story may be written in an era deemed to be post-modern, there is no requirement for it to serve the agenda of a post-modern theorist: all forms may coexist, one is simply likely to be dominant during a particular era. Thus 'classical mainstream' sf flourishes alongside its post-modern relatives.

¹⁴⁵ Ebert, 93.

¹⁴⁶ First said in "Babylon Squared".

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PART FOUR

The Geometry of Shadows: *Babylon 5* and the Light of Destiny

The Geometry of Shadows – *Babylon 5* and the Light of Destiny

In the previous sections we examined the kinds of programmes commonly recognised and accepted as science fiction, and established the linguistic and other generic indicators which separate sf from mundane texts. As this research is concerned chiefly with an American sf series, previous sections also explored the national mythos of the USA. They paid particular attention to the epic story of the conquest of the West, and the creative use of sublime, luminous imagery as a visual endorsement of a God-given Manifest Destiny. This helps establish the extraordinary adherence by America's myth-making faculty to an illusory, fractured and anachronistic binary ideology, and allows us to contemplate the similarities between images of the West and what may be the frontier narrative's natural and more ideologically adaptable successor – science fiction.

Having thus traced the narrative tendencies of American sf television from the arrival of *Star Trek* in the 1960s, Part Three also explored the phenomenon of televisuality as examined by Caldwell, and established the heritage and unquestionable dominance of the four *Star Trek* series and their collective vision of the future. This section now turns to the series at the heart of this dissertation. It identifies the elements *Babylon 5* shares with some of its contemporaries, whilst also noting how strikingly it differs from the visual, narrational and ideological traditions of most American sf television. We previously noted briefly how *Babylon 5*'s reworking of television formats both exploits and subverts the familiar patterns of domestic television narrative – as demonstrated by the strategy of episodes such as “Intersections in Real Time” and “The Deconstruction of Falling Stars” (4.22). **Philosophical and Narrative Strategies** turns to explore in detail the alternative universe created within the programme's diegesis, and the ethical and ideological complexities articulated by its innovative visual and verbal processes of making meaning.

Babylon 5's rejection of binary ideology is examined through two main themes in the series. This occurs firstly through a self-reflexive articulation of historical awareness, both of our reality and of sf's own various realities, and our place within those histories, and secondly, through an exploration of the relationship between the limits of our understanding and our sense of destiny. This is explored in **History and Ideology** and in **History and Science Fiction as Context**. *Babylon 5*'s clear basis in the historical epic tradition is well-suited to television's potentially relaxed detachment and distanciation (noted by Caldwell and Caughie), whilst its more novelistic and romantic moments balance this, permitting necessary personal involvement with characters and narrative, therefore encouraging continued engagement with its story over time. Exploring the story arc, these sections consider how *Babylon 5* draws upon history and ideology in order to create a link between the 'now' and the future, and 'then' and the future. **The Confused Citadel** examines the representation and role of the station and its inhabitants, whilst **Narrative Complexity** takes this further with a close examination of two key arc-related episodes, "Signs and Portents" (1.13) and "The Coming of Shadows." (2.09) It also analyses "Babylon Squared" (1.20), "War Without End" Parts 1 and 2 (3.16-17), and "Sleeping in Light" (5.22). These episodes allow an exploration of the combined issues of episodic and serial narrative, the use of suspense and time travel as devices creating Suvin's cognitive estrangement, and the unique means by which foreshadowing and flash-forwards enhance that suspense and maintain/encourage audience loyalty during the five-season run.

Interconnected with this are manifestations of a powerful ideological break. **Verbal and Visual Imagery** identifies the verbal and visual strategies adopted by *Babylon 5*, such as its marked use of poetic language, particularly from Delenn, Kosh and G'Kar. It repeatedly exposes its linguistic methodology and juxtapositional mise-en-scène in a manner that Rabkin, Delany, Ebert, and Spencer note as typical of science fiction. *Babylon 5*'s linguistic strategies, and its remarkable and extensive use of luminous special effects, combine to bring the background to the foreground with spectacular effect: this technique is compared with that of contemporary series such as *Voyager* and *Stargate: SG-1*. This allows me to demonstrate how *Babylon 5* not only utilises poetic

language and cognitive estrangement as identified by the Formalists, Delany, and Suvin, but also how it draws upon concept of the Sublime, as illuminated by Pascal, de Chardin and Robu.

Finally, *A New Epic, a New Ideology* explores how the imagery presented by *Babylon 5* re-articulates its narrative philosophy. Just as Bierstadt draws upon the Sublime, developing the illusion of depth through composite vistas, and creating visions of a directional Manifest Destiny in his frontier art, so *Babylon 5* also draws upon the Sublime, creating a televisual illusion of remarkable layering and depth in its mise-en-scène. Together with its radical combination of epic (predominantly in the first four seasons) and the novelistic (predominantly in early first and final season episodes), *Babylon 5* creates a liberal, omni-directional future universe: it offers an alternative to the frontier-based linearity upon which many other sf series depend. Like the narrative mise-en-scène of frontier imagery, *Babylon 5*'s universe has its own narrative, but this is attuned to its open philosophical stance and dramatic narrative. This not only creates a dynamic in the imagery, but endorses the offer of an alternative future, one that exists in strong contrast to the reactionary, linear and binary ideology perpetuated by other American sf series, especially to those emerging from the dominant *Star Trek* stable.

As a result, *Babylon 5*'s characters function as apparently free agents but within a narrative that suggests they operate with an imperfect understanding of work for which they are originally predestined. (Please refer to Table 1, page 5, for a reminder of the overall story arc, and see Appendix A for details of individual character arcs) There is a lack of the extraordinary confidence in (human) abilities generally demonstrated in other American sf series. Simultaneously, this uncertainty and its concomitant ideological openness are shown to be the route to a deeper, more profound understanding of our relationship to the universe. Through time travel, an infinite number of possible futures (i.e. parallel universes) are shown to exist, each created by the different choices made by their characters: thus the concept of predestination is quickly discarded and in its place, free will is established as a key aspect within *Babylon 5*'s reality.¹ Despite the unseen powers acting upon its characters, *Babylon 5* is intrinsically about "the power of one mind to change the universe."² The developmental and finite character of *Babylon 5*'s

narrative, its powerful use of language and its elaborate use of the Sublime within its mise-en-scène, articulate a new sense of destiny, where inclusion, not exclusion or polarity, creates the future.³

Philosophical and Narrative Strategies:

The chiliastic ennui of the mid-1990s and grim penchant for relentless paranoia in sf series (*The X Files*, *Dark Skies*, *Space: Above and Beyond*, *Millennium* and *Brimstone*), makes a post-war space station located in neutral territory a somewhat strange choice as the creative setting for a new ideological dynamic. Given also the history of conservative militaristic adventure and technology-based American sf television it seems doubly odd. Space stations do not provide popular story fodder, and few sf series, from America or elsewhere, have experimented with the idea. Not content to have Moonbase Alpha in calm orbit around the Earth, *Space 1999* (1975-78) casts the moon adrift in space, whilst the stationary *Deep Space Nine*'s post-war scenario relies almost exclusively upon its nearby wormhole for adventure. The European Community-funded *Space Island One* (1998-99) is little more than a mundane melodrama merely set aboard the Mir-like 'Unity' station, whilst the USA's *Mercy Point* (1998) is a medical drama: *ER* in space.

However, the timing and location of *Babylon 5* are just the beginning of the series' subversion. Rather than stating that the future only lies somewhere 'out there', in exploration, conquest and/or empire (lest *our* Earthly paradise be explored, attacked and/or conquered),⁴ in *Babylon 5* the future is all around. The meaning and existence of the station itself has as much bearing upon its past and present and future as do the beings associated with it. It exists in all that is said and thought and done, and emerges triumphant in that which the station comes to symbolise. Because it was, it also is and will be; because it will be, it also was and is. Time and space are confused with time and place in *Babylon 5*; it exists literally and symbolically across and through time. It is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic.

A striking aspect of *Babylon 5* is that it does not shy away from discussing belief systems. One of its central themes articulates a dissection of the western world's dominant belief system – binarism. It also quickly dispenses with the idea of “God”, of some divine Manifest Destiny, and with it, the basis of many dominant religions – the concept of a creator controlling and rewarding or punishing his/her inventions, or merely standing by to watch their struggles. Most sf series avoid theological exploration, unless the theology concerned can be defined mythically – Norse, Greek, or Roman, for example. However, although *Babylon 5* may have a quarrel with institutional religion, it has no intention of debunking the concept of faith itself. The sharing of religious ceremonies in “Parliament of Dreams” (1.05) and “Ceremonies of Light and Dark” (3.11) is treated with dignity, whilst “Convictions” (3.02) shows Brother Theo and his fellow monks as useful members of society, not secluded holy-men on mysterious errands. Many episodes have religious titles – “Believers” (1.10), “A Voice in the Wilderness” (1.18–19), “Revelations” (2.02), and “Passing Through Gethsemane” (3.04) – whilst others involve personal spiritual quests which we are urged to respect, such as “Grail” (1.15).⁵ Notably, in “Parliament of Dreams”, the first in a long line of people representing Earth's belief systems is an atheist: in *Babylon 5* no ideology is still an ideology, and regardless of its source “faith manages.”⁶ Nevertheless, it carefully avoids any commitment to a particular deity, human or otherwise, demonstrating instead the interconnectedness of spirit, a kind of ethical version of chaos theory. This is most strongly iterated in the time-travelling episodes. As Herbert Shu-Shun Chan suggests in “Space and Time Out of Joint”, Zathras' comments to Ivanova in the time rift in “War Without End” Part 2 underline this.⁷ When Ivanova suggests they are taking too long, Zathras reminds her that whereas they are both finite, they “cannot run out of time. There is infinite time.” The episode constitutes a calculus-worthy example of “infinity within the finite.”

The series carefully maintains that life forms have a soul – or spirit – and is perhaps the first sf programme to seriously suggest an existence beyond death. “Soul Hunter” (1.02) is the most detailed example, and “The Paragon of Animals” (5.03), courtesy of Lyta's telepathic scan, offers glimpses of a corridor of brilliant light along which a dying Ranger travels – one remarkably similar to the light announcing Lorien's

return in “Sleeping in Light”. The late Morden, Dodger, Adira and Zoe all appear in “The Day of the Dead” (5.08) – far from the ghostly, ghoulish, undead that the Gothic would have us imagine. To “pass beyond the Rim” or “to go beyond the Veil” is physical as well as metaphorical: it does not represent the end of existence, merely the end of a stage of existence. Those who return are aware that they are dead, but reticent of the idea that they bring with them with some sort of astounding cosmic awareness: they seemed unchanged, yet they actually do bring knowledge. With characteristic relish, Morden reveals to a stunned Lennier that he will betray that which he holds sacred: the *Anla'shok* (the Rangers), and thus Delenn. Zoe, a substance-abusing friend from Lochley's wild youth, brings forgiveness for the Captain, and a message for Sheridan from the first Kosh. In turn, Sheridan's parting words in “Sleeping in Light” (a gentle, awed “Well, look at that, sun's coming up”), suggest not death but metamorphosis.

Babylon 5 thus suggests that life in all its diversity – whether the universe itself, magnificent and timeless, or the finite beings inhabiting it, or the smallest sub-molecular particles – is sentient, integral, and thus eternally connected. The Minbari articulate this most clearly, rejecting the idea of a god, and instead choosing a more secular, yet still spiritual, philosophy.⁸ In “Passing Through Gethsemane” we learn that Minbari believe:

that the universe itself is conscious in a way we can never truly understand. It is engaged in a search for meaning, so it breaks itself apart, investing its own consciousness in every form of life. We are the universe, trying to understand itself.⁹

The idea of conscious, aware, philosophical action reverberates throughout the series. Delenn suggests in the pilot, “The Gathering”, that Sinclair does not spend enough time thinking about the significance of the ripples and intersections made by the rocks dropped into the fine sand in the Japanese stone garden. In “A Distant Star” (2.04) she tells Sheridan that “we are the universe, made manifest.” In the diegesis of *Babylon 5*, any word or action has an impact upon surrounding events: as we will see, however minor, casual, or flippant, nothing is unimportant and everything is connected.

This demonstrates just one of the strategies adopted by the series to maintain audience interest without revealing too much at too early a stage. Intrinsic to its narration

is the tendency for the odd early phrase or image to resonate throughout the series, sometimes in unexpected ways. "The Gathering" is a concise pilot, but although its immediate mystery is satisfied, it leaves us with nothing but contextual questions. Why Babylon 5, for example? Lyta Alexander asks Sinclair precisely this, and we later discover that Babylons 1-3 were sabotaged and destroyed. More detail is given in "Grail," when Jinxo is frightened of leaving the station because he left the others only to see them destroyed. By whom, we wonder? Babylon 4 meanwhile, mysteriously vanished. We thus remain none the wiser but the suspense and tension are considerably increased. These and other questions are partly answered in "Signs and Portents", questions established there are partly answered in "Babylon Squared" and "War Without End". However, "Signs and Portents" also dangles an irresistible narrative carrot, one that remains distressingly unqualified until five seasons later, with the final episode of the entire series: "Sleeping in Light". Our initial introduction to the station comes from Londo, and our first glimpse of its future comes from another Centauri: in "Signs and Portents" it is the Lady Ladirra who shares her vision of the destruction of Babylon 5 with Sinclair, and with us.

As Andy Lane's two volume *Babylon File* (1997 and 1999) shows, most episodes have three or four overtly plotted story-lines, but his inclusion of sections called "Observations" and "Questions Raised" etc., demonstrates how the imagery and script provide yet more connections. In the first season, the earlier episodes mostly reach a (temporarily) satisfactory conclusion, with the immediate narrative concerns addressed, or at least left at an appropriate moment. However, the careful combination of an over-all story arc, plus additional short and long narrative threads, replete with visual and verbal hints (but never with adequate context), ensures that although sufficient small narrative questions are answered, new, urgent and more significant ones are posed. This makes present viewing gratifying but future viewing becomes a significant requirement. It is just one of the ways in which *Babylon 5* plays with the concept of the episodic and serial television narrative, and like *Dr Who*, it perhaps also demands a new category from Tulloch and Alvarado's typology of forms. *Babylon 5* requires much the same degree of thought and attention externally, from its viewers, as it requires internally, from its characters. This identifies one of the programme's strengths – strong narrative continuity

– but also one of its weaknesses. Given the lack of verbal redundancy in the series, there is little opportunity to ‘catch up’; as the previous chapter noted, this is not a problem that occurs in the dominant long-term narrative form, the soap opera. In order to remain comprehensible to its viewers, the series demands a remarkably heavy commitment over a five year period (a risky innovative strategy), expecting by the first few episodes to have caught its audience’s attention, and assuming that it can maintain the audience’s interest for the duration.

Part Three acknowledged how the development of longer narrative threads became a common feature of television series, other than soap operas, from the late 1980s – although never to the extent that *Babylon 5* demonstrates. As Straczynski repeatedly acknowledges in interview trailers for the Sci-Fi Channel before daily episodes of the series, the greater story arc (the epic) is mostly completed by the end of season four. This is a change to the original intention of a fluid five-season epic, and was enforced by doubts about the show’s renewal in 1997-8 and the resultant switch from Warner’s to the Turner network. The final season thus reverts to shorter narrative threads, such as the telepath crisis, the fall of Centauri Prime, the destinies of the various characters. It also offers slightly more self-contained episodes, a combined narrative style with which sf viewers have become familiar through series like *The X Files*, *Space: Above and Beyond*, *Stargate: SG-1* and *Deep Space Nine*.

This strategic switch generated criticism from various sources, including Andy Lane and Andy Medhurst,¹⁰ both of whom feel that the increasingly rushed schedule (season five episodes were filmed in six days, not the former seven) meant that the previously exceptional production values deteriorated. Likewise, the uncertainty of renewal meant that key narrative threads were tied up more quickly in season four rather than layered evenly throughout the final season. There is certainly some sense of the narrative ‘rushing’ towards a conclusion in season four, before reverting to a more leisurely pace in season five, although the major story-lines are combining so perhaps this is merely one result of their impetus. However, accepting that the story arc was compromised through external influence, elements of the narrative threads nevertheless retain epic resonance. Essentially, the result of delays in confirmation of renewal meant

that the more novelistic elements were merely brought to the fore in season five, allowing a more detailed examination of relationships and the fallout and aftermath of the war. Certainly this creates slight unevenness, but paradoxically, it also makes the final season more akin to the first in its narrative pattern, thus following the classical pattern of tragedy, moving from equilibrium through disruption and imbalance to a new equilibrium. The closer attention to character after such intense physical and philosophical conflicts also ensures that the audience's attention is maintained, and importantly for any sf series, stops the narrative itself from becoming predictable.

Examples of *Babylon 5*'s overall arc are plentiful, but two of the most useful emerge in "Signs and Portents"/"Sleeping in Light" and "In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum"(2.16)/"Into the Fire" (4.06). The Centauri seer Lady Ladira tells Sinclair in "Signs and Portents" that her terrifying vision of the station's destruction in fire is only "... a possible future ... and it is my hope that you may yet avoid it." Of course, the characters *do* avoid the fire. The images of an assault on Babylon 4 hinted at in "Babylon Squared" and Ivanova's desperate message "...they're killing us" (as Shadow vessels besiege and destroy Babylon 5 in one future timeline in "War Without End" Part 1), do not herald the destruction of the station. They are merely future-flashes, and as the story carefully establishes, the future is uncertain. Ultimately, Babylon 5 *is* encircled by Shadow vessels in "Z'ha'dum" (3.22), its inhabitants *are* forced to walk "through fire and darkness"¹¹ during the Shadow War, the liberation of Earth and the brief Minbari Civil War, and the fiery obliteration of the station *still* takes place. It simply does not occur in any expected or anticipated manner. In "Sleeping in Light" the station is blown up – so as not to become a shipping hazard.¹² (Video Extracts 8a and b)

Thus although we receive tantalising information about its fate almost from the outset, the demise of the last Babylon station is brought about not by military action or grandiose expansionist politics, but by sheer practicality. It certainly occurs because of Sheridan and Delenn's new Alliance, but through its success, not failure. Babylon 5's demolition as a shipping hazard is a far cry from images of courage in adversity, and the desperate heroism of its crew against determined invaders. A mundane kind of everyday decision, descended from the greater decisions made by its inhabitants, decrees its fate. In

Babylon 5 everything is interconnected: we simply do not appreciate the context because it is seldom immediately revealed. Ivanova's characteristically gloomy prediction in "Signs and Portents" echoes through the series: "No boom today. Boom tomorrow. There's *always* a boom tomorrow," – and Ivanova is notably the one whose last moments we see in "War Without End", and who is critically wounded during the assault on Clark's forces in "Between the Darkness and the Light (4.19).¹³

Andy Lane, less than impressed by the final season as a whole, feels the series denied its audience the expected ending. "There should have been fireworks. There should have been parties to rival the millennial celebrations. And yet what we get is only television." Lane's disillusionment with the final season is less my concern than the efforts of those behind the series to create a new form of narrative: even Lane admits that *Babylon 5* may be "only television," but agrees that it is "good television," nonetheless.¹⁴ However, regardless of the ambitions and realisation of the series – its success in completing its run, and its failure to do so as originally envisaged – it is worth remembering that *Babylon 5* has systematically denied its audience's expectations from the outset. The station is not destroyed by the anticipated 'boom', but it *is* still destroyed and the imagery of its destruction is that of Ladir's prophetic vision. Lane might not like it, but there is indeed "*always* a boom tomorrow." As ever, until the last, we are consistently denied any reliable framework or context and thus must struggle to create meaning as we go – an important facet of sf narration, as noted previously.

The second example of the overall arc, from the fourth season's "Into the Fire", contains the most disturbing sign of universal connection, and a clear example of narrative preplanning. On Centauri Prime, with the Vorlons approaching and the Shadow-touched planet under threat of extinction, Londo executes the Shadow's operative, Morden. Summoning Vir, he tells him to go out in the garden, where he has a surprise for him: Morden's head is on a pike. During season two's "In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum", Vir is forced to meet Morden on Londo's behalf. Morden seizes the opportunity to ask Vir the Shadows' question: "What do *you* want?" (Video Extract 9a) The inoffensive Centauri aide replies sweetly:

I'd like to live long enough to be there when they cut off your head and stick it on a pike as a warning to the next ten generations that some favours come with too high a price. I want to look up into your lifeless eyes and wave – like this. Can you and your associates arrange that for me, Mr Morden?

Two seasons, two *years* later, “Into the Fire” offers Vir an opportunity to recall the conversation, and to give Morden’s “lifeless eyes” that little wave. (Video Extract 9b) If the universe has a sense of humour, like its poetry, it is based in irony. Even at a quiet table in the Zocalo, with no-one else apparently privy to their conversation, Vir’s words create ripples.¹⁵ Lady Ladira says as much in “Signs and Portents”, telling Sinclair that “...we create the future, with our words, our deeds and our beliefs.” The story unfolding before us demonstrates precisely this point.

History and Ideology:

Babylon 5 was built by humans, the youngest of the space-faring races, and a natural choice as caretakers for its diplomatic mission. For the audience, the Earth Force command staff afford an acceptable connection between our present and the imaginary future history from the Earth year 2258. As the series commences, repeated references to the Minbari surrender at the Battle of the Line suggest that humans hold considerable sway as they enter the “Third Age of Mankind.” This is underlined by the bickering, lack of interest, and/or wariness demonstrated by the other races. “The Gathering” tells briefly of the Minbari surrender, but gives no reasons for it: at least superficially, they represent a defeated race. The first episode’s pre-credit sequence sees the Narn, bitter from years of Centauri occupation, launch a devastating attack on a Centauri colony/listening post at Ragesh 7 (“Midnight on the Firing Line”). These Centauri/Narn skirmishes continue with increasingly violent retaliations until fully-fledged war breaks out in “The Coming of Shadows”.

The enigmatic encounter-suited Vorlons, the final major race represented on the station (although not, as we discover with the arrival of the Shadows, the only other major power), are initially apparently both uninvolved and unconcerned. In “The War Prayer”

(1.07), Kosh says to Sinclair “We take no interest in the affairs of others.” Yet in “Deathwalker” (1.09), a Vorlon vessel destroys Jha’dur’s ship and her longevity serum because “you are not ready for immortality,” an early indication that perhaps the Vorlons have considerable paternalistic interest in the affairs of others. In “Midnight on the Firing Line” Kosh describes the arguing Centauri and Narn as “a dying people. We should let them pass.” The irony is that ultimately Sheridan and Delenn recognise that the Vorlons and Shadows themselves are in precisely the same situation. In their case, the “dying” is metaphorical; it is a collapse and waning of status and power. Caught in the same bitter cycle of conflict as the Centauri and Narn, the guardians of the old, the Vorlons and Shadows are stagnating. Committed to their Cold War opposition, articulated through their respective questions: “Who are you?” and “What do you want?” (and the schism created by the lack of the linking question: “Why are you here?”), they eventually dedicate themselves to the total destruction of anything touched by the other, unable to remember beyond ideology what initiated their conflict in the first place. Ultimately Sheridan and Delenn let *them* pass – travelling with Lorien and the other First Ones, beyond the Rim and beyond *Babylon 5*’s known universe.

So, although *Babylon 5* is built and operated by humans, it contains a marvellous diversity within its spinning shell. It would be daring sf television indeed that established a minor human contingent living on a station run by aliens, of course.¹⁶ In “The Illusion of Truth” (4.08), this idea is given a disturbing bias by an Inter Stellar News (ISN) report. There are repeated rumblings from human isolationist movements such as ‘Earth First’ and the ‘Home Guard’ throughout the series. This continued anti-alien prejudice, articulated mostly through Clark’s ‘MiniPax’ forces,¹⁷ and ‘Nightwatch’ (through which the Shadows gain considerable advantage), is shown to be the fatal flaw of the power-crazed Clark’s political ambition. Whilst the diegetic critique of intolerance is strong, the representation of the lesser alien species, particularly in the first season, is occasionally disturbing. Whilst we become increasingly familiar with the ways of the Narn, Centauri and Minbari as time is spent explaining, if not justifying, their characteristics, the remainder of the aliens (who chiefly inhabit the alien zone where breathing apparatus must be donned) initially represent little more than a freak show. Glass walls separate

species, whilst the predominantly human bipeds walk past, able to watch at will. This tendency rapidly evaporates: by season two, the unattractive exoticism of the alien 'zoo' is replaced by other, larger concerns as the major story arc comes into play, and the threat of the Shadows is developed.

Nevertheless, within the diegesis of *Babylon 5*, although individuals of each race act according to their individual nature, the qualities ascribed to humans and the capabilities of collective humanity are repeatedly shown to be both positive and important. Summoned to the Minbari Grey Council to be appointed leader, Delenn asks to remain on Babylon 5, commenting upon the remarkable ability she sees in humans. Admittedly guided by Valen/Sinclair's prophecy, she nevertheless sacrifices the more substantial short-term honour of Minbari leadership for the potential greater good of the galaxy. In "And Now for a Word" (2.15), she again marks out humans as having an extraordinary talent. Asked by Cynthia Torqueman, a visiting ISN reporter (whose 'special report' is as twisted as her name), if the Babylon station is worth the money and effort involved, Delenn says that it is, for a simple reason:

Humans share one unique quality: they build communities. If the Narns or the Centauri or any other race built a station like this it would be used only by their own people. But everywhere that humans go, they create communities out of diverse and sometimes hostile populations. It is a great gift and a terrible responsibility, one that cannot be abandoned.

Stephen Clark finds that this is implausible as a biological claim. However, as allegory, he finds it "reminiscent of Gordon Dickson's thesis that only 'full spectrum humanity' can co-ordinate and preserve the 'Splinter Cultures': imagined aliens, almost inevitably, tend to be merely isolated aspects of our own humanity, in need of reconciliation."¹⁸ Dickson is not alone; much psychoanalytical theory argues that in sf the alien represents that to which we ascribe the abject, the disavowed, the other.¹⁹ This is one of science fiction's promises for the future: as we established in Part One, it creates potentially *scriptible* texts, which allow a fresh approach to that which we find abject in ourselves – they allow us to escape from the corresponding socio-cultural and psychological 'baggage'.

However, from an historical approach, the sense of building communities and alliances from “...diverse and sometimes hostile populations” relates more readily to a vast array of predominantly American (but also worldwide) historical moments. The replacement of the League with the new Alliance (the League of Nations with the United Nations) springs readily to mind, but *Babylon 5* refers eponymously to the original Babylon, and to the epic of Gilgamesh, the Great Builder. Gilgamesh erected the great walled great cities such as can be found at Uruk (Erech). At the height of Babylon’s powers, its leader Hammurabi fought to create and maintain an alliance between its five rival city-states.²⁰ The three-power league of Babylon, Mari and Larsa was maintained for 15 years, waging war against the surrounding powers of Eshnunna, Elam and Assur, a war in which Babylon was finally victorious.

In political construct, *Babylon 5* clearly draws upon this, but more fundamentally it utilises the creation myths of ancient Babylon, which tell how the universe was formed through the eternal conflict of two forces, chaos and order – the Shadows and Vorlons. *Babylon 5* is not about ancient Babylon, and similarities with, for example, the topical horrors of war-ravaged former Yugoslavia are readily acknowledged by Straczynski,²¹ but the choice of name is no coincidence. The mytho-history of that ancient land offers a foundation for the future scenario. History itself is fundamental to *Babylon 5*’s cause. The three-race alliance of human, Minbari and Narn (with support from the non-aligned worlds – and intermittent, indirect Centauri involvement) begins a war against the Shadows, but ultimately ends up fighting Shadows and Vorlons (and again, indirectly, the Centauri). The new Alliance’s victory against the Shadows and Vorlons in “Into the Fire” is more ideological than military, and unlike the ancient Babylonian alliances, what is then forged between the other races is no mere marriage of convenience.

The destruction of the Narn regime, the collapse of the Centauri Empire, the suicide and surrender of Clark’s pseudo-Earth Shadow forces, and the Civil War on Minbar are tragic confirmations of ideological chaos. Sheridan and Delenn do not build a new Millennium Empire for themselves and at the expense of others, they clearly have no such intention: they merely seek reasoned justice – although the ‘special report’ from ISN in “The Illusion of Truth” (4.08) suggests otherwise. Yet, ultimately they create a new,

genuine Inter-Stellar Alliance, rejecting dictated binary choices, and working instead around more fluid ethical and secular constructs, for the benefit of all. The viability of this new way is not really put to the test within *Babylon 5*'s story world; however, Delenn's voiceover at the end of "Rising Star" (4.21) offers an historical glimpse of the future and demonstrates realistic despair as well as fervent hope:

It was the end of the Earth year 2261, and it was the dawn of a new age for all of us. It was the end of one chapter and the beginning of another. The next twenty years would see great changes: great joy and great sorrow, the Telepath War, and the Drakh War. The new Alliance would waver and crack, but in the end it would hold, because what is built endures, and what is loved endures, and Babylon 5 – Babylon 5 endures.

This dissertation is not concerned with assessing the strengths and weakness of *Babylon 5*'s ideological reality, but it is concerned with the creation and impact of that alternative ideology. The programme openly identifies explicit ideological aspirations throughout its run, asserting a docu-historical strategy from the beginning. Intermittently, it highlights this perspective, and with the effective narrative closure of its final episode reminds us jarringly that we have been watching "historical records."²² Thus, it makes an effort to achieve what sf does at its best: it creates Brechtian distancing from what we assume is familiar through cognitive estrangement. It rejects what we can readily recognise and offers instead new scenarios and perspectives for exploration and consideration, even as we demonstrate our reluctance to accept them. According to Straczynski, *Babylon 5*'s core meaning centres upon choice and responsibility. He suggests that it is:

about our obligation to society, to each other, and to the future. It reminds us that actions have consequences, and that we must choose wisely if we wish to avoid extermination. Will we decide to lead, or to be led by others?²³

In Brechtian terms, James Brown finds that *Babylon 5*'s approach "encourages one to think only 'within the confines of the subject', rather than about it, in the stream rather than above it."²⁴ This is a fair point, and identifies a major problem for serial sf television. As we established in the previous section, episodic sf television generally need

maintain its reality for only a short period. In the case of series like *The Outer Limits* or *Welcome to Paradox* the audience linkage is provided by the introductory voice-over or the location, whilst the story itself is discrete, lasting a mere 40 minutes or so. Series with longer story threads like *Deep Space Nine*, or even the occasionally revisited stories in *Stargate: SG-1*, risk the audience's total submersion in the story: familiarity sets in rapidly and the familiar is science fiction's nemesis. The story world becomes predictable, we are put at ease by its recognisable theme music and credit sequences, location and establishing shots, readily understandable language, unchanging characters, etc. Unless poetic techniques similar to those identified by the Formalists are used to combat this effacement of signification – neologisms, transformed language, arcane or roughened language, juxtapositional and challenging visuals, significant character evolution etc., – we do indeed retreat within the cosy 'confines of the subject'. *Babylon 5* takes pains to ensure this does not occur. Its characters, its imagery and its articulation of reality are in constant flux. Just as its characters are forced daily to renegotiate the political and personal situations in which they become embroiled, the institutions which they have previously taken for granted – even the station itself – so too are its viewers, denied the omniscience or semi-omniscience common to other television programmes. Sometimes this is subtle, sometimes it is more overt, as we shall see.

Brown's criticism stems from his primary concern: industrial technology. Whereas the mostly unacknowledged presence of technology (and capitalism), linked with a strong individualism "and religion of some kind," resoundingly echoes of "the American way," his suggestion largely ignores *Babylon 5*'s ambitions for balance. He walks perilously close to the same trap (that of ideological polarity), of which *Star Trek* and its peers have historically fallen foul. If not "the American way," there is only the wrong way. Yet I would argue that this is precisely what *Babylon 5* transcends. Its reality simply does not conveniently dispense with the ugly trappings of the world we recognise (iniquitous capitalism, social unrest, disaffection, etc.,) in order to do so. Faced with the type of conflict born of worker/manager or duty/honour brought about by extreme military or political ideology ("By Any Means Necessary" (1.12), "Messages From Earth" (3.08), "Severed Dreams" (3.10), etc.), *Babylon 5* suggests fresh solutions. They are

frequently condemned as politically naïve, as are Vir's reports from Minbar which Londo rewrites – “Point of No Return” (3.01) or “Dust to Dust” (3.06) – but this only serves to narrate the shift between the old and new order. Vir's reports are honest and open, not couched in political jargon, prejudice, or conceit. Sinclair and Sheridan create equally honest and open solutions, and have no truck with political and military posturing or sabre-rattling. Whilst the new Alliance is being forged, Sheridan and Delenn certainly resort on occasion to manipulation – but always in the interests of the greater good, and they invariably demonstrate discomfort with the process. *Babylon 5* even mocks its own medium in the appropriately named “Between the Darkness and the Light”, when an Earth Force security guard scorns: “I don't watch tv. It's a cultural wasteland filled with inappropriate metaphors and an unrealistic portrayal of life created by the liberal media elite.”

As Brown acknowledges, writers tend to write about what they know. Straczynski is an American and *Babylon 5* is made in Hollywood, but that hardly negates its vision of the future. The future is made by all of us, and *Babylon 5* articulates a more international vision than Hollywood television has ever previously attempted. Its primary goal is balance, a middle way – not some new and dogmatic ideological hegemony. In “The Long Night” (4.05), G'Kar remarks to the newly freed Narns that he “did not fight to remove one dictator just to become another myself.” The very strength of this future vision is that it does not have all the answers: it is thus flexible. Commencing with a philosophical stance, Clark believes that most of us are:

rational realists ...(who) believe that people may have different, and diverse, opinions, but that there are universal truths without self-contradictions. ... To find scientific truths as firm as moral truths we have to embark on scientific theory: quarks are the same wherever we may be, though living creatures, crystals, rock formations differ unpredictably.²⁵

He suggests that “the moral if not the dramatic conclusion” of *Babylon 5* demands we take responsibility for our own destiny, and in doing so it merely re-articulates a desire for that same neutral path between demons and angels sought by artists and philosophers in perpetuity.²⁶ Kevin McCarron feels *Babylon 5* is entirely of its time, offering a kind of liberal New Age spirituality that locates “God within the individual and

evolved consciousness,” although he critiques its “robust, even aggressive, faith in the endurance of capitalism, individualism, and humanism.”²⁷

This is a fair criticism, but if, as McCarron argues (and Asimov and Jameson have noted), science fiction’s preoccupations are essentially of its time, *Babylon 5* demonstrates only what *we* recognise from the era of its making. Along with the worst facets of individualism, western capitalism is enduring all too well, and this is a problem for those seeking to create a plausible, more egalitarian vision of the future. *Babylon 5* comments wryly on the horrors of capitalism in “Acts of Sacrifice” (2.12) through the visiting Lumati, who are favourably impressed by the effects of human capitalism when they see the poverty of the Lurkers. However, it is not so much the philosophy itself that is of primary interest, but more the timing of the desire to articulate it. Putting aside its representation of capitalism, *Babylon 5* remains a definitive product of its cultural era – one of turmoil, desperate for diverse and troubled humanity to find a means of peaceful coexistence. Ultimately, *Babylon 5*’s epic approach, combined with its novelistic romances, only enhances its labyrinthine tendencies; its story may be complete, but even in that it denies us an absolute, historical truth: it only offers unsettling and oftentimes unfamiliar choices.

This is echoed in *Babylon 5*’s articulation of its desire for peace and in G’Kar’s “Declaration of Principles” for the new Alliance, which celebrates unity and difference. Despite the establishment of a new Alliance, it has no ambitions for enforced homogeneity. The history of Earth (a planet which we see more rarely than Mars, Minbar or Centauri Prime), and notably American history, is frequently referred to as a bloody example of why this would fail. Not only do we have the recent Earth-Minbar war, which erupted through a terrible First Contact misunderstanding, but also resentful colonies on Mars and Proxima. We find a yet more tangible connection in San Diego, which has been laid waste by atomic weapons which fell into the hands of terrorists following the collapse of the old Soviet Union. Like the soap opera, *Babylon 5* draws on present public fears and concerns to articulate its future. Unlike the soap opera, it cannot provide the continuous ‘working through’ of contemporary issues identified by Ellis, although it functions in a recognisable annual cycle, celebrating Hanukkah, Christmas and New Year

(as well as various alien festivals), and so retains a necessary degree of co-presence. The contrast of the familiar with the unfamiliar thus heightens both the degree of estrangement and (re)cognition.

Nor does *Babylon 5* blanch from reminding us that short-term worries are merely minor variants of long-term fears. The plague that wipes out the Markab in “Confessions and Lamentations” (2.18) has clear associations with AIDS and AIDS denial, and the growing cynicism and discontent about politics and politicians is appropriately extrapolated. In “Voices of Authority” (3.05) we learn that Clark arranged for the assassination of President Santiago and, in an action parallel to that of Shadow-influenced Emperor Cartagia (who is prepared to see Centauri Prime burn as a funeral pyre lighting his way to god-hood), rather than face the consequences, Clark turns Earth’s satellite defences on itself in “Endgame” (4.20). *Babylon 5*’s protagonists must endure disease and fear, conflict and war before they can begin to build a future. That future is by no means entirely peaceful, nor at any stage does it appear to desire conformity. In a sense it is earned, and there are only two characters who emerge relatively unscathed after five years – Vir Cotto and Zack Allen.

Everyone else must pay a high price, whether through choice or manipulation, action or inaction. Characters change, Delenn, Sheridan, Sinclair and Lyta change outwardly or physically as well as psychologically. Others, like G’Kar and Londo evolve in more philosophical ways. Although it echoes the nobler desires for an idyllic new community and the brave foresight of the pioneer movement across the American West, *Babylon 5* thus avoids both the pitfalls of the false homogeneity of a WASPish predestination and the extermination of anything ‘other’ in its path. Science fiction’s ability to create what Suvin identifies as cognitive estrangement is a subversion of our patterns of reference. As such, it allows us to at least confront that which we consider abject, rather than merely reverting to binary notions of ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘us’ or ‘non-us’. Delenn’s claim for humanity stresses the importance of meeting places such as Babylon 5.²⁸ Her change from Minbari to human-Minbari hybrid, and Sinclair’s later transformation into Valen, confirms this. On a smaller level the alterations the Vorlons make to Lyta and Sheridan’s connection with Kosh also stress this. Through their actions,

a genuine sense of community is created gradually within the universe of *Babylon 5*, yet another subversion of television sf tradition.

The concept of an idyllic fully co-operative inter-planetary community is a theme common in sf, and television is no exception. Encompassing the individual series, *Star Trek*'s Federation signals a similar ambition, whilst a darker vision emerges through Servalan and Travis in the dystopic *Blake's 7*. However, unlike their pre-designed communal manifestations, which present their aspirations as a *fait accompli*, we join *Babylon 5*'s characters in their struggle to make a better future. When *Babylon 5* commences its community-based ambitions are far from realised. The station has been operational for a little over a year in the 2257 pilot, by 2258 the planetary forces are still constantly feuding, the peace is under construction: it is not already created through a structuring absence that conveniently requires no explanation of the effort and sacrifices involved.²⁹ In a sense, series like *Star Trek* avoid the moral struggles, sacrifices, histories and, more importantly, the objectivity of the epic: they merely present *de facto* an ideal society in which to explore personal relationships. It is a more comforting format for the viewer, and of course, less challenging.

In *The Next Generation*'s "The High Ground" Dr Crusher is confronted by the ideological and moral complexities of terrorism when she is seized from an alien space-station during a bombing attack by dissidents desperate for medical aid. She is upset and confused by such violent actions. Accused of idealistic naïveté, she responds by saying: "I come from an ideal culture." But we are never really shown how that "ideal culture" is achieved: everyone is vegetarian, money is of no interest, equality is assured, and everyone is apparently happy. This has all been established *a priori*: the struggles necessary to achieve such a remarkable state are used as a structuring absence: we are merely shown the flagship of the new regime – in this case, the Enterprise. Even in *Deep Space Nine*, which occasionally confronts Federation methodology, the basis for action is immediate need: the ends always justify the means, and invariably it is an individual perversion which precipitates the crisis, not a fault with the ideals themselves. Just as the problems reverberating from Vietnam were initially avoided by American television and film, which delved into heady nostalgic bliss with *Happy Days*, *American Graffiti* and

Grease etc., so with the exception of the original series, the *Star Trek* franchises generally avoid politics beyond their own diegesis. The same is true of *Stargate: SG-1*'s secret, high security Cheyenne Mountain base, which merely reinforces our everyday suspicions: the military, with limited government involvement, are engaged in alluring and dangerous projects in which we will never share. It can be argued that *Babylon 5*'s representation of the mundane within the station itself does precisely this: the continuation of recognisable human activities in buying and selling denies the potential of sf. However, as we noted earlier from Suvin's identification of sf's efforts to show us "how we got there", it is the necessary linkage of the mundane reality of the present *and* of the future in juxtaposition with the extraordinary, which creates an effective degree of cognitive estrangement. A door will always be a door, but the manner in which it is presented, perceived, and thus experienced, will change across time.

History and Science Fiction as Context:

If series such as *The Next Generation*, *Voyager* and *Stargate: SG-1* generally isolate themselves from history, as we are beginning to demonstrate, *Babylon 5* is all about history and context. *Babylon 5* underlines a need to remember how the history that it is writing in light is interconnected. It also refers constantly to human history, and to the history of science fiction. We have already mentioned the more obvious significance of its name via association with the battles of unification in ancient Babylonia, and the Shadows and the Vorlons as entrenched Cold War warriors. Piled on this is example after example, cast into a new, stronger light by the alien context. Nightwatch recreates the danger of a Nazi Holocaust, the mass-driver attack on Narn is a devastating reminder of the carpet-bombing of Vietnam, and the Battle of the Line reminds us of the flotilla of little ships at Dunkirk or perhaps the Spitfires and Hurricanes of the Battle of Britain. Clark and Cartagia's ghastly vision of the destruction of Earth and Centauri Prime are terrifying global echoes of General Sherman's Scorched Earth campaign in the American Civil War,³⁰ and the killing fields of Pol Pot's Cambodia. These are all examples of

action; more frightening is the ideology behind them. James and Mendlesohn note the how the words:

of somebody we are taught to admire, such as Thomas Jefferson, find their way into the mouth of a member of the Nazi-like Night-watch ("Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom": "Messages from Earth", 308), and force us to consider the real meaning of liberty.³¹

Alongside Julie Musante's casual remark that the dictionary has been "rewritten," comes her chilling speech in "Voices of Authority." It is Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* made manifest, and espouses the dictates of totalitarian regimes and individual extremists from across the twentieth century world:

In the coming months, certain individuals will be purged from their government positions on charges of sedition, immoral conduct, even spying for alien governments. With our basic freedoms at stake no response can be too extreme. There may be some minor and temporary abridgements in the traditionally protected areas of speech and association, but only until the crisis is over. We have been betrayed at nearly every level. It is going to take the efforts of every loyal citizen to keep Earth safe and ideologically pure.

"In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum" sees Sheridan refer to the breaking of the Enigma Code, the subsequent bombing of Coventry and the apocryphal tale of the sacrifice Churchill was prepared to make in order to win the war, not just the battle. Sheridan draws a direct parallel with his enforced decision to release Morden. He realises that Morden may be able to tell him what happened to his wife Anna, missing, presumed dead, after the Icarus' journey to the Z'ha'dum, but knows that the needs of the greater battle, against the Shadows, cannot be sacrificed. The name of the Icarus is portentous: if the Icarus of legend flew too close to the sun, the Icarus' exploration to the Rim took its crew too far – to where they did not belong. The Ikkarans in "Infection" (1.04) are little different, the name also redolent of rash adventurism: their crime however, was to place their trust in the purity of their race and the logic of defensive machinery. Like Colossus in *The Forbin Project* and Skynet in *The Terminator*, the machinery decided logically to destroy the Ikkarans themselves, thus ensuring their preservation and purity. The spectre of the American solution for countless My Lais echoes chillingly through these stories: the village had to be destroyed in order to be saved.

The most familiar phrase in *Babylon 5*, the “last best hope” of the early title sequences, also has American connections. Part of Sheridan’s introductory speech in “Points of Departure” (2.01), it actually comes from Lincoln’s second address to Congress in 1862. The second half of Sheridan’s speech runs as follows:

It was an early Earth President, Abraham Lincoln, who best described our situation. He said: ‘The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise to the occasion. We cannot escape history. We will be remembered in spite of ourselves. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor to the last generation. We shall nobly win or meanly lose our last best hope of Earth’.”³²

Superficially, it is a wise choice, given that Lincoln is viewed historically as being responsible for a desire to reunify the United States and for the ending of slavery. The souls of the nation were to be brought together, so to speak – and this is one of the quest in *Babylon 5*, not just unification and equality, but for the Minbari in particular, a bringing together of Minbari and human souls. In “Points of Departure” Lennier explains the Minbari surrender at the Battle of the Line, telling Sheridan that Minbari souls are being reborn in humans: in a way the Minbari and humans were killing their own. The marriage of Sheridan and the transformed Delenn is a manifestation of this symbolic linkage of the souls, as are their similar experiences as leaders. On closer inspection, as James and Mendlesohn point out, perhaps more importantly the choice of Lincoln offers an example of how political history creates its own myth:

Abraham Lincoln, whilst he did issue the edict freeing slaves, said in his inaugural address, “If I could save the union without freeing any slaves, I would do it; and if I could save the union by freeing all the slaves I would do it.” Fortunately for African-Americans, the latter proved to be true, but the emancipation edict of 1862 freed slaves only in the rebel-held territories and was an attempt to create a fifth column, not a generous and humanitarian gesture. Slavery was maintained in the four Union slave states until the end of the war. A better choice might have been Harriet Tubman or Oskar Schindler.³³

“The Deconstruction of Falling Stars” examines this very issue. An archive episode, set in the far future, it travels through time via historical records, examining how the story of Sheridan and Delenn’s new Alliance has been interpreted, reinterpreted and

rewritten by historians, politicians and the media. History is a matter of perspective. It points out in no uncertain terms how *Babylon 5* is fundamentally about knowing your own history, being true to it, and learning from it, lest you be condemned to repeat it -- or lest it be used against you.

“In the Shadow of Z’ha’dum” provides Delenn and Kosh with an opportunity to teach Sheridan part of the galactic history of which he knows so little – but which he must learn if he is to understand the great battle ahead. (Video Extract 10) Delenn says, in typically marked poetic language:

There are beings in the universe much older than either of our races ... Once, long ago, they walked among the stars like giants, vast and timeless, they taught the younger races, explored beyond the Rim, created great empires. But to all things there is an end. Slowly, over a million years, the First Ones went away. Some passed beyond the stars, never to return. Some simply disappeared. ...

The Shadows were old when even the ancients were young. They battled one another over and over across a million years. The last great war against the Shadows was ten thousand years ago. It was the last time the ancients walked openly among us. But the Shadows were only defeated, not destroyed. A thousand years ago the Shadows returned to their places of power, rebuilt them and began to stretch forth their hand. Before they could strike, they were defeated by an alliance of worlds including the Minbari and the few remaining First Ones who had not yet passed beyond the Veil. When they had finished, the First Ones went away – all but one.³⁴

Delenn’s arcane and enigmatic ‘literary’ language we will consider shortly, but as we discover in later episodes, the remaining “one” to whom she refers is Kosh. Her speech tells Sheridan the history she believes to be appropriate for him to hear, she is tailoring it to suit her needs, and only when pressed by Sheridan does she admit “not all of the First Ones have gone away. A few stayed behind, hidden or asleep, waiting for the day when they may be needed – when the Shadows come again.” Kosh stays hidden, and we understand only after he is perceived differently, angelically, by a variety of races, rescuing Sheridan in “The Fall of Night” (2.22), that he too is participating in ideological and historical manipulation.³⁵

Delenn’s words about the Ancients echo those she utters to the Grey Council in “Babylon Squared”. She declines to lead the Minbari, asking to be allowed to remain on Babylon 5. Paradoxically, in the very qualities her fellow Minbari see as human

weaknesses, she finds great strength. Echoing her words about the ancients, she says that humans:

do not seek conformity, they do not surrender. ... the passions we deplore have taken them to their place in the stars, and will propel them to a great destiny. They carry within them the capacity to walk among the stars as giants. They are the future, we have much to learn from them.

This is repeated in her demands for unity in “Between the Darkness and the Light”. When the new synthesis is commented upon by the former remaining leaders of the old Council, G’Kar’s words are most telling: “In the past we had nothing in common, but now the humans have become the glue that holds us together.” The human we see in the final sequence of “The Deconstruction of Falling Stars” seems to qualify this recognition for the need for unity, the unity created through the humans, and the future. The similarity between the encounter suit we see and the encounter suits worn by the Vorlons is perhaps more than coincidence. Thus, in *Babylon 5*, the history we see is shown to have a pattern, one that repeats itself, and many of the little asides and comments within the series become glaringly obvious in retrospect. Asked by Elric the Technomage (in the “Geometry of Shadows”), whether or not he believes in magic, Sheridan replies “If we went back in time a thousand years and tried to explain this place to people, they could only accept it in terms of magic.” As Andy Lane points out, *Babylon 4* is taken back a thousand years,³⁶ and presented to the Minbari by Sinclair, magically transformed into Valen (“a Minbari not of Minbari born”) by the same device that transforms Delenn.³⁷

Babylon 5 does not just use social and political history as context, it also refers to science fiction literature, film and television, a marked contrast to most sf/fantasy series – unless they veer towards comedy. The lightweight *Andromeda* make several jokes about its star Kevin Sorbo – of *Hercules* fame – in its first episode (“Who does he think he is, some kind of Greek god?” for example). *Hercules* itself quotes liberally from sf television and film with tongue firmly in cheek, using the famous “Klaatu barada nikto” from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* as a magic spell in “A Wicked Good Time”, for instance. The British sf sit-com *Red Dwarf* also takes no prisoners. Hung-over and irritated by the

mechanoid Kryton's emotional "Is this the quality you humans call 'friendship'?" the last man alive, Lister, responds with a curt "Don't give me that *Star Trek* crap, it's too early in the morning." ("The Last Day") In total contrast, most non-comedy sf series seem fearful of fracturing their reality by intertextuality or self reflexivity. In *Babylon 5* however, there are frequent, ironic comments about 'Deep Space' franchises, and wry acknowledgements from the Command staff that *everything* seems to happen *all* the time on Babylon 5. In "Sleeping With Light", the Hugo Award Straczynski received for "The Coming of Shadows" is on General Ivanova's desk, and during Musante's attempted seduction of Sheridan in "Voices of Authority", Ivanova's hologram appears from Epsilon 3 to cheekily parody *Star Trek*'s opening voice-over (and Kirk's penchant for seduction). "Good luck Captain," she says, "I think you're about to go where *everyone* has gone before."

More seriously, commercial and military vessels use authors' names (the Asimov, the Spinoza) as well as names from mythology (the Agamemnon, Achilles, Heracles, Hera), and history (the Roanoke, the Churchill). The alien race who kidnap Sheridan in "All Alone in the Night" (2.11) are the Streib, a subtle play upon the surname of Whitley Strieber, the author of *Communion* and other tales of alien abduction. Sharing a name from Michael Moorcock's *Elric* stories, Elric the Technomage quotes Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* in "The Geometry of Shadows" when he warns "Do not try the patience of wizards, for they are subtle and quick to anger." Rabkin's transformed language is represented well by the stately Lorien, who also recalls Tolkein – this time, the Elf-realm of Lórien. The pit at Z'ha'dum into which Sheridan jumps is a parallel to Khazad-dûm (a reversal of the first two syllables) and the mines of Moria, where Gandalf the Grey fell, only to be resurrected as Gandalf the White – in similar fashion to Sheridan. Likewise the apparatus of the great machine on Epsilon 3 is remarkably similar visually to the massive Krel machinery in *Forbidden Planet* (1956). The blue spacesuit used in "Babylon Squared" and "War Without End" Parts 1 and 2 is from the film *2010*. References abound: the most obvious is that of Psi-Cop Alfred Bester, presumably named after the author of *The Demolished Man*, one of the best known novels about telepathy. Even security officer Zack Allen is blessed with a heritage; as Andy Sawyer suggests in his

essay on Lovecraftian influences in *Babylon 5*, his name is reminiscent of the town drunk Zadok Allen in the H.P. Lovecraft story “The Shadow over Innsmouth”.³⁸

This is in direct contrast to a series like *The Next Generation*, which, as the previous section noted, tries exceedingly hard not to specifically reference anything outside its own universe, thus creating a fundamental contextual difficulty for its audience.³⁹ The act of cultural referencing affords *Babylon 5* one of its great strengths. Today we use things from the past, yet we do not necessarily consider them to be redundant, or even antiques – *Babylon 5* assumes precisely this, so in 2058, there are everyday objects, attitudes and associations made that we can easily recognise. When Garibaldi watches *Daffy Duck* and eats popcorn in such a place of constant confusion, it creates a sense of continuity, not awkwardness. When Ivanova grows an illegal plant in the hydroponics bay, we can sympathise with her desire for ‘fresh’ coffee. *Babylon 5* also carefully dismisses any potential awkwardness through humour – for instance, in a court case, a human sues an alien’s great grandson for abducting his great grandfather: the alien looks like the alien ‘grey’ associated with Roswell and many UFO/abduction cases. *Babylon 5* does what sf needs to do: it shows us the future and it shows us how we got there.

Humour, mostly observational, is used to great effect to connect our present with *Babylon 5*’s vision of the future – sexism, imperialism, capitalism, etc. are all targets, and Ivanova offers her opinion on most of them. Told to eat a higher calorific diet, the Russian commander responds: “Figures. All my life I’ve fought against imperialism. Now, suddenly, I *am* the expanding Russian frontier.” Franklin suggests that she has “very nice borders,” but the point is well made. In “Believers” she despatches with a hint of sexism by suggesting dryly that she could “knit something” to keep herself busy. G’Kar, his people subjected to hell by the occupying Centauri regime, and more specifically, tortured by Cartagia, can eventually say to Londo in “The Paragon of Animals”, “Oh, go away. Repress someone else.” Vir too, in “Movements of Fire and Shadow” (5.17), remarks glibly that the Centauris’ “...biggest losses have been in Drazi space. They are real good fighters – not terrific conversationalists, and their table manners can make you go blind in one eye, but – *real* tough behind the weapons console.” Again,

this is something many other series avoid, trusting only to comment wryly about their immediate situation. In “And the Rock Cried Out, No Hiding Place” (3.20), Sheridan despairs of sleeping after Kosh’s death, remarking to Delenn that his dreams were enough to “make your hair stand on end.” “That explains the Centauri, at least,” quips Delenn. With a whole year of study in temple devoted to humour, Satai Delenn also has a sense of fun. On one level, this ensures that *Babylon 5* does not offer its aliens as exotic, or enigmatic and humourless creatures. There are none of Bierstadt or Fenimore Cooper’s noble or natural savages here, no hint of primitivism so associated with the 18th century Romance. There is even no room for *Star Trek*’s inferior/superior unknown species. Aliens and humans alike are alternately witty and serious, busy or indolent, successful or a failure, selfish or selfless – they are believable, rounded individuals. In the novelistic sense, this helps us to connect with the characters and their situation, an important balance in a genre where to understand even one’s environment is a constant challenge.

The Confused Citadel:

During the Shadow War and the battle with Clark’s forces, Babylon 5 occupies a military role, protecting those within its walls. However, more importantly, it functions throughout the five seasons as a citadel, truly the “home away from home” described in the opening voice-over to the first season. The city as dystopia or utopia has long been a favourite of futuristic writers and filmmakers, and more often than not becomes a place of frightening social stratification (*THX-1138*, *Metropolis*, *Logan’s Run*) or confused locality (*Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*). Worse still, its increasingly alienating environment brings about questions of what it is to be human, and problematises the increasing fusion of humanity with the cold machinery of technology. Bukatman suggests that:

the rise of the [sf] genre remains bound up in the same technological revolutions which produced the complex industrial urban environment, with all the commensurate ambivalence towards the idea of progress that might imply. The city was most frequently projected as a negative entity, while utopian aspirations were focused instead upon an agrarian existence.⁴⁰

Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) promoted the industrialised utopia, and in *Metropolis* (1926) and *The Shape of Things to Come* (1936) it was realised in film. In the real world, the city as micro- and macrocosm emerged in the aftermath of World War 2, in the shape of "new towns" like Stevenage or Harlow in England, and buildings such as John Portman's Bonaventura Hotel in Los Angeles. More commonly, it appeared in the form of the modern, monadic shopping mall, which has "no windows and no weather, while points of egress are hidden off to the sides." Carefully denying exterior and interior, with mirrors, glass, water, and airy spaces, these malls have streets containing:

carefully planted and nurtured trees; a central 'food court' mimics the piazzas and plazas of a more traditional urban space. This imploded urbanism, reconciling the irreconcilable differences between public and private, or inside and outside, is insistent upon its status as a 'total space'.⁴¹

In sf, the city often becomes what Bukatman describes as "an intolerable space,"⁴² one which lacks the social and moral space of older cities, and becomes instead a challenge, a topographical morass to be comprehended in order to survive. *Babylon 5's* Production Designer Ron Thornton repeatedly acknowledges the influence of *Blade Runner*⁴³ – its influence upon much post-1980s sf should not be dismissed lightly. It provides an excellent example of a post-modernist combination of film noir narrative and Gothic imagery, a gloomy, fractured future replete with cyborgs (replicants).⁴⁴ Beneath *Blade Runner's* superficial gothic gloom and decayed decadence lurks a fine array of sf subject matter. The futuristic Los Angeles of 2019 is an urban melting pot, a heady concoction of a semi-recognisable present-day L.A. amid the hardware and argot of tomorrow. The City of Angels is in decay, a projected manifestation of rotting consumerism. It is dark; its buildings are in ruins, the rainfall is almost constant, and the overall gloom is interrupted only (and constantly) by advertisements whose penetrating verbal sales pitches are matched only by the garish colours of their neon hoardings. The modern city is directionless, constructed three-dimensionally; flying cars zoom above the streets, and advertisements appear on the sides of tower blocks. They deny the substance of the building and turning it into a mere screen – exhorting the viewer to travel further –

to the off-world colonies. As Bukatman observes, the very walls of the apartment blocks become sites of projection, not habitation.⁴⁵ We are denied any means of locating or mapping ourselves within this urban jungle.

Blade Runner's L.A. is a magnificent extrapolation of the endless and directionless Gothic shambles of which Ballard (e.g. "The Concentration City" 1957), and Jameson have written. Heavily influenced by the work of Moeblus, the city is compacted, street level is almost underground, and there are no gleaming towers and shining apartment blocks. The only recognisable feature is the monolithic ziggurat of the Tyrell building, a microchip-surfaced entity which is, of course, singularly lacking humanity – it is a corporate headquarters, set amid a retrofitted past where 1940s film noir sleaze dominates, and the only religion is soulless commerce. The only way Deckard can find the solution to his detective problem is to enter cyber-space. Using an electronic enhancer, he tracks across a digitised photograph, and a new, fractal space for narrative progression is created. Deckard's modern rendition of the traditional detective room search, that for clues, reveals 'impossible' knowledge from the reflection of a woman in the curved mirror of the room within the picture. The reflection shows a snake tattoo, connecting him finally to the artificial snake scale found in the room, leading him to one of the replicants he seeks. If the city in *Blade Runner* is a manifestation of the exploration of complex multiple spaces, this reaches apotheosis in *The Matrix* (1999). Here, in the Alice-like Wonderland of an artificial New York, there are not only levels of architectural structure, but also levels of understanding and perception: the city itself is computer generated and to gain control of the means of transportation between structures, levels and perceptions affords the prize – freedom.

Blade Runner also performs a neat reversal on the theme of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1955), another film that clearly influences and articulates similar fears to those within *Babylon 5*. The film can be read, amongst other things, as an explicit threat of alien invasion (the 'pods'), or more implicitly, as a threatened loss of individuality and independence in the face of the growing hysteria about the Soviet Communist menace. The terror of the little boy who runs hysterically from home, claiming his mother isn't mother any more, and Becky's gasp of horror as a little dog is nearly run over, juxtaposed

with the total and uncaring silence from the unemotional pod-community surrounding them, are key moments within the film. The gasp gives Becky away, and the pods close in. As director Don Siegel remarks "In a world of pods who don't care if a dog dies, her humanity betrays them."⁴⁶

The fascination in these images, and their most disturbing element, is the gradual and inexorable creation of paranoia. The familiar and secure image of 1950s middle-American society is twisted into a perverted distortion of community life before our very eyes.⁴⁷ The alien pods are so humanly banal, so normal, so perfect, that their deceit is almost absolute, and all the more terrifying because of the seductiveness of its Norman Rockwell landscape of clapboard houses, picket fences and quiet, pastoral romance. As Siegel hints, what betrays the aliens is not *what* they do, but what they *don't* do. They don't react, they don't care; there is no fear, no passion, no spark of life: they simply *are*. The tension and terror created by this confrontational narrative, one which demands our express and constant attention to even the smallest detail in an unremarkable mise-en-scène where everything is painfully 'normal', is a remarkably potent experience. In *Blade Runner*, in a cityscape which is the antithesis of a Rockwell utopia, the demonstration of emotion, the poetic lust for life enacted by Rachel, Roy, and Pris, is a signature of the non-human. In *Babylon 5*, we see a reworking of these fears. Clark, Nightwatch, Psi-Corps, the Shadows, and the Drakh threaten to take away the same thing as the pods in *Body Snatchers*, and that which humanity has clearly lost in *Blade Runner*.

Many of the dangers to which *Babylon 5* alerts us represent our very worst fears of cyborg-enhanced life: James Brown writes of them in detail in "Cyborgs and Symbionts".⁴⁸ The bio-mechanically altered telepaths we see being shipped to the Shadows, Anna Sheridan's unnerving loss of personality after she has been linked with the Shadow vessel, the Drakh controllers we see on Captain Jack, the Centauri Regent, and later Londo, all demonstrate or represent this same loss of humanity and individuality. The cyborg, the human blended with the machine, is a popular and enduring sf theme, particularly in film. Claudia Springer suggests it is "in part because many mainstream commercial films remain entrenched in a tradition that upholds conventional gender roles and maintains a stable masculine subject position."⁴⁹ Both Springer and Hal

Foster draw from Klaus Theweleit's study of the psychology of the *Freikorps*, using Freud's claim that the ego is more than a mental function, it is "a mental projection on the surface of the body."⁵⁰ Freud's theory is that any threat to the development of the ego might encourage the creation of some kind of defensive armour "in which the subject attains invulnerability by aligning itself with the rationalistic predictability of the machine." Bukatman suggests that under:

fascism the body almost explicitly becomes part of a machine, delibidinalized through the imposition of boundaries drawn from the outside by the massive deployment of disciplinary and military technologies. The ego is further delibidinalized through pain, severed from the weakness and frailty of the flesh. Meanwhile, subjects augment their armor through acts and attitudes of aggressivity against a range of "outsiders." The men of the *Freikorps* externalize their fear of dissolution by killing what is not "them"... The subject becomes an armored figure, hiding both the erotic and the mortal truth of its being. This is what Theweleit refers to as "*the conservative utopia of the mechanized body*."⁵¹

Films such as *The Terminator*, *Aliens* and *Robocop* all play on this idea. Frequently, given the increasingly very real symbiosis with machinery, in film and television sf, the body becomes ever more heavily armoured.⁵² The association between fascism and control is underlined in *Babylon 5* by the dominant use of it latterly by the Drakh, but initially by the Shadows – only the machines with which they combine living beings are already semi-organic, thus blurring the line even more.

Babylon 5 demonstrates this on the minuscule level by the command staff's constant summons via their 'links': "Never lets you finish a sentence, does it?" says Sinclair to Sheridan in "War Without End". The Psi-Corps is a more regimented, continued reminder of this, using drugs to repress those who will not join (like Ivanova's mother), a role later adopted by Edgars' Industries. In other ways, the question of humanity (in the sense of freedom, individuality and personal control), is articulated early in episodes such as "Infection" and "The Quality of Mercy" (1.21). Both concern individual issues, yet relate historically to more grandiose concerns, whilst "Mindwar" (1.06) warns of a more devious use of technology against unaware humanity. In season four's "Between the Darkness and the Light" the new Warlock class ships built for Clark with Shadow technology, a terrifying union of the bulky, rotating-hulled Earthforce

destroyers and the obsidian, spidery Shadow vessels, warn of the perils of blind technological advance without thought of the consequences.

Yet those who suffer, fight, reject or simply endure this peril, whether by choice or by force, frequently find a home on Babylon 5. Even Bester's 'blip'⁵³ lover Carolyn, turned into a partial cyborg by the organic Shadow technology in "Ship of Tears" (3.14) and interfacing terrifyingly with Med-Lab's electronics, is returned to cryogenic suspension, and kept on the station until salvation can be found. Hybridity and difference in many forms are welcome, not feared. On the small scale, G'Kar's eye, plucked out by the mad Cartagia, is replaced by an artificial one. On a larger scale, when Delenn is rejected by many of her people after entering her cocoon and transforming, on Babylon 5 she still finds acceptance. Larger still, Sheridan and Lochley find a temporary home for Byron when his telepaths need shelter. When the Centauri conquer Narn and demand the arrest of the ruling Kha'Ri, G'Kar is given refuge on the station as a citizen. General Hague's resistance against Clark finds a home, as does Sheridan when he reluctantly relinquishes his uniform, its symbolic meaning now destroyed. Lyta Alexander, altered by the Vorlons, the lost and the forgotten, the Lurkers – they all live on Babylon 5. Karen Sayer considers that Babylon 5 is defined by its relationship to other worlds rather than by its own internal definition. I would add that it is notably destroyed when that need has been served: there is no longer justification for its existence. However, during its lifespan, in direct contrast to the worlds where non-conformity and hybridity is apparently frowned upon, on Babylon 5 it is accepted and even celebrated.⁵⁴

The station thus serves well as "a home away from home," and a necessary link between the other communities. Whilst the other worlds are quintessentially Minbari, Centauri or Narn in nature, Babylon 5 is a melting pot, an indeterminate location far from the mono-cultures of the races it serves. It is more human than anything else, since it was created by humans, but it shares nothing of the hideously unimaginative architecture we briefly glimpse on Earth, nor the careful cultural differentiation of the planetary capitals. The different areas of the station serve as a confused patchwork of communities; the colour coded sectors identifying which group they chiefly serve – sometimes by race but also by occupation: ambassadorial, alien, business, docking etc. Even the elongated image

of the interior core, as seen from Sinclair/Sheridan's office, the restaurant, or the monorail, alerts us to the division and variation within its shell.

Babylon 5 ought to be easily charted, but it is not. If *Blade Runner* offers us a film version of a fractal city, a post-modern location where we cannot map ourselves, and therefore cannot know ourselves, Babylon 5 offers an equally confusing myriad of impossible locations within its spinning station shell. It functions in two ways, partially through the dislocated sense of the station itself, and secondly through the temporally confusing visions and predictions we encounter throughout the series. Although it is not a city in the sense of the luminous crystal-carved arches and lofty towers of the Minbari capital, nor the elegant Sun-King courtyards and Roman palaces of Centauri Prime, the two capitals of which we become most familiar, it is more of a home. Narn is devastated and a howling post-apocalyptic shell of its former agrarian self, and we seldom see Earth, apart from the grim grey concrete block of EarthGov in Geneva, a brief glimpse of the devastation that was San Diego, or the sterile Psi-Corps headquarters. Mars too, the other chief area of human control, offers gleaming domes linked by fragile networks of travel-tubes, the cramped luxury of William Edgars' domicile, but beyond them, there are only the collapsing tunnels and caves of No.1's resistance cells. The red planet is as hostile and unforgiving as the concrete of Earth is unwelcomingly uniform and staid.

In contrast to the static edifices of the planetary capitals, Babylon 5 is in perpetual motion, light glinting off its blue-metal tiles and gleaming forward-stabilisers. Its interior recalls Jameson's descriptions of the monadic shopping mall and Portman's L.A. Bonaventura hotel. It is a self-perpetuating city turned outside in, and we frequently see examples of this in its core: the trees and plants along the walkways, the gardens and lakes (sometimes above us) visible from the monorail, ambassadorial apartments and offices, the shops and bars of the Zocalo. There are plenty of ways through and across the station, but exits and windows are not readily visible: the only clue to their existence is the security/customs hall where identicards are checked. From the outside, access is equally limited: the only way in lies through the brutal steel jaws of the docking bay. In the same way, the various levels of the station are hard to locate precisely. 'Down below', where the Lurkers go, reminds us that this future is riddled with the same social problems

we face today – ones notably denied by future politicians. On Earth, under Clark, there are no homeless, no displaced people, no unemployed, says Julie Musante in “Voices of Authority”, if there are any, they “choose to be,” or are “criminally insane.” People come to Babylon 5 looking for a new start, use up all their money and end up in down below, eking out a living, falling on more and more difficult times until they can barely exist. The ISN reports in “And Now for a Word” and “The Illusion of Truth” may appeal shamelessly to the isolationist movements on Earth with scurrilous tales of alien influence, but the images themselves are based in truth: the poverty and misery of ‘down-below’ is not a lie.

Whereas the fluctuating state of Babylon 4 in “Babylon Squared” and “War Without End” offers a permanent if hazy warning that time and space “don’t work right,” two other episodes identify more precisely the problem of locating oneself. In “Day of the Dead” a whole sector of the station goes missing. Bought by the Brakiri Ambassador for set period of time, it becomes a physical and spiritual part of the Brakiri homeworld, cut off from the rest of the station from Brakiri dusk until dawn. In “Grey 17 is Missing” (3.19), Garibaldi checks through the station’s various ‘levels’ after the extraordinary disappearance of a maintenance engineer. He discovers an entire level of the station has vanished. It *is* there, of course, but the lift doesn’t stop at it, and only by counting the three-second elevator journey between all the other levels, in the time-honoured detective tradition, can Garibaldi identify the problem. His search then becomes the same as Deckard’s – essentially he enters into a fractal space, a two-dimensional geometrical impossibility according to everyday reality, and the maps, but a reality once he is there to solve the crime. It is a netherworld, with its own hierarchy, an alternative station within the station itself, neither part of the diplomats’ and crew’s living quarters and commercial station life, nor ‘down below’. ⁵⁵ But of course there is no ‘down below’ in a rotating, cylindrical station. So the question of location is further complicated by the way the interior of the station is presented to us. *Babylon 5* has sets, dramatic locations with which we become familiar, the living quarters, the Zocalo, the Japanese garden, the command centre, etc., but their actual location and the corridors which link them are a mystery. Maps abound, charts all over the wall telling us and guests where we are, but

they are of no actual use despite their apparently helpful intent; blue sector, red sector, brown sector, level 10, grey sector, level 14....

The view from Sheridan's office showing the station's green fields, lakes, and most obscurely, its maze,⁵⁶ only confirms this further. When Sheridan faces his darkest moments on the station – framed for the murder of a Minbari in “There all the Honor Lies” (2.14), and falling from the exploding monorail in “The Fall of Night” (2.22) – this is explored psychologically as well as visually. In the darkness of down below he finds the hidden depths of the station, yet where *is* ‘down below’? When he falls from the monorail he falls slowly, because he is close to weightless, yet he must be caught before he hits the rotating station floor at over 60 miles per hour.⁵⁷ We do not know where he and Kosh will land: the station is a conundrum, at once mapped and delineated and yet also cognitively unmappable: a mystery. In direct contrast, although we do not know the route from the bridge to sick bay, or from sickbay to Ten-Forward, or from the Promenade to Sisko's quarters, in the *Star Trek* series, the turbo lift takes us to where we wish to go. The crewmembers step inside, state their destination, and are magically whisked away and neatly delivered to the appropriate location: there is no confusion. In *The Next Generation*'s “Disaster” and *Voyager*'s “Twisted” the breakdown of a turbo lift or the warping of the ship's corridors respectively form the core for an episode of drama, so traumatic is it for the Starfleet crews. In the universe of *Babylon 5* the only thing that can be relied upon is that confusion is constant, and constant renegotiation is essential. “No-one here is exactly what he appears to be – not Mollari, not Delenn, not Sinclair and not me,” says G'Kar to Catherine Sakai in “Mind War.” Indeed, they are not, and the same is true of the universe they inhabit.

This aura of confusion is partially a feature of post-modern texts, or more certainly of texts from a post-modern era. For *Babylons 4* and *5*, it also provides precisely this loss of direction and place – not only in the three dimensions of space, but also in the fourth dimension: time. A major means of creating mystery in *Babylon 5* occurs not just through foreshadowing, but also via flash-forwards. As we have established, this is highly unusual in serial television, and without a clear story arc, impossible over the long term. Flashbacks are easy to incorporate, the material is already to hand, but flash-forwards,

which occur frequently in *Babylon 5* not only between episodes, but also between seasons, simultaneously articulate and require a clear sense of context on the behalf of the storytellers – although the audience is necessarily deprived of that knowledge. Visually, their effect is enhanced by flash-forwards being in colour, flashbacks, whether as personal memories or narrative events, in black and white, and predictions and visions in either according to their type, and by the sequence being repeated when the event is actually reached – merely enhanced by other, contextual scenes. These do not just belong in the time-travel episodes, although they are most common there – we see the experiences of Garibaldi, Sinclair, Delenn, and Sheridan. Nevertheless, rather than repeatedly playing on time-travel as a kind of techno-babble dream (in the *Star Trek* universe time travel can be achieved, and is repeatedly used, yet time travel is also seen as wrong, as in some way deviant). *Babylon 5* uses it sparingly, and those who experience it do not have the power to initialise or control it – hence Sinclair and Garibaldi’s experience on Babylon 4, and Sheridan and Delenn’s journeys through time in “War Without End” Parts 1 and 2. The stabilisers worn in the time-rift are clearly established as a necessity, yet explained only briefly by Zathras, who has brought them from the Great Machine on Epsilon 3. This leaves development room for other areas of interest through mystery, prediction and oracle.

Uniquely in sf television, Straczynski’s universe ordains, predicts, warns, and foreshadows, and the audience can attempt to extract meaning through extrapolation, but is never allowed a full context.⁵⁸ It functions like an oracle responding to someone’s request about the gender of their unborn child by saying “Boy - no girl.” But does it mean there will be a boy, but no girl, or an apologetic “it’ll be a boy, sorry – no, actually it’ll be a girl”? Like Reese’s post-apocalyptic nightmare world of *Terminators*, we are given visions of “a possible future”, and just like Reese, we “don’t know Tech stuff.” As a result, seldom do we know how or why this future may occur. Like Data and Troi in *The Next Generation*’s “Darmok,” we are given the information, but are denied any context, and thus any reliable meaning. The frustration is immense, human curiosity is aroused and we watch, caught helplessly in a narrative web, knowing that we dare not miss any information that might provide the context necessary to understanding.

Given our conceptual linkage of time and space, and our reliance upon temporal linearity, this is a significant problem. The sense of confusion in *Babylon 5* is therefore exacerbated in the three arc-significant time-travel episodes “Babylon Squared” and “War Without End” Parts 1 and 2, where the characters are not only confused as to *where* they are, but *when* they are. The impact of these episodes reverberates throughout the series. As Keane remarks in “Time Past/Time Future”, even the opening voice-over narration is subverted by the events of “Babylon Squared”. Sinclair’s first season introduction proudly declares “The year is 2258. The name of the place is Babylon 5.” Yet on Babylon 4, no-one knows what the date is. Zathras adds to the confusion; quizzed by Krantz and Sinclair, he responds in brief sentences, confusing “chronologies of tense and time from the offset.”⁵⁹ Zathras is an alien, he has spent his life in the Great Machine on Epsilon 3, and when Garibaldi asks him what year it is, he says “4993.” The information is useless because like *Babylon 5*’s visions and predictions, it has no context. Questioned further by Krantz, Zathras genuinely can’t help: “Much apologising. Mathematics not Zathras’s skill.” In “War Without End” Delenn may be more articulate than poor Zathras, but she is a source of precisely the same kind of confusion. Firstly, she shows Ivanova, Sheridan, Marcus, and Sinclair a recording of the White Star, gathered by Draal and the Great Machine on Epsilon 3 (in “Voices of Authority” we learn that it sees the future and the past). It is of the near future, and in it, the White Star destroys Shadow vessels carrying a fusion bomb to destroy Babylon 4. They are attempting to prevent it from being taken back in time a thousand years to provide a base of operations for the Minbari and Vorlons: they are trying to change the course of history. Delenn then tells her colleagues, who have not yet shot at the Shadow vessels, but who have heard Ivanova’s message from eight days in the future, that “...it’s history. It’s already been done. All we have to do *now* is to make sure that we do it *then*.”

This is a more complex rendering of the format of the detective story identified in the previous section by Todorov’s *Poetics of Prose*. The plotting of the story and the connection between story and plot (more complex than in mundane narratives), create a convoluted experience, and because it stretches across time as well as space, the significance of “Babylon 4” cannot be explained within a single narrative episode. Instead

it is part of the greater myth of Babylon 5, and whereas the threat of destruction to Babylon 5 is only explained after the two-part “War Without End”, the actual destruction of the station does not come to fruition (nor to absolute clarification) until “Sleeping in Light”. As Sinclair says when he tells Marcus and Ivanova that he will take Babylon 4 back in time: “I’ll take it back because I have always taken it back, and I always will. It’s already happened.” *Babylon 5* is myth, it is ongoing and never ending, existing both diachronically and synchronically, and as such is impossible to pin down exactly. Its very function is to avoid such a fate, it must remain mutable and flexible – yet recognisable. Like *Dr Who*, perhaps the closest to it in format and purpose, its characters are finite, but its story is infinite.

A recurring feature of time travel stories is that the antagonists are the ones who travel through in time to change things. The forces of good invariably time-travel only to stop history from being changed. In *The Terminator*, Skynet tries to kill Sarah and prevent her son John from being born, so he cannot lead the Resistance. In the second film *T2: Judgement Day*, another terminator is sent back, this time to try and kill her and the child John. Both times the human resistance sends someone back to prevent history from being changed; in the first film Kyle Reese, in the second, an adapted Terminator. *Babylon 5* follows this pattern. History is done, it is set, it has happened: it should not be changed, and thus the Shadows’ action is illegitimate. History must also be protected, which is perhaps why *Babylon 5* is so insistent that we are true to it, and do not create false memories of it. In the Shadows, we encounter a force determined to win at whatever cost. If they succeed in destroying Babylon 4, Delenn warns that the Shadows “will emerge from the last war stronger, their forces intact.” History will change, and the Alliance will not be able to defeat them. As a follower of prophecy, and of the knights of order, the Vorlons, Delenn must have order, time must work the way it is intended, the way it has always worked. The sacrifice required of her is the temporary loss of Sheridan (“this was not part of the plan”), and the permanent loss of Sinclair (“He’s my friend, Lennier”). From this point on prophecy (history) has little place in Delenn’s life (or Sheridan’s) although for others, like G’Kar and Londo, it begins to take priority: Londo has repeatedly seen his destiny and death, with G’Kar’s hands around his throat. It is first

seen in “Midnight on the Firing Line”, and then in “Dust to Dust”, where G’Kar finally shares the Centauri’s vision of their demise – later confirmed by the time line that Delenn insists is set in “War Without End” Part 2, which we see during Sheridan’s future-flash.

What complicates the time travel in *Babylon 5* is that it takes us not just to the future or to the past, but to both. When Sinclair and Garibaldi travel to Babylon 4 in “Babylon Squared”, they have no idea where the station was moved in time. As a result of their experiences in 2258, in “War Without End” Ivanova remarks that when *Babylon 4* vanished, they “assumed it was into the future.” It does, of course, move both ways. On the White Star, Delenn tells Sinclair, Sheridan, Marcus and Ivanova that they must enter the time rift and travel back six years in time, thus moving from 2260 to 2254, the year *Babylon 4* was to have come on-line, and the year it vanished. The faulty acceleration of the machinery Zathras fixes to the core pushes the near-completed *Babylon 4* four years into the future, to 2258, where the Sinclair and Garibaldi of *that* year find it, staffed by a skeleton crew and Krantz, its temporary commander. Krantz introduces them to Zathras, whom they find on board as they become “unstuck in time.” Zathras recognises Sinclair, then denies it, saying “No, not the One,” having already been warned by the Sinclair of 2260 that the Sinclair of 2258 will not recognise him. The Sinclair and Garibaldi of 2258 evacuate the station, leaving Zathras, who begs them to go, telling Sinclair he has “a destiny.” The Sinclair of 2260 watches the evacuation transports leave for the *Babylon 5* of 2258, and then takes *Babylon 4* (and Zathras) back a thousand years as a gift to the Minbari in the last Shadow war. Meanwhile, Sheridan, Delenn, Marcus and Ivanova return to their own *Babylon 5* and their own time, 2260, secure in the knowledge that they have ensured history has occurred as should have done.

In a sense Valen is also a forward time-traveller. As Sinclair he knows of the future and can pass it on in the form of prophecy – but only until Sinclair takes *Babylon 4* back in time. Sinclair remains unaware until he and Delenn receive their messages from Valen, in Sinclair’s handwriting. He must make happen with *Babylon 4* what prophecy (his confirmed history) dictates has already happened in that future. Likewise Sheridan, having experienced the future of Centauri Prime in “War Without End,” recalls it in the

present of “Z’ha’dum”. Thrown some 17 years into the future he is accused by an incandescent Emperor Mollari of:

the crime of neglect, the crime of convenience. During your little war you drove away the Shadows, yes. But you did not think to clean up your mess. If a few of their minions, their dark servants, came to Centauri Prime – well, where is the harm in that? You want to see the harm? *Do you?*”

Londo shows him the once beautiful city. Palls of black smoke tower above crumbling edifices, fires flare from the windows of greying, collapsing homes, a Centauri version of the fall of Rome. A possible history of the future is thus laid out for Sheridan, raising yet more questions for the audience. Gifted with the 2277 consequences of what he and the others are doing in 2260, when he returns to his own time, in “Z’ha’dum” he wants to try and save Centauri Prime. Fearing that he has heeded Delenn’s repeated plea (“Do not go to Z’ha’dum”) in the past of the future timeline he glimpsed, which might have led to Centauri Prime’s destruction, he demonstrates responsibility across time for his actions, and in his farewell message to Delenn, explains his reasoning:

I began to wonder, what if that future happened because I listened to your warning, and didn’t go to Z’ha’dum? What if I could prevent the fall of Centauri Prime *and* end the Shadow war by going there? What I want is to stay alive, to be with you. But you were right before, this is about more than what I want.

The time-line Sheridan sees in the future actually remains the same; trying to logically calculate, or even second guess, an infinite number of possibilities in a finite life is futile. Faced with not only the temporal mystery of Babylon 4 but also the physical role of Babylon 5, Sheridan and the others cannot interpret the situation: they can only act according to their fashion. Krantz repeatedly mumbles that they are “unstuck in time,” whilst Sinclair, Sheridan and Delenn do what is required of them. Marcus’ flippant aside to Ivanova that Zathras is “quite mad, you know,” provokes the ever-practical Commander into commenting: “Marcus, we’re stealing a space station to fight in a war that was over a thousand years ago – we’re *all* mad.”

These episodes fit perfectly with the cause-and-effect philosophy underpinning the series, and its insistence upon the knowing use of free will, but they also partly explain how the judicious employment of Suvin's novum and other narrative devices (such as flash-forwards) help maintain *Babylon 5*'s audience. Of course, with a pre-determined arc rather than a variety of smaller threads, there are limitations to the audience's loyalty. Nevertheless, with this approach it is very clear that subtle (or not so subtle) hints can be dropped into the early narrative, even from the pilot episode, and can later be drawn into the story – or not. There is a marvellous symmetry – one only obtainable through such a preordained narrative structure, which allows its own kind of flexibility – and a full use of the most modern television technologies. In series like *The X Files* or *Deep Space Nine*, both of which draw upon major story-lines, this cannot happen because even though a regular team of writers and producers work on them, in comparison with *Babylon 5* the stories are developed on a relatively short term basis. Thus although convenient flashbacks from past episodes may be available to stress certain elements of continuity, they can never offer flash-forwards, images which form part of a future narrative thread. This demonstrates a remarkably innovative feature of *Babylon 5*'s narrative strategy. Whereas a majority of episodes articulate something (however minor), concerned with the arc, “War Without End” and “Babylon Squared” are excellent examples of this continuity, representing what Keane identifies respectively as Barthes' *texte de plaisir* and *texte de jouissance*.⁶⁰

Narrative Complexity:

If *Babylon 5* poses questions which contribute to a story arc lasting for five seasons, it must also at some stage answer them. As we have seen, “Babylon Squared” and “War Without End” explain what happened to Babylon 4, and why Babylon 5 is so vital – Delenn's admiration for the ability of humans to build communities is all the more practical in this light. However, there is another episode which demonstrates very clearly the narrative strategies employed by *Babylon 5*. It establishes the overall arc of the series,

and poses many more questions than answered by either “Babylon Squared” or “War Without End”. Londo’s introduction to “The Gathering” (Video Extract 1) establishes the sprawling, historical nature of the series, and the constant recourse to ISN and newscasters reminds us of the influence of perspective. In turn, the thirteenth episode of season one, “Signs and Portents”, stresses both the epic and romantic nature of the narrative, whilst its focus is the station itself. The continuing exploration of the lives, loves and experiences of those inhabiting it ensure the familiar romantic, novelistic approach which we associate with television, while the epic nature is underlined by the ethical and moral struggles articulated later in “War Without End”, “Z’ha’dum”, and “Into the Fire” in particular. “The Deconstruction of Falling Stars”, which closes season four, takes in both. It leads us from a deceptively ordinary episode opening (the romantic return of the now-married Sheridan and Delenn to Babylon 5 for Sheridan’s Presidential inauguration), into an increasingly disturbing series of visual ‘historical documents’, ending a million years in the future.

“Signs and Portents” is a profoundly arc-related episode, and offers more clues to the past and future direction of the series’ universe than either “Babylon Squared” or “War Without End”, although they are more action-orientated and thus appear more explicit. When the deceptively charming Morden arrives on the station, he tells the entry officer that he has been out on the Rim. The Rim is a mysterious area in *Babylon 5* terms – the equivalent of the very edge of the frontier, perhaps, because it is also where we can find the Shadows’ planet, Z’ha’dum. It is also the gateway to the mysterious ‘whatever’ that lies beyond, a place to which the Techno-Mages and the First Ones depart – and the place from which Lorien returns for Sheridan. Certainly ‘the Rim’ is mentally allied to Mather’s “Devil’s territories.” Asked by the entry officer if he found anything interesting out there, Morden’s response is a cryptic “yes.” It transpires that his mission is to ask each of the Ambassadors the same, deceptively simple question: “What do you want?” – the antithesis of the question with which Kosh confounds everyone in turn: “Who are you?”

The replies Morden obtains from G’Kar and Londo are the most interesting, and each can be split into two segments. Their initial replies are the same, expressing a

personal desire for him to leave, but the second part of their responses both answer Morden's question and articulate a political ambition. Ultimately, just as we see with Vir's desire to see Morden's head on a pike, their words impact upon what finally happens to them personally and politically. Morden's encounter with Londo is equally prophetic. Mollari initially considers him a relatively harmless madman, and tells him to go away, but is worn down by Morden's inane, grinning insistence. "I want to left alone," he says – and he is, as the Drakh's puppet Emperor in the final episodes of the last season, he is a tragic figure of solitude – no-one is more alone than Centauri Emperor Mollari. The second part of his answer, which echoes Delenn's warning about the Shadows' ambitions, gives Morden the response his masters have been waiting for:

"Do you really want to know what I want? Do you really want to know the truth? I want my people to reclaim their rightful place in the galaxy. I want to see the Centauri stretch forth their hand again and command the stars. I want a rebirth of glory, a renaissance of power. I want to stop running through my life like a man who is late for an appointment, afraid to look back or look forward. I want us to be what we used to be. I want - I want it all back the way it was. Does that answer your question?"

G'Kar initially tells Morden "I want to be left in peace." The second half of his response is vague and uncertain in comparison with Londo's angry tirade. He wants the destruction of the Centauri Republic, nothing else really matters "... so long as Narn is safe." G'Kar is, of course, left in peace – finding over time, a new spiritual depth and comfort in his life for a period. His other wish comes true: the Centauri Republic is destroyed and despite its appalling sacrifice in the Narn-Centauri war, Narn *is* safe. As he greets Garibaldi in the fourth season "Epiphanies" (4.07), G'Kar is ecstatic: "Narn is free." Nothing else matters – including the loss of his eye and later, locked in final combat with Mollari, his life. Fittingly, although both travel some distance spiritually (especially G'Kar), these two final representatives of the old way of thinking die together, along with their races' eternal hatred.

Morden's encounters with Delenn and Kosh are more limited but equally revealing. Delenn challenges his question, already more philosophically aware of its complexities than her fellow ambassadors. As he speaks to her, the Triluminary sign

(spiritually associated with Valen and thus central to the Minbari Religious caste), appears on her forehead, warning her, although at the time we are unaware of its significance – to both her and Sinclair.⁶¹ As she looks at Morden, he is cast into shadow, and clearly shaken, she tells him to go: he does so. The meeting with Kosh is accidental, but the Vorlon's ship arrives in time for Kosh to instruct him: "Leave this place, they are not for you."

"In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum" demonstrates that Morden is never alone. Talia telepathically senses the (invisible) Shadow creatures accompanying him, we hear a strange transitory sound, and the camera in Morden's cell permits us the briefest glimpse. The Vorlons are ever-cryptic, but despite the clarity of this statement, it is uncertain in retrospect whether Kosh is speaking to Morden or to the Shadows. In either case, the question is posed: if "they" are not for him, then for whom? Only when the intentions of the Vorlons and the Shadows become clear in the fourth season do we realise that this was a matter of selecting sacrificial pawns for the battle ahead. Nevertheless, the words of both Kosh and Delenn are prophetic, this time for Morden. He, and by default, the Shadows are told: "Leave. Go now." Ultimately, with the exception of Londo, those living on Babylon 5 refuse to be used as pawns for the Shadows or Vorlons. Even Londo, recognising his error is the same as that which he accuses Sheridan of in "War Without End" (the crime of convenience), is given three chances to redeem himself by the prophecies of Lady Morella in "Point of No Return" (3.09), and perhaps does so.⁶²

"Signs and Portents" also marks the brief first appearance of a terrifying spider-shaped Shadow vessel, although we have no idea of what it is – only that it is connected to Morden in some way. Londo has been dealing with a questionable art-trader and has obtained a precious artefact: an ancient symbol of Centauri authority – the Eye. It has been missing for over a century, and echoes Londo's verbal longing for everything to be the way it used to be. Londo lives in the past. Lord Kiro and his aunt, Lady Ladirra, come to Babylon 5 to collect the Eye but rather than returning it to the Centauri Emperor, as intended, Kiro begins to express his desire for power. En route to his ship with Londo and Ladirra, Raiders take him hostage, apparently stealing the Eye. Once on their ship, Kiro is shown to be in league with them – and left with Londo, the Lady Ladirra repeats a warning

she gave to Kiro when he was an adolescent: “The Shadows are coming.” This time, she says “the Shadows have come for us all.” No sooner have they set out from Babylon 5 than the Raider ship, its crew and the devious Kiro, are destroyed by the mysterious spider-like vessel. Talking to Sinclair later, Ladira shares her vision of Babylon 5’s possible future: the entire station in fiery demise, an image we see repeatedly in the series.

The other important strand of the episode deals with Sinclair’s loss of memory. He is missing twenty-four hours from his life during the Battle of the Line, beginning when he is taken aboard the Minbari vessel on Delenn’s command. When he regains consciousness, he is drifting in his starfury. It is mentioned in “The Gathering” and in “And The Sky Full of Stars” (1.08) where he is interrogated by renegade officers from EarthForce who believe he made a deal with the Minbari. In fact, “And the Sky Full of Stars” shows that when Sinclair is taken prisoner, the Minbari interrogate him. The glowing Triluminary reveals to them the secret that Lennier discloses to Sheridan in “Points of Departure” – that Minbari and humans souls are linked in some way. Under instruction from Sinclair, Garibaldi discovers that everyone short-listed for the post of station Commander was rejected by the Minbari – until his name was reached. This apparently minor story-line from “Signs and Portents” establishes one of the factors necessary to “Legacies” (1.17) where the Minbari warrior Neroon tells Sinclair that he “talks like a Minbari.” It also justifies Sinclair’s posting to Minbar as Ambassador in “Points of Departure” and in “War Without End” (Part 1) clarifies the Vorlon’s comment to Rathenn, on Minbar, that Sinclair “is the closed circle. He is returning to the beginning.” So the episode plays a major role in the story arc without using time travel, but by creating the same narrative effects. It picks up themes established in the pilot and previous episodes, and out of them, creates further mystery and impetus.

This technique occurs several times, but the most important concerns Sheridan. Just as the roles of the other major characters are established in the first series, so Sheridan’s character and destiny must be articulated soon after his arrival in “Points of Departure.” His frustration at being assigned to Babylon 5, initially allegedly to deal with the renegade Minbari cruiser *Trigati*, but also to aid General Hague’s plans to curb Clark’s illegal actions, is further explored briefly in “A Distant Star”. However, the

greater role he (and others) will play is better, albeit implicitly, explored in “The Coming of Shadows”. Here, the dying Centauri Emperor Turhan visits the station, because he admires its work for peace. Turhan’s intention is to apologise to G’Kar and the Narn people for the atrocities carried out by his ancestors. Meanwhile G’Kar, consumed with hatred, plans to assassinate him, but the Emperor collapses before G’Kar can do so. The devious nature of Centauri politics is revealed by the Emperor’s unwillingness to trust his people to deliver his message of reconciliation: it is Franklin who visits G’Kar to say ‘I’m sorry’ on behalf of Turhan. Centauri deception is further clarified by the conspiracy between Lord Refa and Londo – a conspiracy in which Londo ominously involves Morden and the Shadows. Musing on Morden’s earlier offer – “Just name a target” – and ignoring Vir’s horrified pleading, Londo has the Shadows destroy a Narn colony/listening post in Quadrant 14. It results in a new Narn-Centauri war, creating the conflict and chaos that is the Shadows’ ultimate goal. Even as Turhan draws his last breath, Mollari is manufacturing history, a crime of the highest order in *Babylon 5*. To the people assembled in the medical centre Londo says the Emperor has told him: “Continue. Take my people back to the stars.” In the corridor, Refa asks what he really said. Londo replies “He said that we are both damned.” Time, and the universe, prove him right.

Prior to his illness and official speech, Turhan asks to see Sheridan: their conversation foreshadows Sheridan’s destiny. It also refers to Sheridan’s love and respect for his father (the significance of which explains why Kosh is initially drawn to using him, as he is to Delenn, equally observant of her elders) – and is worth repeating in full:

Emperor: “Why are you here? In this place, in that uniform? Was it your choice, or were you pressed into service?”

Sheridan: “It was my choice. The planetary draft didn’t start until the war, a few years later. I guess I wanted to serve something that was bigger than I was, make a difference somewhere, somehow. You seem interested in why people chose to be here?”

Emperor: “It has occurred to me recently that I have never chosen anything. I was born into a role that had been prepared for me. I did everything that I was asked to do because it never occurred to me to choose otherwise. And now – at the end of my life – I wonder what might have been.”

Sheridan: “That’s why my father taught me to live each second as though it were the last moment of my life. He said: ‘If you love, love without reservation, if you fight, fight without fear.’ He called it the Way of the Warrior.”

Emperor: “No regrets then?”

Sheridan: “A few, but just a few. You?”

Emperor: “Enough to fill a lifetime. So much has been lost, so much forgotten. So much pain, so much blood, and for what, I wonder? The past tense, as the present, confuses us, and the future frightens us, and our lives slip away moment by moment, lost in that vast terrible inbetween. But there is still time to seize that one last fragile moment, to choose something better, to make a difference, as you say. And I intend to do just that.”

Sheridan’s encounter with Turhan tells implicitly of his plunge into the abyss at Z’ha’dum, and the test he faces whilst there. This is also foreshadowed and paralleled in “There All the Honor Lies”. Here, harassed by his home officials, subjected to unreasonable demands, Vir tells Londo he spends his life trying to do “what they want, what you want – I don’t even *know* what *I* want.” He speaks of “falling into a pit where there is no way out.” At the same time, Sheridan is framed, accused of murdering a Minbari, and faces the same dilemma. Kosh, in the process of teaching him “to fight legends” – “Hunter, Prey” (2.13) – insists that Sheridan keeps his appointed lesson, far down in the depths of the station, despite the apparent desperation of his current situation. Kosh shows him “one moment of perfect beauty,” which Sheridan later describes to Ivanova as “beauty – in the dark.” Notably, she responds by saying Kosh’s lessons must be working: “You sound just like him,” retrospectively fascinating given that part of Kosh is inside him at Z’ha’dum. A common motif in the Gothic and sf, is this descent into an abyss, metaphorical or physical, after which self-knowledge is obtained.⁶³ Kosh has led Sheridan far into the bowels of that unchartable area ‘down-below’. Sent into a sector where he must stoop to proceed, Sheridan finds what seem to be piles of sackcloth, which inflate into figures. He is asked for a token, and apologetically offers his gold ‘stat bar’, a symbol of the pride associated with his uniform and role. The figures begin a Gregorian chant, part of the Christmas Mass: while Sheridan experiences this perfect moment, he also learns about himself.

“The Coming of Shadows” thus reveals much about the story in seasons to come, Turhan’s questions foreshadowing Sheridan’s conversation with Lorien in the depths of Z’ha’dum in “Whatever Happened to Mr Garibaldi?” (4.02). At Z’ha’dum, Sheridan is in precisely the situation Turhan remarks upon, caught “between seconds, lost in the infinite possibilities between tick and tock.” He dreams of being held by an extraordinary being of light (Lorien), and the scale, composition, and lighting of these scenes (Video Extract

11) underscores *Babylon 5*'s use of the sublime as identified by de Chardin and Robu. The vast creature of light, the Immense, holds Sheridan, the Complex, whilst tiny molecules, the Minute, swirl and spiral around its non-corporeal 'limbs'. Lorien asks Sheridan the same questions posed by the Vorlons and Shadows: "Who are you. What do you want?" but he also poses another, one which vitally links the other questions: "why are you (here)?" – the same question Turhan asked of Sheridan. Lorien warns Sheridan that:

you can't turn away from death simply because you are afraid of what might happen without you. That's not enough. You're not embracing life, you're fleeing death. And so you're caught in between, unable to go forward or backward. Your friends need what you can be when you are no longer afraid, when you know who you are and why you are, and what you want. When you are no longer looking for reasons to live, but can simply be. You must let go. Surrender yourself to death. The death of flesh, the death of fear. Step into the abyss, and let go. ... It's easy to find something worth dying for – do you have anything worth living for?

At first Sheridan cannot answer; repeatedly he responds with "I can't," or "I don't know how," or "what if I fall?" But as Lorien continues talking, he begins to understand the question. Sheridan quotes Kosh: "'Understanding is a three-edged sword' – your side, their side, and the truth in between."⁶⁴ The two questions the Vorlons and Shadows pose are linked here by Lorien when he says Sheridan must know "why you are" – only this can give the real answer, and the answer that will allow Sheridan to escape from in between – to death or to life. When Lorien tells Sheridan to take a chance, to jump once more into the abyss, he says that he may be able to save him, "I caught you before," but also that it "might not work." Sheridan utters the words that allow his return: "But I can hope." Lorien's response articulates a foundational belief in *Babylon 5*: "Hope is all we have."⁶⁵

Lorien's speech also echoes G'Kar's previous season's end voice-over about the death of hope. In his experience in obeying Kosh and exploring down below, jumping from the monorail and jumping into the pit at Z'ha'dum, Sheridan confronts respectively his own power, his mortality, and his death. In each instance, in the darkest moment he discovers that the worst of places still offer wonder. In the darkness of Z'ha'dum, we see his stat bar lying on the floor in a direct reminder of the previous instance he relinquished

it. At the third time of sacrificing himself, he is resurrected. Karen Sayer notes that the messianic scene from “There all the Honor Lies” provides a “pastiche of the nostalgic and the devout, with the alien and the scientific” and foreshadows Sheridan’s return from the dead in “The Summoning” (4.03). She suggests that:

Babylon 5 clearly, therefore, deploys the Sublime for both visual effect and as a way of addressing the search for identity. Here the metaphysical as so often happens in contemporary science fiction, suddenly returns via the architectural/spatial to overwhelm the individual and make them transcendent.⁶⁶

Although *Babylon 5* avoids verbal redundancy and unnecessary repetition in a linear sense, unlike the soap opera, it still provides careful parallels within its narrative to reiterate at different levels (physical, psychological, and metaphorical) the messages it is imparting. The important difference is that the specific issue and its entire context shifts, unlike in a soap opera where a generally static issue is continually worked through from a variety of perspectives. So although there is a lack of overt redundancy, the major concepts of the series *are* presented in a variety of forms and with minute differences in repetition. Sheridan thus experiences his darkest moments at the same time as Vir and later, Franklin, and in “Whatever Happened to Mr Garibaldi”, is tested by Lorien at Z’ha’dum at the same time as Delenn, Garibaldi and G’Kar face the bleakest of futures.

There is a strong parallel between Sheridan’s experience and Franklin’s more personal revelation in “Shadow Dancing” (3.21), and it helps to mark out the epic and novelistic functions of their respective characters. Sheridan’s romance with Delenn is novelistic, but their actions, dictated for so long by others, are primarily epic. Franklin is not being manipulated by external forces, and his experiences are personal, novelistic, dictated by his own weakness and addiction to stims (stimulants). However, Franklin’s actions are also shown as an exercise in self-indulgence, not an exercise of willing self-sacrifice as Delenn and Sheridan experience, particularly in “Comes the Inquisitor” (2.21), “Z’ha’dum”, and “Moments of Transition” (4.14). One of Franklin’s first actions on the station is to go against the orders of his commanding officer, Sinclair, and the parents of a child he wishes to save by operating – because he refuses to accept their religious belief above his ability as a physician (“Believers”). He offers to resign: Sinclair

refuses to accept it. In “A Race through Dark Places” (2.08) he establishes an underground railway for telepaths; instead of trusting others, he again ‘goes it alone’ and jeopardises the independence of the entire station. At a time of immense pressure, in “Interludes and Examinations” (3.15) he resigns, and goes ‘walkabout.’ Addicted and in need of cleansing, in “Shadow Dancing” he ‘meets himself’ just as he had hoped, but the meeting is far from comfortable. Trying to help someone who is being attacked by a thug, Franklin is stabbed and left to die. As his blood pressure drops and he weakens, a uniformed Franklin appears, to carry out what Gareth Roberts calls a “brutal” attack on the reasons for his resignation:

You finally had it all, didn't you? A good job, people who cared about you, and you messed it up. 'I have to leave before they fire me', 'I have to find myself.' What a bunch of mealy-mouthed self-indulgent Foundationist crap.... Take responsibility for your actions, for crying out loud."

This, says Roberts “is the subversion. The trite ‘I have to find myself,’ trotted out with all seriousness so often in American drama, is debunked and dismissed.”⁶⁷ The incident takes place as the Alliance faces its first open conflict with the Shadows, in “Shadow Dancing”, and a little after Garibaldi has lectured G’Kar about his responsibility as a leader, about the need for working together, not in isolation in “Walkabout” (3.18). Like Sheridan, Franklin is in his own abyss, not just the mental one into which he has retreated, but also physically: not only is he ‘down below,’ but he has to climb a ladder to escape from the pit in which he literally ‘finds’ himself. Like Sheridan, understanding, and sheer force of will, a determination to live for something – not to die for something – allows him to escape. But worse is still to come. When he comes round in Med-Lab, through the window to his room he can see the dead and wounded from the battle with the Shadows. At the very time he was needed most by the others, he was not there, too engaged in the little picture, himself, to remember the big picture, those around him. He later tells Sheridan he finally understands: the stims might have kept him going, allowing him to do more, but he needs to “do better,” not more. At the third time of asking, Franklin too is resurrected but it is a purely personal resurrection.

Sheridan, his life force replenished temporarily by Lorien in “The Summoning”, **also** needs not do more, but to do better. He returns from Z’ha’dum harder, grown in **stature** – matured. Z’ha’dum is his rite of passage: the warrior that he was and the **spiritual** teachings of Delenn, Kosh and Lorien have combined to create a new way, **another** choice. In a universe of elders who offer order or chaos, under Sheridan and **Delenn’s** leadership, the younger races choose to reject the binary ideology and embrace **the** new. The voice-overs from the first two seasons begin to make sense: “It was the **dawn** of the *Third* Age of Mankind.” Evolution will take place, but natural evolution, not **one** created through the perversions of the Vorlons’ genetic intervention or the Shadows **psychological** games. It is significant that the Vorlons are insubstantial, non-corporeal **beings** of light, and the Shadows are skeletal. The Shadows do not change, using **intangible**, psychological techniques for their manipulation (the alluring desire for power, **glory** and victory) whilst the Vorlons use physical ones (appearing as angelic figures from **religion** and myth, and seeding various worlds with telepaths, as we see in “The Fall of **Night**” and “Dust to Dust”). Both aim to create the situation most advantageous to **themselves** in the next great war, with no concern for the younger races who will carry **out** their will.

A prime source of this deception occurs through an unwitting Delenn, and more **questionably**, through Kosh. Delenn is for a long time unaware that she is being **manipulated** into using Sheridan by the Vorlons in a fashion equally cynical to the **Shadows’** use of Morden, and through him, Londo and Refa. We, like the characters, are **asked** to constantly renegotiate our readings, until ultimately we recognise the situation **for** what it is, not what we have presumed. When we see the two ancient races in their **natural** form, unsurprisingly, they are not so different. The second Kosh may be non-**corporeal**, but enraged in “Falling Towards Apotheosis”(4.04), its fluctuating light-**features** are not dissimilar to the overall appearance of the more substantial Shadows: **they** are, like their ideologies, simply two extremes of the same thing. (Video Extracts 12 **a** and **b**) McMahon refers to Goethe in his demonstration of how equal and opposite the **two** older races are, when he says “there is strong Shadow where there is much Light.”⁶⁸ **Sheridan** is drafted to fight on the “side of light,” as Zathras calls it, but the in time we

realise that the light of the Vorlons is just as blinding as the darkness of the Shadows. When Sheridan suggests that he has to “think like them” in order to defeat them in “And the Rock Cried Out No Hiding Place”, an appalled Delenn drags him away from the command centre: she had already realised that no answer will be found in such polarised logic.

Babylon 5’s inherent challenge to binary ideology sometimes occurs in more explicit ways. For example, the idea of the flag, the uniform, the symbol of a nation to be honoured without question and above all else, is challenged in “The Geometry of Shadows”. Every so often, according to tradition, the Drazi enact an arbitrary ritual. They put their hands in a barrel and take out a coloured sash – green or purple. They fight to the death, if necessary, until one side has the upper hand and takes control. Asked by Sheridan to practice her diplomacy by dealing with the ever more flammable situation between the Green and Purple Drazi on Babylon 5, Ivanova is astonished at their explanation for fighting. But her argument that at least human flags “are worth something” sounds hollow in this context. Ultimately, as Clark says, we are “uncomfortably aware that birth and circumstance dictate allegiance just as arbitrarily.”⁶⁹ The title of the episode gives a clue to the importance of this seemingly amusing encounter – while the Vorlons and the Shadows are setting up the younger races to fight for them, Sheridan unwittingly for the Vorlons to battle the Shadows and create a Universe of perfect Vorlon order. At the same time, the Shadows are creating chaos and mistrust on Centauri Prime, Earth and a dozen other worlds. Each power offers its own twisted version of history and evolution to the younger races.

As I have suggested, manufacturing history is a crime in the world of *Babylon 5*. The Vorlons and the Shadows have done it for centuries, the Narn and Centauri, and to a lesser extent the humans and Minbari do it before our eyes. For instance, Delenn, in league with Kosh, allows Sheridan to believe that Anna, unwilling to serve the Shadows, must be dead. She and Kosh do not know, they merely presume, but they are wrong. In effect they deny Sheridan the opportunity to find out for himself, and Delenn faces humiliation for this in “Z’ha’dum” as Sheridan berates her for not trusting him enough: “You ‘couldn’t allow it’. You’d deny me to right to choose.” Her sin parallels that of the

Vorlons, parents who choose for their children, expecting obedience without question. In “Interludes and Examinations” Kosh has earlier revealed his “true colours” when he lashes out at Sheridan, calling him “disrespectful” and “impertinent.” Later, as he is about to be torn apart by the Shadows, Kosh appears to Sheridan as his father in a dream, admitting that he was wrong: “You have to fight your way ... I knew what was ahead, I guess – I guess I was afraid.” He thus is distanced from the other Vorlons, who after his apparent death display no concern for the lives of the younger races. In “The Hour of the Wolf” (4.01), after Sheridan vanishes at Z’ha’dum the new Vorlon Ambassador tells Delenn, casting around for solace in her grief and frustration, that “respect is irrelevant.” Lyta Alexander, acting as his Ambassadorial aide, suggests that the “picture just got bigger,” and we are forced once more to reconsider what we understand of the Vorlons and their ambitions. The answer is very little.

The love or the rift between parent and child is alluded to frequently. Delenn and Sheridan speak constantly of their love for their parents, and their good relations with them. Yet their parents are absent – Delenn’s father is dead, her mother in a convent, while Sheridan’s father (a retired diplomat) and mother, are on Earth, far from the conflicts in which Sheridan is embroiled, yet supportive of his actions. Delenn and Sheridan thus come with no explicit reason to rebel. Delenn initially falls foul of learning her lessons too well, once prophecy has been fulfilled (that is to say, the knowledge that Sinclair could offer from taking Babylon 4 back in time and becoming Valen) she is at a loss, her philosophy temporarily challenged by the new Kosh. But Delenn is rebellious and outspoken. She learns a hard lesson from her hasty, angry words in the Earth-Minbari war, for we learn in “Atonement” (4.09) that she was the one who cried out “Strike them down. No mercy. No mercy!” after the tragic death of Dukhat. Now she thinks when she speaks, she considers the consequences. In “Comes the Inquisitor” the Vorlon emissary Sebastian tells her “your only destiny is to be the nail that gets constantly hammered down. Bang, bang, bang.” He instructs her to “be a nice Minbari, conform, be quiet.” She will not. She refuses to accept the post of leader of the Grey Council, she enters the chrysalis and transforms herself into half-human/half Minbari without the approval of the Council. She flies in the face of tradition when it suits her, electing to marry Sheridan,

and she accepts the role of *Entil'za*, leader of the Rangers, despite the rejection of others, most notably Neroon – who later becomes a convert and sacrifices himself to her cause: life.⁷⁰ No wonder Dukhat is driven to remark that the truth and Delenn are seldom convenient.⁷¹

Sheridan too initially acts merely as a convert to the idea of order and structure – as a military man it is unlikely he would appreciate much else. But he, like Sinclair before him, spends much of his time *not* obeying orders. When he and Ivanova are asked to pay a token fee for their quarters, Sheridan will have none of it and they spend an uncomfortable night in his office, made no better by his terrible jokes. When EarthGov signs a non-aggression pact with the Centauri and refuses to give emergency aid to the Narn, Sheridan still harbours a Narn warship. When President Clark issues an order declaring martial law, Sheridan struggles to delay it – until he realises that the instruction itself is illegal and thus contains its own means of escape. Nevertheless, eventually he announces Babylon 5's secession from the Earth Alliance. So when he feels Kosh is not supporting him in the work against the Shadows, Sheridan rebels, and although that rebellion ultimately, apparently, costs Kosh's life and significantly shortens his own, it also signifies the maturity of the younger races – at least in their leaders. Again, Sheridan takes a third way, not the anticipated selection: he opens “an unexpected door.”⁷²

In “War Without End” Part 2, pointing out Sinclair, Delenn, and Sheridan in turn, Zathras says:

I know you, and I know you, and I know you. All Minbari belief is around three. Three castes: Worker, Warrior, Religious. Three languages: Light, Dark, and Grey. The Nine of the Grey Council – three times three. All is three, as you are three, as you are one. As you are *the* One. You are the One who was. You are the One who is. You are the One who will be. You are the beginning of the story, and the middle of the story and the end of the story that creates the next great story. In your heart you know what Zathras say is true ...

The number three is indeed an important figure in *Babylon 5*. It is the manifestation of balance, an alternative path of compromise and sacrifice between intransigent ideological polarity. As Zathrus explains, Sinclair, Delenn and Sheridan form a trinity – each “the One” as their star comes into ascendancy – but each reliant upon the

other, and occupying the same space and time. In the same episode, just *who* is wearing **the** blue space suit *when* becomes an issue – we know Sheridan and Sinclair have worn it, **but** “the One” of whom Zathras speaks, is Delenn, who has switched time stabilisers to **save** Sheridan, and appears in time to save Zathras. The three are thus interchangeable **and** easily confused, yet what they symbolise is clear. They offer an alternative at a time **when** alternatives seem extinct.

We can identify the value of ‘three’ in the Minbari system of which Zathrus **speaks** – and the Grey Council was notably established by Sinclair (who becomes Valen), **who** learns from Delenn and the Minbari of 2059, who follow the practices established by **Valen** (who was Sinclair). This creates a crucially circular development,⁷³ which depicts **no** single person as responsible for the belief system. Three is also a significant number in **the** transformation of Delenn and Sinclair from Minbari and human to Minbari-human **hybrids**, and in the result of the blending of Sheridan’s military pragmatism and Delenn’s **spiritual** idealism, represented physically by the news of Delenn’s pregnancy in “Wheel of **Fire**” (5.19).⁷⁴ Finally, and vitally, it also articulates the Sublime, as Pascal and de **Chardin** would have it – the Minute (molecular) and the Immense (the universe), **contemplated** by the Complex: life. This is not only articulated by Delenn on many **occasions**, most notably by her descriptions of the universe, but is visualised repeatedly in *Babylon 5*’s dynamic use of markedly different planes, perspectives and dimensions as **part** of its active and narrational mise-en-scène.

The danger of failing to make use of a third option is also made clear. When **Sinclair** takes Babylon 4 back in time, he takes with him Zathras – an alien who functions **as** a beast of burden. With the influence of Valen (and Zathras’ words to Sinclair/Valen) **the** spiritually wise Minbari have understood and recognised the need for a third option, **the** power of three over the past thousand years. Along with the Warrior and the Religious **castes** are the Minbari Workers. The Civil War occurs because, as Delenn argues, for too **long** the Workers were forgotten, while the Warrior and Religious castes held sway. The **Minbari** temporarily forgot the third option, and reverted to polarised binary politics, **resulting** in Civil War. Delenn’s intended self-sacrifice and Neroon’s martyrdom in “**Moments of Transition**” remind us all of the dangers of this. Re-forming the Grey

Council, Delenn says it will no longer float in the stars, set apart from its people, but will instead be rooted firmly amongst them. The Worker caste has four representatives while the Religious and Warrior caste only have two each. The final place is “reserved in memory of Neroon, until the day it is taken by the One that is to come.” This is an updating of the traditions we have seen throughout the series, where a place is frequently reserved for the return of Valen (such as the eating of Flarn). The worker also serves as a link between the Warrior and the Religious caste, the necessary link between the action and the philosophy. Delenn is looking forward here, not backwards, reaching to the future, not trapped by the past.

So we can see that interwoven within the very fabric of *Babylon 5* is a central denial of binary ideology, and a demand for an awareness of the interconnectedness of life through actions, thoughts, and words, across the universe. The series can function in this manner because of its strong, preordained epic story arc and although, as we have noted, the uncertainty of renewal undoubtedly compromised a smoother flow of complex narrative towards the end of season four and into season five, the story was not overtly compromised. It still utilises long, arc-related threads – the establishment of the new Alliance, the telepath crisis, the Drakh and the fall of Centauri Prime – their ordering and complexity is merely adjusted. The original ability to preordain, foreshadow and more importantly, flash-forward as well as into the past, creates and maintains a link and a hook, much like Sinclair’s “closed circle,” drawing its audience back until a satisfactory resolution to all levels of the story is achieved.

This is how *Babylon 5* turns several weaknesses of the soap opera format into considerable strengths. As we noted in Part Three, soap opera is driven by the need to multiply incident. The complex multiplicity of plots also means that character coherence is secondary to incident, and so the residents of *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*, or *Dallas* are forced to act ‘out’ of character as often as ‘in’ character. Because soap operas debate and ‘work through’ current events through discussion from a variety of perspectives, their characters can appear inconsistent or implausible, especially to the casual viewer. *Babylon 5*’s narrative avoids the redundant and arbitrary tendencies of traditional long-term television soap opera, whilst simultaneously exploiting its fundamental elements. It

relies upon continuous incident to draw back its audience, but that incident is planned and **thus** entirely coherent, and in that sense, discrete. It (re)considers actions from various, **alternative** perspectives at different times, and has array of potentially malleable **characters**, from Sheridan and Delenn to the ISN reporters and minor alien delegations. **However**, these characters are not inconsistent; instead they are evolutionary, changed by **both** action and circumstance. The complex story, our understanding of both it and of the **characters** themselves, is directly linked to the degree of knowledge they and we possess **of** the unfolding arc. The actions of the characters change according to this knowledge. **Thus**, just as *Babylon 5*'s universe is continuously interwoven with the actions of its **characters**, so the understanding of that story is interwoven with the attention of its **audience**. Equally *Babylon 5* integrates its narrative into our lives, through recognisable **social** and historical issues from our own cultures, especially from science fiction, but **sufficiently** distanced for us to encounter them as if anew.

Verbal and Visual Imagery:

As we have established, in the future world of *Babylon 5* people carry out **extraordinary** acts of epic proportions, and, as Ivanova's voicecover from "Sleeping in **Light**" (Video Extract 8b) recognises, sometimes "true strength comes from the most **unlikely** places," such as the once indecisive Zack and timid Vir. Yet importantly, all the **characters** base their lives around very ordinary things. They still eat out, dress up, buy **trinkets**, have small ambitions and daily desires, personal problems and personal **relationships**. Garibaldi is a struggling reformed alcoholic, Zack has a questionable past, **Sheridan** is still mourning the death of his wife Anna (season two), Lyta has financial **troubles** (season five), and the transformed Delenn in season two has no concept of how **to** wash her hair, and turns to an aghast Ivanova for help with that and other more **personal** issues. Trying further to explore her human side, Delenn emerges in a black **evening** dress "which will turn heads," to dine with Sheridan. Sheridan reciprocates by **eating** Flarn and engaging in the associated ritual. G'Kar inexplicably develops a love of

Swedish meatballs; Lennier helps Garibaldi build a motorcycle, but adds a clean Minbari fuel source. Ivanova wakes up wondering why her mouth tastes like carpet. Everyday life is at times painfully similar to life as we recognise it today.

There are no magical transporters or food replicators in *Babylon 5*, people still eat pizzas and order takeaways. Until after the Earth-Minbar war, Earthforce did not have artificial gravity in its ships, and they bought 'jump-gate' technology from other races. Human expertise has not been enough in isolation, and there are no grand pseudo-scientific explanations of the technology possessed by any race. In "Walkabout", Lennier begins to explain the advantages and operation of the organic Vorlon-based technology behind the White Star, only to have his momentary leaning towards techno-babble dismissed by Sheridan with "Well, as my great grandfather used to say – 'Cool!'" In *Babylon 5* technology is used the way we use technology today – we don't sit in awe of a computer, we just use it – like the crew of actors in *Galaxy Quest*. Even if we don't quite understand what *makes* it work, we understand what it *does* and (mostly) how to make it function. If we are confused, aliens are no better. Looking at the control panel in an unfamiliar shuttle on the descent to Epsilon 3 in "A Voice in the Wilderness" Part 2, Londo muses "If I were a landing thruster, which one of these would I be?"

The effect of this careful juxtaposition of the ordinary with the extraordinary establishes a vital connection. It means that the sense of wonder is directed away from technology and out into the sublime universe, into our experience of it – what we see and what we hear. It is underlined by the very ordinary areas of the station which the characters frequent, the very ordinary comments they make to each other. We see nondescript docking bays, the customs areas, the security area, the living quarters, the command room and the war room the chaos of the Zocalo, the bars. Television screens are everywhere – news, information, and entertainment are at a premium. People come together off duty to party, to talk, and to watch. Ivanova's illegal coffee-plant and Garibaldi's Daffy Duck poster only accentuate this very average reality. The interior of Babylon 5 doesn't look like a space station at all; it is just a place where people live and work, with all the communalities and misunderstandings of mundane life today. Lennier and Vir regularly meet to bemoan their status as aides; in "The Hour of the Wolf", when

G'Kar asks naively if Daffy represents one of Garibaldi's household gods, Zack wickedly **tells** him that "it's sort of the Egyptian God of Frustration." Juxtaposed with this **everydayness**, however, is not just the apparently endless variety of aliens who live and **work** on the station, nor the mystical turn of phrases we hear from them - Delenn, G'Kar **and** Kosh in particular. There are also the incredible visions we see outside the station – **the** beautiful, stark universe, a dynamic vision of the cosmos, full of secret wonders. **Mapped** and charted it may be, and the life within integral and eternally connected, but **mysteries** and conundrums abound. Even as Sheridan and Delenn regard Babylon 5, **Epsilon** 3 and the nebula behind it, in "Into the Fire", Sheridan remarks that with the First **Ones**, the Shadows and the Vorlons gone, the magic has also gone. But Delenn corrects **him**: "Now we make our own magic," she says.

In contrast, in *The Next Generation* the entire quadrant is figured out, mapped and **charted**: there is little left to explore. Far from going boldly "where no-one has gone **before**," under Jean-Luc Picard the Enterprise mostly potters around a secure little galaxy **delivering** medical supplies, dropping off passengers and supplying Q with endless **amusement**. If it was daring in killing one of its major players (Tasha Yar) in "Skin of **Evil**", that was its first and final act of rebellion. After the first few episodes, the universe **plays** a mere backdrop: it is ironic that *Star Trek* presumably originated the starfield we **use** on our computers as a screen-saver, because that is mostly all we see of it. It creates a **kind** of windscreen composite vista, artificially framing space from a height. Standing on **their** bridges, Kirk, Picard or Janeway create latterday examples of this uni-directional **magisterial** gaze Boime (1991) associates with frontier landscape painting, although **mostly** they only gaze at a starfield, planet, or, more commonly, an alien commander in **close-up**. (Video Extracts 13a and b)

Looking through a variety of episodes from both *The Next Generation* and *Voyager* to find examples, I found that the images of space are repeatedly limited to the **ship** in planetary orbit (used as an establishing shot between commercial breaks), and the **black** and white star-scape of warp speed, seen flickering through the portholes of the **observation** lounge, the Captain's 'ready-room', or the mess. Even in "The Best of Both **Worlds**" where the Enterprise locates remains of the Federation fleet destroyed by the

Borg at Wolf 359, the mise-en-scène of the images we receive either from the bridge, or omnisciently as the Enterprise continues on course, lack any substantial narrative dynamic. They are also linear, offering gentle, gradual sweeping turns, lacking use of all dimensions, more appropriate for vessels in gravity than in space. This is in total contrast to the vibrant mise-en-scène of *Babylon 5*, which announces its intentions even in the opening credits. In later series, such as *Voyager*, there is little use of the new televisual technologies and techniques Caldwell identifies. Physical action and descriptive dialogue dominate, while a static mise-en-scène offers a mere indication of the location. The sets are stark, functional and impersonal (the ship interiors are predominantly beige, or grey), the camera moves little, offering mostly close-ups or mid-distance shots, classically edited, or occasionally, keeping abreast of the characters/ship, heading purposefully toward their destination.

Other series make occasional excursions to explore the sublime and the extraordinary.⁷⁵ *Stargate: SG-1* has both Daniel the archaeologist and the alien Teal'c to provide a commentary on the extraordinary. Teal'c can comment about human existence, and the naïve Daniel can express his amazement at alien planets: superficially, it should work well as a cultural exchange. However, the series falls foul of Le Guin's criticism of sf. So rooted is it in ancient history that it is chiefly populated by characters and gods from Earth's Egyptian mythology: its title sequence betrays this. (Video Extract 14) There is seldom a need for space travel per se, transport is provided by the visually impressive stargate. Once through the rippling watery event horizon, the teams pass along an elegant swirling cloud-tunnel of blue and white smoke (reminiscent of the earlier opening sequences for *Dr Who*); as the seasons increase the journey is less frequently shown: it is taken for granted. The networks of stargates, created and connected by unknown aliens, merely provides a superhighway for a series of set combat locations.

As we saw in Part Three, this scenario creates potentially excellent fodder for an episodic series (new week, new planet, new mise-en-scène, new alien encounter), and the occasional revival of long-term threads. However, the opportunity is diminished. Major Samantha Carter is not only an experienced combat pilot, but also a doctor of physics, capable of interpreting the remarkable phenomena we see – black holes, worm-holes,

temporal anomalies. She provides a hard-core scientific approach, actively diminishing **the** sense of wonder; astounding imagery is thus reduced to examples of astrophysical **theory**, rather than experienced as wonders or mysteries. *Stargate* is further undermined **by** the wilful stupidity of SG-1's commander, Colonel Jack O'Neill (Richard Dean **A**nderson – also the series' co-producer), whose flippant catch-phrases ("Now, see, *that's* **a** surprise"; "I knew that. I did.") ensure that missions are almost whimsical at times. The **p**lanets visited are necessarily Earth-like and seldom extraordinary: the resultant effect **m**inimises the degree of estrangement.

In an email interview (see Appendix C) Eric Chauvin, matte artist for both *Babylon 5* and *Voyager* suggests that *Voyager* also lacks visual and aesthetic innovation:

Paramount knows it has a franchise with a known financial return, it doesn't want to fool around with the formula. Consequently, it doesn't do anything very daring or original because that wouldn't be part of the *Star Trek* style. I'm actually amazed *Voyager* is still on the air. To be honest I don't watch the show. When I get the rough cuts of episodes I'm working (on) I'm astounded how boring and formulaic they are.⁷⁶

The *Star Trek* image has been carefully forged over thirty years, and as Chauvin **f**airly comments, to change it risks the established audience dynamic. There is no reason **w**hy it should, of course – the economy principle of genre is not peculiar to the studio **s**ystem's films, and episodic sf television has traditionally occupied schedules. If the **v**arious *Star Trek* series can guarantee good returns and a solid audience, they clearly **f**ulfil their audiences' expectations to a greater or lesser degree. Whether they are **f**unctioning as science fiction, providing cognitive and linguistic estrangement, is more **d**oubtful. They rely upon the anachronistic bland background of pre 1980s television, **a**llowing their dialogue (especially technical discourse) to dominate, rather than paying **a**ttention to the potential of a dynamic mise-en-scène.

However, more interestingly for my argument, Chauvin also confirms that "on a **p**er episode basis, the amount of work I do on *Voyager* is significantly less than on *B5*." **C**ertainly, *Babylon 5*'s frequent images of space and space travel utilise depth and **m**obility in a manner unfamiliar to even the newer *Star Trek* series, shifting between **p**lanes and perspectives, spinning, swirling and rotating. The departure of the Imperial **C**entauri vessels following the death of Turhan in "The Coming of Shadows" is a fine

example of how this occurs in even the briefest of scenes. (Video Extract 15) Epsilon 3 and the nebulae form the background, closer is Babylon 5, and alongside (but closer for the viewer) are the Centauri vessels. Maintaining the rotating station as its central focus, the 'camera' turns from left to right as the ships depart to the left. The result is not only powerfully dynamic, but three-dimensional, because the different planes of action and their various movements are highlighted. Paralleling the advances made by Bierstadt and Church in the late 1800s, our gaze is mobilised through the judicious use of new technology. *Babylon 5* creates dynamic composite vistas, channelling incredible depth and vibrant motion into its television images, creating a narrative mise-en-scène of intense power. (Please see Appendix E for an interview with *Babylon 5*'s visual effect artist, Ron Thornton.)

Except for the rarely used observation deck, and Ivanova's limited view from the command centre (and even these have rotating backgrounds), *Babylon 5* also has nothing akin to the *Star Trek* viewscreens. A journey into hyperspace, the equivalent of the quiet, unflickering starlight of *Star Trek*'s warp speed, resembles a trip through hell. (Video Extracts 16a and b) Angry, glaring vortices of red and black swirl in constant flux around the ships, and the danger of losing contact with the navigational beacon is made repeatedly clear ("A Distant Star", "The Fall of Night", and "Movements of Fire and Shadow"). When we emerge into normal space, incredible vistas, many from images captured by the Hubble telescope,⁷⁷ open up before our eyes.

In normal space, the background is never static or empty. Planets have recognisable features, and the ships of the various League and Alliance members appear in a variety of designs: elegant and functional, yet aesthetically colourful and extraordinary. Whereas in *Star Trek* most vessels' outer hulls appear a uniform grey, in *Babylon 5* the ships are as diverse in size, shape, colour and form as the beings operating them. The First Ones' ships are massive, brilliant manifestations of light and movement, dwarfing and diminishing the flamboyance of the Alliance vessels as they enjoin battle. The organic Vorlon ships are squid-like,⁷⁸ incomprehensible hieroglyphs appearing on their hulls as they move; the Shadow vessels are obsidian, the light sliding off their spidery outline, an inchoate scream reverberating as they pass by. (Video Extract 17)

The White Stars at Sheridan's disposal move in all directions possible, bird-like in **their** appearance and motion. The Starfuries don't turn, they 'flip', switching direction **almost** instantly; larger ships rotate or turn in the smallest circle possible, whilst the **Shadow** vessels utilise a strange uncertain trajectory, in keeping with their semi-organic **nature**. Their laser weapons slice through other vessels in nanoseconds. They do not **launch** fighters or missiles, but disgorge them in a shuddering orgasmic travesty of **ejaculation**, conception and birth. In turn, these explode into swarming clouds of arachnid **weaponry**. Larger vessels, notably the White Stars and the elegant angelfish Minbari **warships** (the less developed progenitors of which we see in "War Without End" Part 2, **when** Valen/Sinclair takes Babylon 4 a thousand years back in time), have viewscreens, **but** more frequently use three-dimensional hologrids, which cascade down from the **ceiling**. During the terrible battle in "Shadow Dancing", Sheridan and Delenn command **their** fleet with a view of the entire arena: the conflict surrounds them, encasing them. The **magnitude** and final cost of the event is plain to see: fragments of shattered hulls drift all **around**, and the narrative shifts from epic to personal to epic as we see the conflict run its **course**, and the cost to those involved. (Video Extract 18)⁷⁹

Thus danger and terror, wonder and joy, await us in the universe of *Babylon 5*. If **we** haven't realised this constant flux through the marvellous, omni-directional visuals, **we** have smaller visual signs: the costumes. Elaborate and diverse, their use is one of the **simplest** and clearest examples differentiating *Babylon 5* from other sf series. In *The Next Generation* and *Voyager* Starfleet personnel wear Starfleet uniforms, whilst others (**Federation** or other) are identified merely by the fact that they do not. In one sense, **individuality** is lost in the name of the Federation; actions become predictable once the **uniform** is donned. When Janeway and her crew visit a planet uninvited, they **occasionally** dress in local garments, but fundamentally appearance is irrelevant: the **action** and the technological jargon dominate. The Klingons, Romulans, and Ferengi have **readily** recognisable appearance and clothing, but other than identifying the alien race, the **costumes** signify little, especially given that difference is seldom reinforced through **language** (even in *Deep Space Nine* where Worf's native Klingon is used more

frequently, it is immediately translated and explained). The same is true of *Stargate: SG-1*, *Farscape*, and *Voyager*.⁸⁰

In contrast, *Babylon 5*'s uniforms and clothing alter according to the evolving characters and situation. Each racial grouping has an identifiable style of clothing, but it does not remain constant. The starchy blue and brown Earthforce uniform of the first three seasons gives way to the stylish black and silver outfits Delenn offers Sheridan, Ivanova, Franklin, and Garibaldi in "Ceremonies of Light and Dark", symbolic of their movement away from Earth towards independence. Morden's flashy jewellery and designer suits become less ostentatious as the Shadow war develops, and positively minimalist as the war ends. Delenn's initially harsh appearance softens as she undertakes a change to become partly human. Her ridged head-crest bone becomes tiara-like (albeit reversed), and whilst her dresses retain their kimono-like Minbari origins, they become more flowing and elegant, reminiscent of a fairytale princess. When she is called into action, she wears a simpler, more practical outfit – but often has a cloak – again reminiscent of disguised princesses. Sheridan changes from youthful leader to sober statesman, his uniforms and business suits reflecting this transition, whilst Londo's colourful and flamboyant waistcoats and jackets become darker, more sober, as his character descends into a personal abyss, and he oscillates between drunken clown and Shadow puppet. (Video Extracts 3-7)

Alongside the visual imagery, we also have the verbal imagery of neologisms and transformed language identified by Rabkin to remind us of its magic (we have already established evidence of Rabkin's other category: *Babylon 5*'s historical and generic intertextuality and self-reflexivity). Kosh offers us the most examples of transformed language: in "Deathwalker" he requests a meeting "at the hour of scampering," suggesting that Talia "listen to the music, not the song," and in "Believers" he notes that if "the avalanche has already begun, it is too late for the pebbles to vote." The use of the Minbari and, to a lesser extent, the Narn languages create adequate neologisms to underline the alien environment. Delenn is still learning English, and her attempts to speak more colloquially are somewhat embarrassing – "abso-fraggin-lutely, dammit" in "The Long Twilight Struggle" (2.20) – but also quite natural. The everyday nature of

conversation (and avoidance of technical jargon) juxtaposed with the exotic and alien **removes** the mundanity enforced by *Star Trek*'s universal translator, or *Stargate: SG-1*'s **basis** of alien tongues in ancient human languages, where archaeologist Daniel serves as a **sort** of portable Rosetta Stone. In "War Without End" Part 1, we are denied knowledge of **all** of what Sinclair says to Delenn after Sheridan is snatched out of time. Only part of it **is** translated by subtitles – thus creating additional questions. In *Babylon 5* visual and **verbal** language, juxtapositions, and hiatuses perpetuate the mystery of existence.

When Sheridan confesses that he is uncertain about his posting to Babylon 5, **Delenn** lapses into poetic language, mystical and enigmatic. (Video Extract 19) She tells **him** that:

The universe puts us in places where we can learn. They are never easy places, but they are right. Wherever we are, is the right place and the right time. Pain sometimes comes – it is part of the process of constantly being born. We are both, I suppose, going through transitions, but the Universe knows what it is doing.

... Then I will tell you a great secret, Captain, perhaps the greatest of all time. The molecules of your body are the same molecules that make up this station and the nebulae outside. They burn inside the stars themselves. We are starstuff. We are the universe made manifest, trying to figure itself out. As we have both learned, sometimes the universe requires a change of perspective.⁸¹

Delenn does not only wax lyrical and philosophical: her connection of the minute **and** the immense performs that powerful function of the Sublime identified by Pascal, de Chardin and Robu. This is one of Delenn's main character functions: it is she who creates **the** impulse, the necessary connections, the link between the one and the three, and the **impetus** for change, through her own actions towards her great cause – life.⁸² Distracted **elsewhere** from the ordinary and mundane, her words encourage us to locate the smallest **molecules**, moving to complex contemplation of our place in the universe, and to the **immense** majesty of the universe around us. This is rare in sf television, but it is common **in** sf literature, as the opening paragraph to Arthur C. Clarke's "Who's There?" (1958) demonstrates:

When Satellite Control called me, I was writing up the day's progress report in the Observation Bubble – the glass-domed office that juts out from the axis of the Space

Station like the hubcap of a wheel. It was not really a good place to work, for the view was too overwhelming. Only a few yards away I could see the construction teams performing their slow-motion ballet as they put the station together like a giant jigsaw puzzle. And beyond them, twenty three thousand miles below, was the blue-green glory of the full Earth, floating against the ravelled star clouds of the Milky Way.⁸³

It is this poetic articulation of the Sublime in juxtaposition with the mundane that allies *Babylon 5* to literary sf, and simultaneously distances it from so much science fiction television. It is also part of how the series best articulates its epic nature: the universe is a place of natural wonder, and we are but a tiny part of it.

As Karen Sayer notes, the Sublime also occurs in depictions of Babylon 5 itself. The last of the Babylon stations is an impressive 5 miles long, a complete city in space, encased in “two million five hundred thousand tons of spinning metal – all alone in the night.” The station, which appears in a different manner in all five seasons’ opening credits, is remarkable. Quoting Fred Botting’s *Gothic* (1996), Sayer considers the station akin to those “vast, magnificent and obscure” objects which “evoked sublime emotions.”⁸⁴ In keeping with our explorations of Burke, Cole, Kant, Aldiss et al., in Part Two, Botting suggests that:

loudness and sudden contrasts, like the play of light and dark in buildings, contributed to the sense of extension and infinity associated with the sublime. While beauty could be contained within an individual’s gaze, sublimity presented an excess that could not be processed by a rational mind. This excess, which confronted the individual subject with the thoughts of its own extinction, derived from emotions which ... produced a *frisson* of delight and horror, tranquillity and terror.⁸⁵

Certainly the use of light and dark (inherent to the story) is freely expressed in visualisations of Babylon 5. During the five season run we see it from a remarkable variety of angles and perspectives, many designed as more than mere establishing shots, although these are of course used between acts. A fine example of light and dark occurs in the second season title sequence. (Video Extract 4) As Epsilon 3 eclipses the light of its star, it casts the shining blue rotating station into darkness – until its own lights come on to illuminate it in almost chiaroscuro fashion against the backdrop of the planet and vast nebulae. Undoubtedly, the station is “a shining beacon, all alone in the night.” As we

have already noted, the importance of scale identified by Pascal and de Chardin is **reiterated** by Delenn in her mantra: “We stand between the candle and the star.” Her **much-loved** linkage of the smallest molecule, to ambulant life, to the nebulae outside is **also** drawn to our attention. Visually, it also occurs repeatedly, oftentimes in establishing **shots**, where the tiny maintbots’ continual engineering work, and ships in their vicinity, **create** a grand impression of scale. It is articulated most firmly during the same title **sequence**, which draws us out from the helmet of a space-worker, reflecting the blue-**white** stars around it, to the station itself, to the planet and nebula beyond. *Babylon 5* **itself** stands literally “between the candle and the star,” and metaphorically, as a fortress “**between the darkness and the light.**”

Thus we can see how *Babylon 5* establishes an ideology and narrative pattern **which** visually, verbally and intellectually creates a challenge to its viewers. There is **another** means of ensuring familiarity does not set in at every level. Just as epics rely **upon** continuity and multiplicity of incident, so sf must also continue challenging its viewers. As noted earlier, *Babylon 5* changes its title sequence and theme music every season as part of a strategy to ensure familiarity does not settle in too quickly: the voice-over introduction also changes each season. (See Appendix D and Video Extracts 1, and 3-7.) These sequences offer dynamic glimpses of the marvels within the programme and also a guide to the mood of each season, which changes dramatically. The titles are mysterious and anonymous in season one, showing images of the station’s construction and its inhabitants to Sinclair’s voice-over, and then the cast’s names, merely captions set against a rotating background of the nebula outside *Babylon 5* while the relatively nondescript theme builds gradually. In season two, the characters are more accessible, the cast is shown in pleasant, full screen shots, the music is louder, more flamboyant. With the impending war in season three, Ivanova’s voice-over announces daringly that the “last best hope for peace” has “failed.” The pictures are more determined here: the camera runs along the emphatically hard and lean outer hull of the station, with superimposed images of the cast turning as if to address their audience, whilst the music (although changing only superficially throughout the series), elevates its darker, more sombre tones. Season four is explosive: split-screen images of war and violence from the past seasons collide

with images of the characters in action, whilst in season five the music blossoms into a celebratory anthem as images of Babylon 5's achievement give way to imagery of serious, mature characters.

The music is also non-specific. Whereas the themes from *The Next Generation* and *Voyager*, etc., all have triumphant French horn and trumpet elements which are highly reminiscent of music normally associated with pioneering westerns (Video Extracts 20 and 21) *Babylon 5* eschews this, using instead far less generic, and more neutral tonalities.⁸⁶ It does not possess the innovative alien qualities of *Forbidden Planet*'s sound design, but it is a far cry from the brass triumphalism of *The Next Generation* or *Voyager*, which equates the cosmos with the wild west. Likewise, although its title sequences contain seasonal historical introductions, *Babylon 5* is not generally prone to the use of voiceovers, or a version of the 'Captain's Log'. However, at the rare, but vital, moments in the series, when additional voiceovers do occur, notably they come from non-humans. Ivanova may warn of the coming war in "The Fall of Night" at the end of season two, and she continues this grim overview with her season three voiceover, but in "Z'ha'dum", after Sheridan's presumed death it is G'Kar who speaks in poignant anticipation of the future. (Video Extract 22) As we watch Shadow vessels circling their destroyed city, and the chasm into which Sheridan plummets in his desperate act of self-sacrifice, the Narn tells us that:

It was the end of the Earth year 2260, and the war had paused, suddenly and unexpectedly. All around us it was as if the universe were holding its breath, waiting.

All of life can be broken down into moments of transition or moments of revelation. This had the feeling of both.

G'Quan wrote: 'There is a greater darkness than the one we fight. It is the darkness of the soul that has lost its way. The war we fight is not against powers and principalities: it is against chaos, and despair. Greater than the death of flesh is the death of hope, the death of dreams. Against this peril we can never surrender.'

The future is all around us, waiting in moments of transition to be born in moments of revelation. No-one knows the shape of that future, or where it will take us. We know only that it is always born in pain.

Delenn introduces “War Without End” Part 2 and “Z’ha’dum” and comments upon the next twenty years of the Alliance in “Rising Star.” The fourth and fifth seasons’ introductions are also truly intergalactic, with excerpts from previous episodes, and a multi-cast introduction. Likewise the proposals for a new Interstellar Alliance, with the four major powers and the League of Non-Aligned Worlds involved (reformed much as the faltering League of Nations was replaced by the United Nations), are presented by Delenn, not Sheridan, in “Rising Star”. Similarly, the Declaration of Principles for the new Alliance is drafted by G’Kar, whose literary skills have been nicely honed during the past two seasons, whilst he writes his own book of philosophical and spiritual revelation. Thus the future is seen to belong to everyone, and to be of everyone’s making, equally human and non-human. It can fairly be argued that the smaller races are too frequently demonstrated to be spineless, conniving, or simply untrustworthy. Andy Lane also notes the fascist tendency of the Rangers in “Learning Curve” (5.05), reminding us that they are appointed by, and answerable to, originally un-elected persons such as Delenn and Sheridan, and questions the passing of the Presidency to Delenn after Sheridan’s death.⁸⁷ However, both Sheridan and Delenn earn a right to leadership through their deeds as well as their promises, and the general atmosphere is overwhelmingly suggestive of positive collaboration, which will in turn lead to justice, equality, and a potentially better future for everyone.

Lane’s point is perhaps linked to the fact that the new Alliance is not suggested by Earth. Brought to its knees by President Clark, Earth is merely invited to join, although admittedly the ground-rumbling fly-over by the White Star fleet as Delenn states the terms of the treaty is more threatening than welcoming. But this is not the direct threat of external intervention in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), where Sobchack sees the “Platonic values” manifested in Klaatu’s ascetic flying saucer (and his giant robot, Gort) as a cry for “clarity, sanity and reason” in direct contrast to the chaotic *mise en scène* of Washington DC’s human sprawl.⁸⁸ The 1950s fear of a kindly warning, or a god like intervention in the face of adversity or human foolishness, was not far from the fear of pure invasion - with no salvation, as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* suggests. In *Babylon 5*, Earth is invited to join the new Alliance, not merely scolded by a paternalistic *deus ex*

machina, and the Rangers, unlike Klaatu's intergalactic robot police force, are drawn from members of all the Alliance worlds. Thus an alternative partnership of human and alien (in Sheridan and Delenn's case, also of male and female, and alien/human hybridity), is made clear in these articulations, and the actions and imagery of the series further this ambition.

This seasonal change and use of 'alien' voiceovers may seem minor, but it operates in direct contrast to the familiar and constant opening sequences of other sf series, which do not change, or merely enhance/amend certain aspects of their visuals. *The Next Generation* revamped its opening sequence in later series, but not its voice-over. *Blake's 7* and *Dr Who* also changed, but this is more to do with taking advantage of advances in technology (especially in the case of the long running *Dr Who*), whilst the loss of Blake after season two necessitated a change in titles for *Blake's 7*. The titles of *Voyager* promise much, and they deserve consideration, since they contain some splendid examples of space imagery. (Video Extract 21) Sadly, this is not often extended into the episodes themselves. The sequence contains what we might call the elemental: as *Voyager* crosses the screen we see fire, air, water, and rock. The ship first passes through a scarlet and yellow solar-flare, then sends ripples through a multi-coloured pastel gaseous cloud (which simultaneously resembles water and air). We look up to see *Voyager* crossing above an ice-bound planetoid, then the camera rises through the ring of tiny asteroids, which clatter on the 'camera' as we travel through them, ultimately coming level with, and then above, the ship as it passes the Saturn-like planet. Finally, as the warp engines come on line, the ship moves toward a glorious purple, blue, and scarlet nebula backdrop, vanishing in a point of brilliant white light. Just as *Voyager's* journey home recalls the adventures of Sinbad and Odysseus, so the elements precious to them are shown to us, making the connection between those ancient heroic voyages across Earth. It echoes the sense of destiny we observe in pictures of the frontier, except rather than heading West to new lands, the ship is heading home through new lands. Yet the closing image of its journey is against a backdrop not dissimilar to the promise offered within Bierstadt's *Sunset in the Yosemite Valley* (1868) (Fig. 14): the same light as we find in this, or in Church's *Twilight in the Wilderness* (Fig. 13) infuses the imagery here.

The difference is important: *Voyager* is backward looking rather than forward looking. The Western articulated its demise as it articulated its existence: it was a self-fulfilling prophecy. The frontier hero, whether the eponymous Shane or *The Searchers*' Ethan Edwards, is condemned forever to ride further west, further into nature, further towards the sunset and the end, as the frontier is swallowed up by civilisation: it is the very place they protect, yet simultaneously, can never truly inhabit. But the western states were settled long before the mid-west, and where east and west meet, the frontier, like the setting sun, is gone. Bierstadt's paintings of Yosemite were notably often of sunset, the end of light. They are therefore a retrospective of what *was*, as well as what they actually depict – ideologically and culturally.

Voyager offers a similar kind of directional retrospective. On several occasions Janeway is asked why she refuses to let the crew settle in the Delta Quadrant, given that their journey home is estimated to take 70 years. But she steadfastly refuses, there is no settling here; the values and customs of Starfleet are honoured and obeyed, there is little deviation despite circumstances, as "Equinox" confirms. Even in "Resolutions" when she and Chakotay contract a virus and are unable to leave a planet, the ship carries on – only to return once the Doctor has located a cure. Seldom does the crew learn from others: it is far more interested in teaching everyone else Federation values, Federation ideology. One of the continuing threads is the gradual humanisation of Kes, Neelix and Seven of Nine: they are taught the values that Janeway holds dear. Even the Maquis crew rapidly accepts the change – Chakotay, their commander, most of all. In "Nemesis" he expresses his surprise at an alien race's desperation to destroy their "enemy," saying that his people would try to talk things out. Yet he was a Maquis rebel, fighting desperately to save his adopted planet (ceded to the Cardassians), just a few brief years prior. In the film *Star Trek: Generations* (1994) the android Data expresses the Western frontier values lurking close beneath the surface most clearly, saying: "Saddle-up, lock and load." *Star Trek*'s anachronistic ideology is betrayed by its metaphors, its militarism, and its music.

A New Epic, A New Ideology:

In contrast to other series then, *Babylon 5* subtly and effectively change its titles, voice-over and music each season. Its characters evolve not only in psychologically and philosophically, but their appearances change superficially or more fundamentally to underline this. *Babylon 5* also dwells upon its images of the galaxy more than any other series, and the choice of imagery and its inherent narrative – the narrative mise-en-scène, as opposed to the dramatic narrative – is another factor which distinguishes it from its peers. Ironically, it is partly the financing of *Babylon 5* that presented it with the opportunity to use imagery in a more daring and more frequent manner. Although Eric Chauvin believes that the appearance of *Babylon 5* is “the result of several factors,” he unsurprisingly rates the most significant factor as money. However, echoing some of the reasons Caldwell notes in *Televisuality*, Chauvin suggests that when the series started, it already “had more visually ambitious shots than the budget could afford. A big cost saver was doing all the FX shots on a desktop computer.” So even discounting financial reasons for numerous matte and FX shots, *Babylon 5*’s ambitions importantly combined imagery with narrative from the start. Chauvin felt that its sets:

were very unimpressive compared to those on say the Star Trek series. To make up for their shortcomings a lot was done in the mood of lighting on the sets, The use of shadows, pool lighting and atmospherics (smoke) were used to add visual interest inexpensively. This economical approach to the show also [a]ffected the work I did on the show. Shots that were designed had high production value but didn’t cost much to produce... Once the producer caught onto how much production value they could get for the money, the amount of shots I did exponentially increased from season to season.⁸⁹

So, partially through intent, and partially through financial requirements, if *Babylon 5*’s future galactic history forms the bedrock for its narrative, the images of that future, its verbal articulation, and the sense of destiny jointly evoked through them, are equally vital. Like everything in *Babylon 5*, they are integrated, integral, not merely pretty backdrops or exotic locations soon forgotten. But *Babylon 5* is more than an innovative and clever use of television narrative forms and visuals by a determined author/producer and collaborative crew. It also represents that which lies at the heart of sf and yet, as we

have seen, is so rarely offered consistently by television: an ideological break. As Roberts notes, this:

is why *Babylon 5* is in such an important position. It comments upon where we are now as western culture fractures beneath the alternatives from around the world, as well as from internal pressures born of previously excluded factions of society (in terms of gender and class). We are in crisis. For too long the brutality of dichotomy, thesis and antithesis has blunted our thinking. ... We have grown beyond such thinking, matured to a point where we can handle more than mere binary opposition. It served its purpose, but its time is passed.⁹⁰

The light of destiny in *Babylon 5* is like its ideology, it is not linear: it is everywhere. Instead of the directional, binary light of the frontier, west towards the future or east towards the past, a divine illumination of a specific location ahead of us in time and place, in *Babylon 5* our destiny is where we make it, and where we find it. If the good ship *Voyager* vanishes into a diamond flash of light on its way home, *Babylon 5* itself is that light – “a shining beacon, all alone in the night.” Only at the end does the station itself perish, in fire, as predicted by Ladirra twenty-five years earlier. But the promise forged within it lives on.

Even in the final episode this wonder remains. In “Sleeping in Light”, Sheridan dreams of Lorien, who tells him that he must return to the place where it all began. We were forewarned of this in “The Day of the Dead”. Kosh’s message to Sheridan is “When the long night comes, return to the end of the beginning” – a typically cryptic reference to Coriana 6, the site of the final encounter between the Vorlons and Shadows. Bidding an agonised farewell, Sheridan and Delenn remind us of their connection with the universal sublime: “Goodnight my love, the brightest star in my sky,” he says. “Goodnight – you, who are my sky, and my sun, and my moon,” she replies. Departing from Minbar, Sheridan visits Babylon 5. Its fate is intrinsically linked to that of Sheridan, it is about to be decommissioned. Sheridan then travels on alone to the place where the new order was finally, incontrovertibly established: Coriana 6. He tells Delenn it is better to “end out there.” The power of myth is articulated through the mature Sheridan, as is a recognition of the need for it: just as Valen’s body is never found, so in-diegesis and ex-diegesis, people will never know exactly what happened to Sheridan. Our rare omniscience, our

privilege as television viewers in this scene, is to watch Lorien return in a shimmering blaze of silver/golden light, to take him beyond the Rim. (Video Extract 23)

The magic and wonder of the moment is returned to at the end of the episode. Watching Delenn greeting the golden Minbar sunrise, as she did with Sheridan during their last hours, Ivanova says "As for Delenn – every morning, for as long as she lived, Delenn got up before dawn and watched the sun come up." (Video Extract 24) In the golden glow of the sunrise, the image of Sheridan, clad in golden brown robes, appears briefly at Delenn's side as her outstretched hand reaches beyond him, towards the future: despite its incredible sadness, the present and the past infuse the tableau with warmth and security.⁹¹ The scene also reiterates what *Babylon 5* has dared suggest elsewhere: beyond what we can perceive lies the "next great story," the next step in evolution. For now it is not for us, it remains hidden in a blaze of light – but that light is like that of the early Luminists who created their images before America began actively to 'compose' its Manifest Destiny and thus its landscape. It is centred, not directional: it is simply beyond.

That it is sunrise, not sunset, is a small difference, but it is one of incalculable significance. Sunrise does not offer us the light of something past, a light which can only be chased along a narrow, linear course – futilely sought behind El Capitan, the western mountains, or the next star – always just beyond our grasp. Sunrise is the dawning of a new day, the promise of light all around, and the light is shared by all. It casts down tangible sublimity, in the tradition of those clouds in 19th century art, and it moves towards us, not away from us. It is the promise of the future, not a dusky remembrance of what has been and is gone: it is quite literally "the dawn of the Third Age of Mankind."

Fittingly, given her prophetic introduction to the third season, the words that summarise the story that begins "the next great story"(Video Extract 8b), are spoken by Susan Ivanova:

Babylon 5 was the last of the Babylon stations. There would never be another. It changed the future and it changed us. It taught us that we have to create the future, or others will do it for us. It showed us that we have to care for one another, because if we don't, who will? And that true strength sometimes comes from the most unlikely places. Mostly though, I think it gave us hope that there can always be new beginnings, even for people like us.⁹²

But Ivanova's words are not the end. Even "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars" does not show us 'the end', only the end of one portion of the story. As "Sleeping in Light" closes, the credits (uniquely absent from the beginning of the episode) acknowledge not only the characters and the cast, but also the team behind the programme. Meanwhile, the voice-over tells us that we have watching an "historical document" – an ISN 'take' on the story of the last of the Babylon stations. As maudlin grief sets in at the loss of Sheridan and the end of *Babylon 5*, the objective interrupts us yet again. (Video Extract 25) We have indeed been watching historical records of epic events; the only difference is that they are not recorded *past* events, but in the fashion of science fiction, records of a potential *future*. Even in its final seconds, *Babylon 5* subverts our expectations and subverts the traditions of television and television science fiction.

This then is the epic of *Babylon 5*. I believe that it is a secondary epic, conspicuous in being the first to emerge from the United States in the aftermath of Vietnam and the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is created by collective boutique authorship and marketing, an epic that acknowledges but transcends the fractured mythology of the frontier to find a new means of ideological expression and a new hope in the same location promised to us by the western – that "undiscovered country" of the future.⁹³ Its machiavellian politics compel us to explore our own political ideologies through the potent future histories of science fiction. Through its incorporation of the Sublime within its mise-en-scène, *Babylon 5* reminds us of ancient speculations and journeys of discovery. With its constant use of neologisms, alien lexicons, arcane and transformed language, its poetic and linguistic juxtapositions create and enhance a strong degree of cognitive estrangement. Its combination of the novelistic and the epic, its consistent reworking of traditional television forms, through subversion, deviation and repetition on many levels, ensures a constant re-negotiation of those ontological structures and institutions so often taken for granted in present society.

Babylon 5 is the first modern epic for television, the first epic closed text in American television, and the first solid attempt to reconsider the trenchant, binary

ideology that so dominates western society. It does so in perhaps the only genre that can potentially, realistically allow such a radical subversion: science fiction. *Babylon 5* may not be quite what was originally envisaged in either format or narrative, but its remarkable achievements are decidedly impossible to overlook. Like Le Guin's story of Rilke encountering true myth in Apollo, in *Babylon 5* we too face true myth. Like Apollo to Rilke, it tells us that we must change our lives.⁹⁴

¹ This realisation came while watching an rerun of the *Dr Who* series “Inferno” from 1970. Whilst trying to mend the TARDIS the Doctor is accidentally thrown into a parallel universe. He manages to return to his own universe, but upon realising that things are not *quite* the same in the two realities, he also realises that the existence of alternative and contrasting time lines implies that there is also an opportunity to make difference choices: it implies free will.

² Straczynski, “The Profession of Science Fiction,” 15.

³ Roberts, 47

⁴ *The Next Generation*’s Borg in “Best of Both Worlds”; *Deep Space Nine*’s Dominion shapeshifters through seasons 6 and 7, *Voyager*’s Species 8472 in “In the Flesh” and *Stargate*’s Gou’ald from the start, all demonstrate a firm intention to invade and destroy the Federations and/or Earth.

⁵ Pauline Archell-Thompson writes of this in detail in “Shades of Darkness: Shadow and Myth,” in James and Mendlesohn, 71-79.

⁶ Delenn in “Confessions and Lamentations,” and Brother Theo in “Passing through Gethsemane.”

⁷ Herbert Shu-Shun Chan, “Space and time Out of Joint: ‘War Without End’,” in James and Mendlesohn, 29.

⁸ Nevertheless, when Kosh appears to save Sheridan in the “Fall of Night” (2.22) Lennier sees a winged Minbari figure, whom he names “Valeria.” Paradoxically, the Principles of the Alliance contains the first page of every religious book of its members, perhaps demonstrating how difficult it is for ideology to distance itself from religious morality and ethics.

⁹ The Vorlons are capable of “breaking off” parts of their consciousness and sending them elsewhere – as Kosh does with Lyta and Sheridan – thus Delenn’s speech suggests a kind of hierarchy of power within the universe as well, as if we evolve gradually through a variety of forms until we are at one with the universe itself.

¹⁰ Andy Lane’s comments are in *The Babylon File*, vol. 2 (London: Virgin, 1999), p1-4. Andy Medhurst’s comments are from a personal email, September 2000.

¹¹ Dukhat to Delenn in “Atonement” (4.09). Delenn also repeats this to Lennier on several occasions, most notably in “All Alone in the Night” (2.11).

¹² Straczynski plays a technician who turns off the station’s lights and departs on the final shuttle.

¹³ She is of course saved by Marcus who uses the alien machine from “The Quality of Mercy” to sacrifice his lifeforce to replenish hers – in much the same was as Lorien saves Sheridan with *his* life force.

¹⁴ Lane, *Babylon File* 2, 183.

¹⁵ It is worth remembering however, that Morden is shown never to be alone, that he always has Shadow companions.

¹⁶ *Farscape* is slightly more daring as it throws astronaut Crichton into an alien galaxy, but the ‘heroes’ of the series are undeniably humanoid and our sympathy lies with Crichton more than the ‘muppet’ aliens.

¹⁷ The Ministry of Peace – note the Orwellian overtones.

¹⁸ Stephen R.L. Clark, “Psychopathology and Alien Ethics,” in James and Mendlesohn, 156. For stories demonstrating Dickson’s own thesis, he recommends Dickson’s *The Final Encyclopaedia* (London: Sphere Books, 1984), and *Chantry Guild* (New York: Ace Books, 1988). Actually, most of Dickson’s *Childe* or *Dorsai* books suggest an inherently ethical humanity’s future expansion throughout the galaxy.

¹⁹ See in particular *Alien Zone*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), and Constance Penley et al., *Close Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

²⁰ The states concerned were: Larsa, Eshnunna, Qatna, Aleppo and Assur.

²¹ He drew upon the background of Yugoslavian actor Mira Furlan (Delenn), for some of “the inner turmoil.” Straczynski, “Profession of Science Fiction,” 14.

²² This is perhaps not unlike the ‘historical records’ in *Galaxy Quest*.

²³ Straczynski, “Profession of Science Fiction,” 15.

²⁴ James Brown: “Cyborgs and Symbionts: Technology, Politics and Identity,” in James and Mendlesohn, 129.

²⁵ Clark, 153.

²⁶ Clark, 154.

²⁷ Kevin McCarron, “Religion, Philosophy and the End of History,” in James and Mendlesohn, 142.

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- ²⁸ Clark, 156.
- ²⁹ Sinclair's initial experience is to be falsely charged with the attempted murder of Kosh, Sheridan's first action concerns a renegade Minbari cruiser, the *Trigati* - a horrible irony bearing in mind that he destroyed the Black Star, the Minbari flagship in the Earth-Minbari war.
- ³⁰ Appropriately, given Sheridan and Delenn's engagement and attempt to unite humans and Minbari in a new alliance.
- ³¹ James and Mendlesohn, 8.
- ³² Lincoln's speech actually says: "the last best hope." In Basler, 537.
- ³³ James and Mendlesohn, p13fn.
- ³⁴ "In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum" (2.17).
- ³⁵ The Vorlons are of course seeding planets with telepaths, playing not only at ideological manipulation, but also genetic manipulation. Notably Londo, in league with the Shadows, and from a spiritually bankrupt society, does not see anything.
- ³⁶ Lane, *Babylon File* 1, 184.
- ³⁷ Marcus and Ivanova discuss the story of Valen in "War Without End" Part 2.
- ³⁸ Andy Sawyer, "The Shadows out of Time: Lovecraftian echoes in Babylon 5," in James and Mendlesohn, 63.
- ³⁹ It even has a villain in the two part "Year of Hell" called Annorax.
- ⁴⁰ Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 123.
- ⁴¹ Bukatman, 126.
- ⁴² Bukatman, 130.
- ⁴³ See David Bassom, *Creating 'Babylon 5'* (London: Boxtree/Channel Four, 1996).
- ⁴⁴ Hal Foster, "Armor Fou," *October* 56 (1991): 64-97.
- ⁴⁵ Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 132.
- ⁴⁶ Don Siegel quoted in Stuart M. Kaminsky, *Don Siegel, Director* (New York: Curtis Books, 1974), 104.
- ⁴⁷ Sobchack, 125.
- ⁴⁸ Brown, 110-129.
- ⁴⁹ Claudia Springer, "Muscular Circuitry: The Invincible Armored Cyborg," quoted in Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 302.
- ⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. J. Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and C., 1960), 16.
- ⁵¹ Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 303.
- ⁵² Foster notes that recent sf cinema "though sometimes parodic, even critical, the armored figures of commercial culture symbolically treat fantasmatic threats to the normative social ego: for instance, visions of cities given over to drugged minorities (e.g., *Robocop*)." Foster, 69n.
- ⁵³ The term 'blip' is used for a rogue telepath.
- ⁵⁴ Karen Sayer, "Every Station has its Phantoms: Uncanny Effects and Hybrid Spaces," in James and Mendlesohn, 95.
- ⁵⁵ This experience parallels Garibaldi's efforts to find himself, after Bester has blocked his mind and turned him into an undercover operative.
- ⁵⁶ Morden and Londo meet here in "Chrysalis" (1.22).
- ⁵⁷ Falling (or flying) is forever connected to Sheridan. He recalls his father telling him that if you are falling off a cliff, you might as well try to fly. Delenn offers to watch while he sleeps on the tilted Minbari-style bed, and says she will catch him if he falls. Sheridan actually falls three times. Firstly, it occurs in the gentle manner of Kosh's lesson during a time of personal crisis: a bended knee, a moment of reflection and signal of acquiescence. Secondly and more violently, it is repeated in "The Fall of Night" when he jumps from the monorail to avoid assassination by a Centauri bomb - only to be caught by Kosh. The most violent version occurs at Z'ha'dum. As the White Star crashes through the glittering domed ceiling to deliver its deadly cargo, urged by Kosh, he jumps from the parapet into apparent oblivion. Sheridan actually falls a fourth time, but the question must be: can a dead man fall? When he fights the second Vorlon, with the help of Kosh and Lorien, he must be restored by Lorien.
- ⁵⁸ *Deep Space Nine* has its Bajoran Orbs of Prophecy, but they invariably cast the seeker into a surreal past, to reconsider actions, rather than into the future - suggesting a lack of any extensive pre-planning in the series' narrative.

⁵⁹ Keane, 20.

⁶⁰ Keane, 22-23. Keane refers to Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 9.

⁶¹ We discover in “Atonement” that Delenn is a “child of Valen”, that she is one of his descendants. Valen is Sinclair, thus the Triluminary responds to his DNA – both in the ‘future’ as Sinclair encounters it, and in Valen’s future, when Delenn encounters it.

⁶² Londo is told that he must restore the eye that does not see, not kill the one who is already dead, and at the last, surrender himself to his greatest fear, knowing that it will destroy him. Many critics have suggested that “the eye” refers to the ancient Centauri artefact in “Signs and Portents”, but I believe it refers to G’Kar and Narn. G’Kar’s eye is plucked out by Cartagia, and Londo makes a bargain with G’Kar, to restore Narn and G’Kar, if G’Kar helps him with his plot to remove Cartagia. The one who is already dead presumably refers to Sheridan, Londo’s prisoner on Centauri Prime in 2277 (which we see in “War Without End”). Londo threatens to kill him, but it later transpires that it is a show, put on for the benefit of his ‘keeper’, and Londo allows Sheridan and Delenn to escape. Alternatively, it could refer to Morden, who is ‘dead’ when he returns to Centauri Prime, and it is the destruction of the Shadow vessels and the execution of Morden which brings about the Drakh invasion. Finally, his greatest fear could be loss of control and power, originally all that he wanted, and thus allowing the Drakh keeper to take custody of him in “The Fall of Centauri Prime” (5.18) satisfies this demand. Equally, it could be merely to surrender himself to death itself, at the hands of G’Kar – in which case he demonstrates hitherto unseen nobility in his acceptance of both. Again, without the full context for the events, which we are denied, we cannot be sure.

⁶³ Aldiss and Wingrove, 18.

⁶⁴ “Deathwalker.”

⁶⁵ Lorien reminds Ivanova that love is the greatest gift of her people – Sheridan’s love for Delenn is the powerful force Lorien recognises at this time – a something worth living for. “You should embrace that remarkable illusion,” he tells Ivanova. “It may be the greatest gift your race has ever received.” (Into the Fire).

⁶⁶ Sayer, 93.

⁶⁷ Roberts, 44.

⁶⁸ David F. McMahon, “The Psychological Significance of Straczynski’s Universe,” in James and Mendlesohn, 80.

⁶⁹ Clark, 154.

⁷⁰ Neroon threatens to kill Delenn in “Grey 17 is Missing”, but saves her and sacrifices his own life in “Moments of Transition.”

⁷¹ “In the Beginning.”

⁷² Kosh#2 in “The Hour of the Wolf.”

⁷³ Akin to that which we noted in *Dr Who*.

⁷⁴ We first learn of their son David, in “War Without End” Part 2, when the Delenn of the future tells the time-drifting Sheridan that their son David, is safe. He is referred to again in the “Deconstruction of Falling Stars” and “Sleeping in Light.”

⁷⁵ *Farscape* has fabulous imagery and locations, but they are not dwelt upon, nor seldom integral to the plot (and its intended audience would seem to be younger and the series is less serious in intent than is *Babylon 5*).

⁷⁶ Eric Chauvin in email interview. See Appendix C.

⁷⁷ McMahon, 87.

⁷⁸ According to Ron Thornton, they are actually based on garlic. From interview with Eric Reinholt. See Appendix E.

⁷⁹ This extract is edited for the benefit of continuity. In the episode the battle with the Shadow fleet is intercut with the attack on Dr Franklin.

⁸⁰ Actually the uniform does change in the final two seasons, but no attention is drawn to it, and the suggestion is more to do with an arbitrary fashion change than one meaningful to the narrative.

⁸¹ To Sheridan in “A Distant Star” (4.04).

⁸² She finally discovers this is her answer to the inquisitor Sebastian in “Comes the Inquisitor” (2.21).

⁸³ Arthur C. Clarke, “Who’s There?” in *Of Time and Stars* (Harmondsworth: Puffin Books, 1974), 86.

⁸⁴ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), 164, quoted in Sayer, 92.

⁸⁵ Botting, 164.

⁸⁶ Thank you to Stephen Deutsch for confirming this.

⁸⁷ Lane, *Babylon File* 1, 208. Lane also makes a direct comparison to Nightwatch, and notes the odd tendency to appoint friends and family to Alliance posts in vol.2, 124. He comments further: "Hmm – the Rangers as a fascist organisation who can ignore the entire judicial process in order to take their own personal revenge on those who hurt them. I hope to God this is the prelude to Straczynski's subversion of the Rangers, rather than his idea of how the perfect police force should operate. There is something terribly American about a force of do-gooders with executive authority to do anything they wish." Lane, *Babylon File* 2, 134.

⁸⁸ Sobchack, 76.

⁸⁹ Eric Chauvin in email interview. See Appendix C.

⁹⁰ Roberts, 49.

⁹¹ We don't know, of course, where the sun rises on Minbar – east, west, north or south, but sunrise nevertheless signifies and new day and 'new' light.

⁹² "Sleeping in Light" (5.22).

⁹³ Used in *Star Trek: The Undiscovered Country* (1991) the phrase comes from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Act 3, scene 1. Hamlet is talking of death, but perhaps in that death, resurrection.

⁹⁴ Le Guin, "Myth and Archetype," 45.

PART FIVE

And the Sky Full of Stars: Conclusion

And the Sky Full of Stars – Conclusion

This dissertation does not claim that *Babylon 5* represents a shining template for all future sf television narratives. Nor does it claim that *Babylon 5* was an unwarranted and extraordinary success in the eyes of its producers, viewers and critics. However, it does argue that *Babylon 5* affords us a tantalising glimpse of a hitherto scarcely developed potential in story-telling for television. The series provides the genesis of the lengthy closed drama text in the United States, demonstrating the use of serial and episodic television, not as separate entities, but in potent combination. This is chiefly achieved through the various narrative strategies identified previously, and located within the epic and novel forms. It comes to us also via the Romantic mode, through generic repetition and variation, representation of the Sublime/sense of wonder, and the creative use of cognitive estrangement obtained through poetic juxtaposition and imagery. *Babylon 5* may not be the best that science fiction can achieve, but undoubtedly it demonstrates what is currently *television* science fiction at its best.

Certainly, as I have acknowledged previously, experiments with the closed text have occurred before. The most notable work in sf was carried out in Patrick McGoochan in *The Prisoner*, by Terry Nation in *The Survivors*, and *Blake's 7*. But Nation and McGoochan were working in Britain, two or three decades ago, under vastly different circumstances. Never before has American commercial television, driven as it is by ratings over idiosyncratic artistry and not by a Reithian or Public Service agenda, either accepted or risen to the challenge of producing an original novel, let alone an epic, for television. Some of the reasons have been explored in this thesis, but Straczynski is probably quite right when he suggests that the major reason it had not occurred before is simply because "... no-one had ever done it."¹ *Babylon 5* is a remarkable hybrid. It is neither soap opera nor episodic series, nor saga. It is all of these things, and yet none of them. It is an epic written for television, a closed text with an extensive and complex predetermined story arc, yet it contains episodes that require no prior knowledge whatsoever, but which fit with ease into the greater narrative - sometimes even contributing to it, albeit in elliptical fashion.

Babylon 5 is not the kind of episodic and genial science fiction with which we have become familiar. One of the major problems it faced was precisely how to create a futuristic setting for a television series when that future was already dominated by the universe of Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*. Straczynski recalls an extraordinary interchange with a viewer who demanded to know why hand-links were used in *Babylon 5*, when "... it's been established that in the future chest communicator-pins will be the accepted technology."² One wonders precisely how strong the influence of *Star Trek* can be! But in the 1990s, the various *Star Trek* series required not only revamped site-to-site matter transporters, but also androids that wished to be human, genius children, the tedious discourse of techno-babble, and still relied upon only an occasional use of cgi window-dressing with which to hypnotise their audiences. The sublime, the sense of wonder intrinsic to sf, was mostly absent. *Babylon 5* requires none of *Star Trek*'s toys: it merely demands complete and undivided attention. In this, it challenges theories concerning the casual glance of the television viewer, and thus also rebels against the overwrought repetition and redundancies of traditional television narrative.

When the United Kingdom's Sci-Fi Channel began weekly stripping of the show in August 1998, it smartly introduced the series in advertisements as "a classic period costume drama" adding by way of intrigue that "the period just happens to be 2258."³ *Babylon 5* is perhaps the ultimate period costume drama. Its political intrigues and sinister ideological struggles are of epic proportions: they span millennia, stretching across vast reaches of the galaxy to touch worlds where ancient races once "walked among the stars like giants."⁴ Its story may have been five years in the telling, and the life of the station itself a mere quarter-century, but the lives within its diegesis bridge the centuries – from thousands of years in the past, when the First One (Lorien) came into being, to the inevitable demise of the Earth's solar system, far in the future.⁵

Ancient tales of great discovery, fantastic journeys beyond the known lands, can be found in all cultures. Regardless of their origins, they clearly still fascinate us. In their extreme sublimity they entertain and terrify us, they recreate a lost sense of wonder: most of all, they confront us with that we often fear the most: the truth about ourselves. Perhaps they offer the most international of literature – something which we all can recognise. For the most part, like those ancient tales, *Babylon 5* avoids being culturally specific. But like those ancient tales, its nature is truly speculative and its confrontation is relentless. Repeatedly and explicitly, it asks us: "Who are you?", "What do you want?", and finally, "Why are you here?". More implicitly, it also asks a question central to

speculative fiction from the first voyages beyond known land: "What if ...?" This does not make for comforting, safe television. But *Babylon 5* is not a repetitive space soap, nor an episodic jaunt into strange new worlds through some alien stargate, nor a comfortable potter around the Alpha Quadrant in the safe hands of a politically anxious post-Cold War Federation. It is something new. The profound universe of *Babylon 5* is bleak and unforgiving, cold and harsh – yet strangely uplifting, an abyss illuminated by hope and love, gifting us with a perfect moment of beauty in the dark.

Of course, *Babylon 5* is cult television – all the more so in the United Kingdom where it was originally screened by the most cult of all terrestrial channels, Channel 4. In some ways sf must always be so, its contents frighten the more reactionary amongst us, or elude those who demand reality, or worse still in a genre of speculation "accuracy ...that last refuge of the unimaginative."⁶ Of all the genres, modes and means of storytelling, only sf can so easily and effectively make what is known unknown and what is unknown known, for the very reasons I have previously argued. Its artful juxtapositions of "now" and "then" force us to confront the paradoxes of our ideologies, the hope and the foolishness, and to consider, along with them, the immense potential cradled within the heart of humanity. In some ways sf is the most international of genres, because whereas what is commonly called 'science fiction' today undoubtedly borrows heavily from both the detective and the gothic,⁷ the broader sweep of voyages into the unknown, of early speculative fictions, delves almost four thousand years into human history. It connects us to a world we can know of only through archaeology and myth - ironically perhaps science fiction in its truest sense. With its magnificent use of arcane language, a discourse almost exclusively reserved for timeless tales, sf links us at a stroke with the oldest kinds of speculation in story telling. It connects ancient Babylonian histories and legends to modern-day designs for a future Babylon in space.

Straczynski makes no secret of his admiration for J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and I make no apology for a romantic reference to it now. With the threat of Mordor removed and the Dark Lord's Ring destroyed, peace settled across the land. But to all things there is an end. In time, leaving Middle Earth to the likes of mortal men, the elves, dwarves and wizards departed, sailing from the Grey Havens across the Sundering Seas. Bilbo and Frodo, weary from the burden of the Ring, went with them, into the mists of eternity. There is a parallel we can find with the last days of Sheridan. Travelling once more to Babylon 5 to bid it a fond farewell, he travelled on to Coriana 6, site of the great battle. There, some 20 years after he fell at Z'ha'dum, he was reunited with Lorien, and

joining those we learned to call the First Ones, Sheridan passed beyond the Rim.⁸ At the dawn of the Third Age of Mankind, *Babylon 5*'s universe belongs to the younger races. As Sheridan and Delenn comment at the end of "Into the Fire," whether they rise or fall, the responsibility is theirs alone.

In the final episode, "Sleeping in Light," Straczynski carefully, personally, threw the switch, and the last of the Babylon stations fell dark. In full sight of an honour guard of Alliance vessels it was consumed by fire, just as was prophesied by the Lady Ladirra, its story complete. Perhaps, like wizards and Technomages, we shall not see its like again. But the impact and legacy of the *Babylon 5* series remains. It offers a unique lesson in the potential of story telling in the relatively young art of television. Certainly as an example of what is possible in sf television, *Babylon 5* is a shining beacon, although as I write this in January 2001, sadly it remains "all alone in the night." Whether or not its achievements will be remembered, whether or not its innovations will be taken up, is not for me to tell. Perhaps, after all, this comes too soon after its completion for its ramifications to percolate through traditional television programme making.

Nevertheless, the potential impact of *Babylon 5* should not be underestimated. It may not have achieved what it set out to do in the manner Straczynski and his team had hoped, but what it achieved is remarkable. *Babylon 5* creates a major ideological break, reworking the most basic tenets of the television series, offering a new, vibrant arena for American mythology and ideology. Drawing upon the Sublime, and creating an intensely powerful, dynamic mise-en-scène, it takes the visual and verbal icons and symbols with which we are all familiar and casts them into an alien light – as sf's processes of cognitive estrangement demand. It takes television's use of sfx and cgi as narrative mise-en-scène to new heights. It has thus thrown down its brave challenge to other makers of sf, and to those of us who watch it on television: it has shown us just what *can* be done if there is a willingness to try. The legacy of *Babylon 5* is perhaps precisely that concept – because, in the words of Delenn "what is built endures, what is loved endures, and Babylon 5 – Babylon 5 endures." History, it seems, awaits.⁹

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- ¹ Straczynski, "The Profession of Science Fiction," 8.
- ² Straczynski, "The Profession of Science Fiction," 16.
- ³ The series was shown weeknights, Details in Cable and Wireless, *Cable Guide* (3rd August, 1998): 25.
- ⁴ Delenn: "In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum."
- ⁵ "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars."
- ⁶ Ballard, "Which Way to Inner Space," 117.
- ⁷ We need only see Data in his oft-visited Sherlock Holmes mode to confirm this, or Dr Crusher striving to rid herself of the family ghost/alien in "Sub-Rosa."
- ⁸ "Sleeping In Light."
- ⁹ From "Rising Star." "History awaits," is said by Delenn, prior to the battle in "Shadow Dancing."

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Films:

I use the director's name here not in an auteurist sense, but rather as a means of clarification.

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Alien. dir. Ridley Scott. Twentieth Century Fox/Brandywine Productions: USA/UK, 1979.
Alien³. dir. David Fincher. Brandywine Productions: USA, 1992.
Alien Resurrection. dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Twentieth Century Fox/Brandywine Productions: USA, 1997.
Aliens. dir. James Cameron. Twentieth Century Fox/Brandywine Productions: USA, 1986.
Alphaville. dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Chaumiane/Filmstudio: France/Italy, 1965.
American Graffiti. dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Universal/Lucasfilm/Coppola Company: USA, 1973.
The Andromeda Strain. dir. Robert Wise. Universal/Robert Wise: USA, 1970.
Apocalypse Now. dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Omni Zoetrope: USA, 1979.
The Aristocats. dir. Wolfgang Reitherman. Walt Disney: USA, 1970.
Badlands. dir. Terence Malick. Warner/Pressman/Williams: USA, 1973.
The Ballad of Little Jo. dir. Maggie Greenwald. Rank/Fineline/Polygram/Joco: USA, 1993.
Bend of the River. dir. Anthony Mann. United Artists: USA, 1952.
Blade Runner. dir. Ridley Scott. The Ladd Company: USA, 1982.
Bonnie and Clyde. dir. Arthur Penn. Warner Bros: USA, 1967.
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. dir. George Roy Hill. TCF/Campanile: USA, 1969.
Close Encounters of the Third Kind. dir. Steven Spielberg. Columbia/EMI: USA, 1977.
Colossus (aka The Forbin Project). dir. Joseph Sargent. Universal: USA, 1969.
Contact. dir. Roger Zemeckis. South Side/Warner Bros: USA, 1997.
Dances with Wolves. dir. Kevin Costner. Guild/TIG Productions: USA, 1990.
Dark Star. dir. John Carpenter. Jack H. Harris Productions: USA, 1974.
Death of a Gunfighter. dir. Robert Totten/Don Siegel. Universal: USA, 1969.
The Deer Hunter. dir. Michael Cimino. Universal/EMI: USA, 1978.
Duel. dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal: USA, 1971.
Dune. dir. David Lynch. Dino de Laurentiis: USA, 1984.
The Empire Strikes Back. dir. Irvin Kershner. TCF/Lucasfilm: USA, 1980.
Fantasia. dir. Walt Disney. Walt Disney Company: USA, 1940.
The Fifth Element. dir. Luc Besson. Gaumont/Columbia: USA, 1997.
Galaxy Quest. dir. Dean Parisot. Dreamworks: USA, 1999.

The Green Berets. dir. John Wayne/Ray Kellogg. Warner/Batjac: USA, 1968.
Heaven's Gate. dir. Michael Cimino. United Artists: USA, 1980.
Jaws. dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal: USA, 1975.
The Jungle Book. dir. Wolfgang Reitherman. Walt Disney Company: USA, 1967.
Jurassic Park. dir. Steven Spielberg. UIP/Universal/Amblin: USA, 1993.
The Law and Jake Wade. dir. John Sturges. MGM: USA, 1958.
Little Big Man. dir. Arthur Penn. Stockbridge/Hiller/Cinema Center: USA, 1970.
The Long Goodbye. dir. Robert Altman. UA/Lions Gate: USA, 1973.
MacCabe and Mrs Miller. dir. Robert Altman. Warner Bros: USA, 1971.
The Magnificent Seven. dir. John Sturges. UA/Mirisch-Alpha: USA, 1960.
The Matrix. dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski. Warner Bros: USA, 1998.
Metropolis. dir. Fritz Lang. UFA: Germany, 1926.
No Blade of Grass. dir. Cornel Wilde. MGM: UK, 1970.
North by Northwest. dir. Alfred Hitchcock. MGM: USA, 1959.
Ocean's Eleven. dir. Lewis Milestone. Warner/Dorchester: USA, 1960.
The Omega Man. dir. Boris Sagal. Warner/Walter Seltzer: USA, 1971.
Planet of the Apes. dir. Franklin Schaffner. TCIF/Apjac: USA, 1968.
Return of the Jedi. dir. Richard Marquand. TCF/Lucasfilm: USA, 1983.
The Searchers. dir. John Ford. Warner Bros/CV Whitney: USA, 1956.
Silent Running. dir. Douglas Trumbull. Universal: USA, 1971.
Soldier Blue. dir. Ralph Nelson. Abco: USA, 1970.
Soylent Green. dir. Richard Fleischer. MGM: USA, 1973.
Space Cowboys. dir. Clint Eastwood: USA, 2000.
Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan. dir. Nicholas Meyer. Paramount: USA, 1982.
Star Trek III: The Search For Spock. dir. Leonard Nimoy. Paramount: USA, 1984.
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Star Wars. dir. George Lucas. TCF/Lucasfilm: USA, 1977.
Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace. dir. George Lucas. Lucasfilm/Twentieth Century Fox: USA, 1999.
2001: A Space Odyssey. dir. Stanley Kubrick. MGM: UK, 1968.
The Terminator. dir. James Cameron. Cinema 84/Orion: USA, 1984.
The Thing. dir. John Carpenter. Universal: USA, 1982.
The Thing (From Another World). dir. Christian Nyby. RKO/Winchester: US, 1951.
THX 1138. dir. George Lucas. Warner/American Zoetrope: USA, 1970.
Trip to the Moon. dir. Georges Méliès. France, 1902.
Twelve Monkeys. dir. Terry Gilliam. Universal: USA, 1995.
Uzana's Raid. dir. Robert Aldrich. Universal: USA, 1972.
Westworld. dir. Michael Crichton. MGM: USA, 1973.
The Wild Bunch. dir. Sam Peckinpah. Warner/Seven Arts: USA, 1969.
The X-Files Movie. dir. Rob Bowman. Twentieth Century Fox: USA, 1998.
Young Guns. dir. Christopher Cain. Vestron/Morgan Creek: USA, 1988.

Television:

This list includes only programmes/episodes discussed in detail, or used for video extracts.

Babylon 5 (Please see Appendix A for episode list).

Beauty and the Beast.

Blind Date.

Dark Skies.

Deep Space Nine:

“Badda bing, Badda bang”

“Far Beyond the Stars”

“Q-Less”

“Trials and Tribble-ations”

Dr Who:

“The Pyramids of Mars”

“The Trial of a Timelord”

“The Three Doctors”

“The Five Doctors”

EastEnders..

Hercules:

“A Wicked Good Time”

The Next Generation:

“The Best of Both Worlds”

“Darmok”

“Disaster”

“The Emissary”

“Encounter at Farpoint”

“Face of the Enemy”

“The Neutral Zone”

“Relics”

“Reunion”

“Skin of Evil”

“Take the High Ground”

“Unification”

Red Dwarf:

“The Last Day”

Space: Above and Beyond.

Star Trek:

“The Empath”

“Plato’s Stepchildren”

“The Trouble with Tribbles”

Voyager:

“11.59”
“Bride of Chaotica”
“Caretaker”
“Equinox”
“Future’s End”
“In the Flesh”
“The Killing Game”
“Once Upon a Time”
“The Q and the Grey”
“Resolutions”
“The 39s”
“Threshold”
“Timeless”
“Twisted”

Stargate SG-1.

The X-Files.

APPENDIX A

Babylon 5: character arcs, seasons, episodes, and cast.

MAJOR CHARACTER ARCS:

(This is an amended and expanded alphabetical version of information from *The Lurker's Guide to Babylon 5*. Source: www.midwinter.com/lurk/universe/cast-3.html)

Lyta Alexander:

A former Psi Corps telepath, Lyta is the first commercial telepath assigned to the station. In the pilot episode, she scans the Vorlon ambassador, an experience that left her forever altered. She leaves, tries to reach the Vorlon homeworld, an act which eventually leads to her role as Ambassador Kosh's aide. Returning to Babylon 5 in season three, she has been physically altered by the Vorlons. Her telepathic abilities are astounding, although she mostly keeps their real limits a secret, and only towards the end of season five do we glimpse what she has become – something close to a doomsday weapon. After the death of the original ambassador, Lyta agrees to help Sheridan get rid of the second Kosh, and she joins Byron and his telepathic community in season five, becoming chiefly responsible for the struggle for a Telepath homeworld after Byron's martyrdom. Her powers and her actions become dangerous, and Sheridan has her imprisoned until G'Kar suggests that they leave to explore the galaxy together.

Zack Allen:

One of Garibaldi's lieutenants, Zack is earnest and trustworthy, if not necessarily the brightest person on the station. After the arrest of Garibaldi's old aide for attempted murder ("Revelations") in season two, Zack takes on a more senior role. He joins Nightwatch, not for political reasons but because it pays an extra few credits and he sees no reason why he ought not take advantage of it. Ultimately, he is forced to choose between watching the ever increasing Nazi-style activity of Nightwatch, or helping Sheridan and Garibaldi get rid of them. He joins Sheridan and ultimately becomes Chief of Security for Babylon 5.

Marcus Cole:

A Ranger permanently stationed on Babylon 5 from season three, Marcus is a brave, capable warrior whose sarcastic wit belies dogged determination and fierce loyalty. Marcus fights for the Army of Light because he has nothing else left; his last remaining

family was killed in a Shadow attack. Marcus secretly yearns for the affection of Commander Ivanova, but their relationship never really develops. Marcus sacrifices his life to save Ivanova as she lies critically ill after the assault on Clark's forces.

Vir Cotto:

Centauri assistant to Londo. Generally timid and unsure of himself, Vir occasionally works up the nerve to confront Londo about the dangerous path he is following by dealing with Morden. Londo seldom listens, but Vir does not stop. He is posted to the Minbari homeworld for a while (season three) because Londo wants him to be safe during the Shadow war, and during the Centauri devastation of Narn, Vir's sense of justice leads him to help the Narn escape from their occupied homeworld. He helps Londo plot against the mad Emperor Cartagia, and during the struggle, kills the Emperor with the poison blade Londo intends to use. When Londo becomes Emperor, Vir takes on the role as Ambassador to Babylon 5; after Londo's death, Vir becomes Emperor.

Delenn:

Delenn is a member of the Minbari religious caste and the Minbari Ambassador. She is also *Satai* Delenn, a member of Minbar's ruling body, the Grey Council, and the late leader *Dukhat's* chosen successor. She is a child of Valen, related through the generations to Sinclair/Valen. Her strong sense of *destiny, and conviction* that her role in the forthcoming Shadows war is a matter of fate, leads her to undergo a physical transformation at the end of season one/start of season two. This gives her human characteristics. At first, this makes her an outcast amongst her own people, but as the ancient prophecies started coming true, the Minbari rally around her. Delenn and Sheridan fall in love, but their relationship is largely on hold due to the demands of the Shadow war, and the problems of creating and maintaining a fragile new alliance. After Sinclair returns to the past, Delenn becomes leader of the Rangers, *Entil'za*, a role she later shares with Sheridan as the Shadow war develops. After Earth is freed from Clark's forces, Sheridan and Delenn marry, although the Minbari demand that she justify herself in "Atonement" and we discover that she in fact was the one responsible for Earth almost being wiped out in the Earth-Minbari war. Toward the end of the final season she becomes pregnant. When Sheridan dies she assumes the role of President of the new InterStellar Alliance.

Stephen Franklin:

Dedicated and assured, Dr. Franklin is a specialist in xenobiology (alien biology), and in charge of Medlab on Babylon 5. His strong sense of personal morality is at times in conflict with his duties as the chief medical provider for aliens from hundreds of worlds and cultures, some of whom view his obligations rather differently – "Believers". Dr.

Franklin runs a free clinic 'downbelow' for the lurkers who cannot afford medical care (discovering in the process the alien machine which heals Ivanova and Garibaldi); he also serves on an "underground railroad" for telepaths who do not want to be found by the Psi Corps. During the Shadow war he becomes addicted to stims, goes on 'walkabout' and only returns after he is stabbed and almost dies whilst on his spiritual journey to "meet himself." Franklin is finally appointed to Earth to serve as Head of the Xenobiology division.

Michael Garibaldi:

Asked to take on the role of Chief of Security on Babylon 5 by Sinclair, who has a past association with him, Garibaldi has a troubled past, bouncing from position to position and trying to overcome alcoholism. He is shot by one of his own security people who is involved in the assassination President Santiago, and his life is saved by Sheridan and Franklin, who use the alien machine we encounter in "The Quality of Mercy". Sheridan and Garibaldi become close allies, although Garibaldi is a cynical and sceptical person in contrast to Sheridan's idealism. Garibaldi helps Sinclair and Delenn establish a Ranger connection with Babylon 5. When Sheridan is on Z'ha'dum, Garibaldi is abducted by the Shadows and taken to a Psi Corps facility; he has no idea what was done to him there, and only vaguely remembers the abduction itself – an abduction that is actually arranged by Bester. He returns to Babylon 5 more cynical than ever, programmed to obey psi-commands. Bester uses him to betray and capture Sheridan before showing Garibaldi what he has done. Bester releases him to return to face his fate fully aware of his betrayal, and aware that he is unable to fight the psi-cop's control mechanisms: Bester locates a block in Garibaldi's mind so that he cannot kill Bester in revenge. Returning to Babylon 5, he becomes the chief of security for Sheridan and Delenn's new alliance, but falls once more into alcoholism, and his lapse costs the alliance dearly. Finally coming to terms with it, through the return of his long-time lover Lise Hampton-Edgars, he takes over the multi-national company, "Edgar's Industries" after the death of Lise's husband, and marries her, returning to Mars to live.

G'Kar:

The ambassador of the Narn Regime, after the Centauri-Narn war, G'Kar becomes a fugitive. Sheridan granted him asylum on Babylon 5, which G'Kar is using as a base of operations from which to organise a movement to retake his homeworld from the Centauri. G'Kar is one of the first (apart from Kosh and Delenn), to realise that the ancient enemy, the Shadows, have returned. During "Dust to Dust" G'Kar has a vision, and believes that his people must serve the role of sacrificial lambs, sacrificing themselves in the interest of the greater good. He becomes a spiritual leader among his people, his exile giving him a compelling serenity and sense of conviction similar to that of Delenn. Captured by the Centauri whilst searching for Mr Garibaldi (season four), he is tortured, and has an eye plucked out by the insane Cartagia. Londo makes a bargain with

him, he will free G'Kar and Narn if G'Kar aids him in the removal of Cartagia. G'Kar agrees, and is duly freed. He becomes a bodyguard for Londo, relishing the irony this presents, and reclaims his place amongst the new Alliance leaders. He finally leaves Babylon 5 with Lyta Alexander, to explore the universe, and to escape the ever-increasing adoration of Narns who have read the spiritual text he writes after his vision. He meets his death locked in mutually agreed-combat with his nemesis, Londo.

Susan Ivanova:

Second in command and in charge of the day-to-day operations of Babylon 5, Ivanova is an ambitious, quirky and pessimistic career soldier. Born in Russia, she has a strong dislike for the Psi-Corps, whose legally-mandated drug treatments drove her mother to suicide after it was discovered her mother was a latent telepath. Ivanova too has latent telepathic abilities. In the second season she is promoted to Commander by Sheridan, and takes on more diplomatic duties. A capable pilot and tactician, she frequently commands part of the White Star fleet, and it is whilst continuing the assault on Clark's forces, after Sheridan's capture, that she is critically injured. Marcus takes her back to Babylon 5 and saves her with the alien device that is first shown in "The Quality of Mercy" - and which also saves Garibaldi's life in season two. The cost however, is Marcus' life, and devastated, Ivanova leaves the station for a Deep space assignment. We finally see her as a General in Earth Force, and after Sheridan's death she takes over command of the Rangers from Delenn.

Kosh #1:

Kosh is initially an enigma, hidden within an encounter suit and unwilling to show himself. In the pilot episode he is attacked by an Minbari assassin who attempts to frame Sinclair. Kosh says and does little, but interferes occasionally - "Deathwalker". In season two, having explained to Sheridan about the threat of the Shadows, Kosh saves Sheridan's life, revealing himself as a being of light - like an angel. Each race who sees him, sees their own god or angelic figure - except Londo, who sees nothing. Kosh takes a great interest in Sheridan, teaching him "to fight legends" - ready for the Shadow war. He communicates through a complex sequence of musical tones, translated into English by a device on his encounter suit. When he speaks, his words are cryptic. In season three, when the new alliance is falling apart, Sheridan begs him to do something. At first he refuses, angry with Sheridan for asking, but ultimately he does so, arranging a Vorlon attack on a Shadow fleet. The response is deadly - Morden and his Shadow associates attack Kosh on Babylon 5, tearing him apart. As this happens, Kosh appears to Sheridan in a dream, as his father - reassuring him, but also becoming part of him - an act which saves Sheridan at Z'ha'dum (Kosh tells him to jump into the pit), and again in the battle with the second Vorlon Ambassador.

Kosh #2:

The second Vorlon Ambassador is even more reclusive, and a much darker personality than the first. He has only contempt for other races. Like all Vorlons, in public he wears a bulky encounter suit to hide his true, insubstantial form. The only person on the station who knows anything about Kosh is his aide Lyta Alexander, whose body he occasionally inhabits when he wants to travel incognito. This Ambassador is killed in battle with the first Kosh who 'emerges' from Sheridan in season four, shortly after his return from Z'ha'dum with Lorien.

Lennier:

Lennier is Delenn's Minbari aide, recently out of a monastery on the Minbari homeworld. He reveres Delenn as an almost holy figure and accepts her transformation without question. He pledges his life to her and is perfectly willing to die by her side. He often accompanies her and even in times of crisis, stands by her. Still something of an innocent thanks to his isolated upbringing, Lennier learns the art of diplomacy during his tenure on Babylon 5, and becomes friends with Vir. In "Ceremonies of Light and Dark" we learn that he loves Delenn, and his relationship with Sheridan is thus strained as Delenn's relationship with the Captain develops. After Sheridan and Delenn marry, Lennier joins the Rangers, returning only occasionally to Babylon 5 to serve as best he can: he provides evidence that the Centauri are carrying out acts of terrorism. When Delenn and Sheridan leave for the new Alliance headquarters on Minbar, he acts completely out of character and by an act of omission, predicted by Morden in "Day of the Dead" he almost allows Sheridan to die. He flees, and aside from his holographic apology to the appalled Delenn, we do not see him again.

Londo Mollari:

The Centauri Ambassador to Babylon 5, Londo Mollari is a decadent nobleman, a clownish figure, fond of wine, women and song, from an insignificant royal house. However, he is one of the first people to be lured by the promises of Morden and the Shadows, becomes chief of planetary security for the Centauri Republic, and a member of the Centauri Royal Court. His dealings with the Shadows, at a price he doesn't understand until too late, propel him into war with the Narn, and also into the corridors of Centauri power. His only true love, the former slave-girl Adira, is killed by Morden, but believing Lord Refa (a rival at the court), to be responsible, Londo kills him, only later to discover his error. Forever linked with his opposite number in the Narn regime (G'Kar), Londo has a vision of his death at the hands of G'Kar – something which comes true (in a future-flash) during "War Without End" Part 2. World-weary and horrified by the events spinning out of control around him, Londo's life falls apart. He finally makes a deal with

G'Kar (in the fourth season), then a prisoner of the Centauri regime under the mad Emperor Cartagia. He plans to kill the Emperor, release G'Kar and free Narn. After the death of Cartagia he returns briefly to Babylon 5, but is then recalled to his homeworld. Under the threat of the Vorlon fleet, he executes Morden, and destroys the Shadow vessels to whom Cartagia gives shelter on the planet. In the fifth season, the Drakh, former servants of the Shadows, take control of Centauri Prime as revenge, faking Centauri acts of guerilla warfare against the new Alliance. Londo returns to his planet to become Emperor, he sacrifices his freewill by allowing a Drakh 'keeper' to merge with him. Finally he dies, as predicted, at the hands of G'Kar, with the Centauri Empire in complete collapse.

Morden:

A member of the same expedition Sheridan's wife was on, Morden was captured by the Shadows and now works for them, mostly in liaison with Londo Mollari, but also with others who are agreeable to the devious proposals of the Shadows, such as Lord Refa. He is always accompanied by one or two of the Shadows, though they are invisible to most people – we see them in “In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum” in Morden's cell. After Sheridan's expedition to Z'ha'dum, Morden is initially scarred from the nuclear fallout, but he soon heals. As the Vorlon fleet approaches Centauri Prime in the fourth season, he is executed by Londo - who has his head put on a pike outside the royal court. Morden returns to visit Lennier in “The Day of the Dead” and predicts that he will betray Delenn and the Rangers.

John Sheridan:

Sheridan is appointed commander of Babylon 5 after Sinclair's departure, and asked by General Hague (aware of Clark's plans) to check the loyalty of the officers there. He establishes himself as honest and brave, offering safety to G'Kar after the devastation of Narn, and helping a Narn cruiser under attack from the Centauri (season two). With Delenn, he becomes leader of the Army of Light, and is taught by Kosh to “fight legends”. An officer of the Earth Alliance military until Babylon 5's secession (season three), Sheridan was a hero of the Earth-Minbari War – the only person to survive an attack from a Minbari warship, and the only person to have destroyed one. When his wife Anna, presumed dead, appears from Z'ha'dum, and asks him to return there with her, although he knows it is a trap, he goes to the Shadow homeworld, which results in his 'death'. His love for Delenn and his faith allow him to be temporarily (for a period of 20 years or so) revived by Lorien, one of the First Ones. His sacrifice resulted in the destruction of the Shadows' largest city and halted their advance. The experience lent him a heroic mystique in the eyes of many, and the lessons he learns from Kosh and Lorien allow him (and Delenn) to challenge the Shadows and the Vorlons in “Into the Fire”, resulting in the older races leaving the galaxy, and allowing the younger races to live by their own design. During the war against Clark's forces on Earth, Sheridan is captured,

tortured and interrogated, but eventually rescued by Garibaldi, Franklin and Lyta. He stops Clark from destroying Earth, resigns his commission and is appointed President of the New Alliance. He marries Delenn, and moves with her to Minbar, to the new Alliance Headquarters. Twenty years after his 'death' at Z'ha'dum, he dreams of Lorien and returns, as Kosh tells him in "Day of the Dead", to Coriana 6. Lorien meets him there, and they pass beyond the Rim.

Jeffrey Sinclair:

Appointed to Babylon 5 by EarthGov, Commander Jeffrey Sinclair is a survivor of the Battle of the Line at the end of the Earth-Minbari War. He misses his fighter pilot days and willingly jeopardises his personal safety, yet he is also a calm man, who spends time meditating in the station's Zen Garden. Unsure why he was given command of such a high profile diplomatic station, he tries to find out why he was chosen above the others – only to discover it was at the request of the Minbari. At the end of the first season, after Earth President Santiago is assassinated, Sinclair is recalled to Earth and then mysteriously posted to Minbar. Once there, he takes up his diplomatic duties, but also becomes involved with the Rangers, becoming Ranger 1 – *Entil'za*. Delenn is certain Sinclair has an important destiny ("Soulhunter" and "A Voice in the Wilderness"). We see a glimpse of this when we share his future-flash in "Babylon Squared", where he is fighting against a great and dark power. Finally, upon his return in "War Without End" we learn that he is to become Valen, the great spiritual Minbari leader, and "a Minbari not of Minbari born." He changes into a human-Minbari hybrid by using the same machine that Delenn uses in "Chrysalis" and takes Babylon 4 back in time a thousand years to offer as a gift to the Minbari in their war against the Shadows.

Talia Winters:

Babylon 5's resident commercial telepath (from "Midnight on the Firing Line"), Talia is on her first solo assignment, with level 5 psi rating, bound by the rules and regulations of the Psi Corps. She sells her telepathic services to businessmen and occasionally assists the station personnel. Talia is unaware that she contains a secret personality, in-built by Bester's Psi-cops, one which will endanger Babylon 5's crusade. Talia and Ivanova become close, but when Lyta Alexander returns with a password that will reveal the second personality, Talia tries to kill Lyta, the second personality protecting itself. Lyta sends the password telepathically to all of the command staff, trying to find out who is threatening her, and when Talia is revealed as the unwitting traitor, she is sent back to Earth.

Episodes:

All episodes written by J. Michael Straczynski, unless noted.

Pilot: “The Gathering”

Main Cast:	Commander Jeffrey Sinclair:	Michael O’Hare
	Lt Commander Laurel Takashima:	Tamlyn Tomita
	Security Chief Michael Garibaldi:	Jerry Doyle
	Ambassador Delenn:	Mira Furlan
	Ambassador Lono Mollari:	Peter Jurasik
	Ambassador G’Kar:	Andreas Katsulas
	Dr Benjamin Kyle:	Johnny Sekka
	Lyta Alexander:	Patricia Tallman
	Carolyn Sykes:	Blair Baron
	Del Varner:	John Fleck

Season 1: “Signs and Portents”

Regular/Semi Regular Cast:

Commander Jeffrey Sinclair:	Michael O’Hare
Lt. Commander Susan Ivanova:	Claudia Christian
Security Chief Michael Garibaldi:	Jerry Doyle
Dr Stephen Franklin:	Richard Biggs
Ambassador Delenn;	Mira Furlan
Ambassador Londo Mollari:	Peter Jurasik
Ambassador G’Kar:	Andreas Katsulas
Vir Cotto:	Stephen Furst
Lennier:	Billy Mumy
Na’Toth:	Caitlin Brown
Talia Winters:	Andrea Thompson
David Corwin:	Joshua Cox

Episodes:

- 1.01 “Midnight on the Firing Line”
- 1.02 “Soul Hunter”
- 1.03 “Born to the Purple” (w. Larry DiTillio)
- 1.04 “Infection”
- 1.05 “The Parliament of Dreams”

- 1.06 "Mind War"
- 1.07 "The War Prayer" (w. D. C. Fontana)
- 1.08 "And the Sky Full of Stars"
- 1.09 "Deathwalker" (w. Larry DiTillio)
- 1.10 "Believers" (w. David Gerrold)
- 1.11 "Survivors" (w. Mark Scott Zicree)
- 1.12 "By Any Means Necessary" (w. Kathryn Drennan)
- 1.13 "Signs and Portents"
- 1.14 "TKO" (w. Larry DiTillio)
- 1.15 "Grail" (w. Christy Marx)
- 1.16 "Eyes" (w. Larry DiTillio)
- 1.17 "Legacies" (w. D. C. Fontana)
- 1.18 "A Voice in the Wilderness" Part 1
- 1.19 "A Voice in the Wilderness" Part 2
- 1.20 "Babylon Squared"
- 1.21 "The Quality of Mercy"
- 1.22 "Chrysalis"

Season 2: "The Coming of Shadows"

Regular/Semi Regular Cast:

Captain John Sheridan:	Bruce Boxleitner
Commander Susan Ivanova:	Claudia Christian
Security Chief Michael Garibaldi:	Jerry Doyle
Dr Stephen Franklin:	Richard Biggs
Ambassador Delenn;	Mira Furlan
Ambassador Londo Mollari:	Peter Jurasik
Ambassador G'Kar:	Andreas Katsulas
Vir Cotto:	Stephen Furst
Lennier:	Billy Mumy
Na'Toth:	Mary Kay Adams
Talia Winters:	Andrea Thompson
Zack Allen:	Jeff Conaway
Warren Keffer:	Robert Rusler
David Corwin:	Joshua Cox

Episodes:

- 2.01 "Points of Departure"
- 2.02 "Revelations"
- 2.03 "The Geometry of Shadows"
- 2.04 "A Distant Star" (w. D.C. Fontana)
- 2.05 "The Long Dark" (w. Scott Frost)

- 2.06 "A Spider in the Web" (w. Larry DiTillio)
- 2.07 "Soul Mates" (w. Peter David)
- 2.08 "A Race Through Dark Places"
- 2.09 "The Coming of Shadows"
- 2.10 "GROPOS" (w. Larry DiTillio)
- 2.11 "All Alone in the Night"
- 2.12 "Acts of Sacrifice"
- 2.13 "Hunter, Prey"
- 2.14 "There All the Honor Lies" (w. Peter David)
- 2.15 "And Now for a Word"
- 2.16 "In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum"
- 2.17 "Knives" (w. Larry DiTillio)
- 2.18 "Confessions and Lamentations"
- 2.19 "Divided Loyalties"
- 2.20 "The Long, Twilight Struggle"
- 2.21 "Comes the Inquisitor"
- 2.22 "The Fall of Night"

Season 3: "Point of No Return"

Regular/Semi Regular Cast:

Captain John Sheridan:	Bruce Boxleitner
Commander Susan Ivanova:	Claudia Christian
Security Chief Michael Garibaldi:	Jerry Doyle
Dr Stephen Franklin:	Richard Biggs
Ambassador Delenn;	Mira Furlan
Ambassador Londo Mollari:	Peter Jurasik
Ambassador G'Kar:	Andreas Katsulas
Vir Cotto:	Stephen Furst
Lennier:	Billy Mumy
Marcus Cole:	Jason Carter
Zack Allen:	Jeff Conaway
David Corwin:	Joshua Cox
Lyta Alexander:	Patricia Tallman

Episodes:

- 3.01 "Matters of Honor"
- 3.02 "Convictions"
- 3.03 "A Day in the Strife"
- 3.04 "Passing Through Gethsemane"
- 3.05 "Voices of Authority"
- 3.06 "Dust to Dust"
- 3.07 "Exogenesis"
- 3.08 "Messages From Earth"
- 3.09 "Point of No Return"
- 3.10 "Severed Dreams"
- 3.11 "Ceremonies of Light and Dark"
- 3.12 "Sic Transit Vir"
- 3.13 "A Late Delivery from Avalon"
- 3.14 "Ship of Tears"
- 3.15 "Interludes and Examinations"
- 3.16 "War Without End" Part 1
- 3.17 "War Without End" Part 2
- 3.18 "Walkabout"
- 3.19 "Grey 17 is Missing"
- 3.20 "And the Rock Cried Out, No Hiding Place"
- 3.21 "Shadow Dancing"
- 3.22 "Z'ha'dum"

Season 4: "No Surrender, No Retreat"

Regular/Semi Regular Cast:

Captain John Sheridan:	Bruce Boxleitner
Commander Susan Ivanova:	Claudia Christian
Security Chief Michael Garibaldi:	Jerry Doyle
Dr Stephen Franklin:	Richard Biggs
Ambassador Delenn;	Mira Furlan
Ambassador Londo Mollari:	Peter Jurasik
Ambassador G'Kar:	Andreas Katsulas
Vir Cotto:	Stephen Furst
Lennier:	Billy Mumy
Marcus Cole:	Jason Carter
Zack Allen:	Jeff Conaway
David Corwin:	Joshua Cox
Lyta Alexander:	Patricia Tallman

Episodes:

- 4.01 “The Hour of the Wolf”
- 4.02 “Whatever Happened to Mr Garibaldi?”
- 4.03 “The Summoning”
- 4.04 “Falling Towards Apotheosis”
- 4.05 “The Long Night”
- 4.06 “Into the Fire”
- 4.07 “Epiphanies”
- 4.08 “The Illusion of Truth”
- 4.09 “Atonement”
- 4.10 “Racing Mars”
- 4.11 “Lines of Communication”
- 4.12 “Conflicts of Interest”
- 4.13 “Rumors, Bargains and Lies”
- 4.14 “Moments of Transition”
- 4.15 “No Surrender, No Retreat”
- 4.16 “The Exercise of Vital Powers”
- 4.17 “The Face of the Enemy”
- 4.18 “Intersections in Real Time”
- 4.19 “Between the Darkness and the Light”
- 4.20 “Endgame”
- 4.21 “Rising Star”
- 4.22 “The Deconstruction of Falling Stars”

Season 5: “No Compromises”

Regular/Semi Regular Cast:

President John Sheridan:	Bruce Boxleitner
Captain Elizabeth Lochley:	Tracey Scoggins
Security Chief Michael Garibaldi:	Jerry Doyle
Dr Stephen Franklin:	Richard Biggs
Ambassador Delenn;	Mira Furlan
Ambassador Londo Mollari:	Peter Jurasik
Ambassador G’Kar:	Andreas Katsulas
Vir Cotto:	Stephen Furst
Lennier:	Billy Mumy
Zack Allen:	Jeff Conaway
Lyta Alexander:	Patricia Tallman
Byron:	Robin Atkin Downes

Episodes:

- 5.01 "No Compromises"
- 5.02 "The Very Long Night of Londo Mollari"
- 5.03 "The Paragon of Animals"
- 5.04 "A View from the Gallery"
- 5.05 "Learning Curve"
- 5.06 "Strange Relations"
- 5.07 "Secrets of the Soul"
- 5.08 "Day of the Dead" (w. Neil Gaiman)
- 5.09 "In the Kingdom of the Blind"
- 5.10 "A Tragedy of Telepaths"
- 5.11 "Phoenix Rising"
- 5.12 "The Ragged Edge"
- 5.13 "The Corps is Mother, the Corps is Father"
- 5.14 "Meditations on the Abyss"
- 5.15 "Darkness Ascending"
- 5.16 "And All My Dreams, Torn Asunder"
- 5.17 "Movements of Fire and Shadow"
- 5.18 "The Fall of Centauri Prime"
- 5.19 "The Wheel of Fire"
- 5.20 "Objects in Motion"
- 5.21 "Objects at Rest"
- 5.22 "Sleeping In Light"

APPENDIX B

Television listings for week of 3-10th June 2000. Excluding animation and children's tv.

BBC 1: *Star Trek Generations* (film) *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* (film)
@4 hrs

BBC 2: *Voyager*, *The Outer Limits*, *Farscape*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Star Trek*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Weds and Fri); *3rd Rock from the Sun*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Sliders*.
@8 hours

Channel 4: *Dalek Invasion Earth 2150 AD* (film) *Babylon 5*, *Prey*. @4 hrs

Channel 5: *Outland* (film); *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*. @4 hrs

Sky 1: *Deep Space Nine* (Sat, Sun and Fri); *Voyager* (Sat, Sun and Mon); *TekWar*; *3rd Rock from the Sun*; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; *The X-Files*; *Forever Knight*; *Stargate: SG-1* (Mon-Fri, 5pm and 11.30pm rpt, extra episode on Fri); *Xena: Warrior Princess*; *Earth: Final Conflict*; *Good versus Evil*; *Roswell High*.
@26 hrs

Listings for week of 26th August –1st September 2000. Excluding animation and childrens tv.

BBC 1: *Back to the Future* (film), *Barbarella* (film), *Saturn 3* (film). @ 5hrs 30 mins.

BBC 2: *Shivers* (film), *Voyager*, *The Outer Limits*, *Star Trek*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Thurs and rpt Friday). @8 hours

ITV: *The Visitor* @1hr

Channel 4: *Crusade*, *Mortal Kombat* (two episodes), *Magic in the Water* (film), *12.01* (film) @7 hours.

Channel 5: *Dark Knight*, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, *Charmed*, (*Attack of the 50ft Woman* (film), *Space 1999*, *Joe 90*, *Stingray*, *The Tomorrow Man* (film), *Them* (film) – all part of an sf theme weekend), *Xena: Warrior Princess*.
@12 hours.

Sky 1: *Deep Space Nine* (Sat and Sun), *Voyager* (Sat and Sun, plus 5pm and 11.30pm or midnight repeat Mon-Fri, new episode Monday 8pm), *Earth: Final Conflict*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X Files*, *Prey*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Stargate: SG-1*, *Early Edition*, *The Next Generation* (double episode), *The Outer Limits*. @ 25 hours.

ITV had only one sf programme during these periods. Barring films, this is not an uncommon feature of its schedule. The Sci-Fi Channel provides dedicated sf programming, offering television and films for twenty hours a day.

APPENDIX C

Interview with Eric Chauvin, Matte Artist for *Babylon 5* and *Voyager*, conducted by email on 5th August 2000

Q. 1) Please could you briefly describe your basic role regarding input to both Babylon 5 and Voyager.

Well, actually I have no real input on the show except for having the ability to autonomously work on the shots I do for the show. I work with an effects supv. who is in Los Angeles while I live and work here in Washington State. For the most part, both shows have been very good about not “art directing” me to death with constant changes and tweaks. They pretty much tell me what the scene is, give me a plate element to work from and leave me alone. 99% of the time they accept what I send down the first time.

Q.2) I understand that you and your team were behind the matte shots for the space station interior and various alien worlds. Can you tell me your brief and your thoughts behind the use of shapes, colour and overall appearance for these very different backgrounds.

On Babylon 5, the interior of the space station otherwise known as “the core” was always meant to be a recurring feature of the show. Most of the scenes that take place in the core are in the zen garden. On the other occasions that you see the core the intent was primarily to establish scale. Beyond that I wanted to have the core be a microcosm of what the surface of the earth looks like from the air only mapped onto the interior of a cylinder. So what you see are clusters of bldg. ranging from small communities to large metropolises, lots of agricultural areas which look like a patch quilt of shapes and colors and finally water elements comprised of various sized lakes. The shapes and colors are simply the by product of trying to create these topological features in a realistic way. The primary goal of the work I do is to try to create images that are believable. As for the alien worlds, most of the time those shots were designed by a concept artist working for the production. He would work closely with Joe S and the producers on the show to come up with a look that they liked. Once that was approved I would then start on creating the matte shot based on the concept art. Getting back to your question again, the shapes and colors are really a means to an end to create a believable image for the audience. I don't really have an analytical approach to creating a shot. Mostly I just keep working on it until I start to believe the reality of the imagery.

Q.3) B5 seems to use many more artistic effects in its background imagery - chiaroscuro, illusion of depth, colours/contrast, trompe d'oeil effects etc., - than any other series. What do you feel you created here that helps the other effects to differentiate the series from anything else?

The look of B5 is the result of several factors. The single biggest factor is money. When the show began, it had more visually ambitious shots than the budget could afford. A big cost saver was doing all the FX shots on a desktop computer. A company was formed to do the FX work for the series on Amiga computers using an inexpensive software package called the video toaster. Over time the toaster became LightWave. In the early days of LightWave, it was only capable of creating models and renderings of a limited quality. So the people at Foundation Imaging (the company formed to do the FX for B5) had to design and produce shots that could be done within the constraints of LightWave. Once that look was established it was pretty much locked for the rest of the series. Even though Lightwave quickly became more powerful and faster, the look of the ships were stuck in the look that was established in the first season. Also dealing with the issue of money, the sets the show was shot on were very unimpressive compared to those on say the Star Trek series. To make up for their shortcomings a lot was done in the mood of the lighting on the sets. The use of shadows, pool lighting and atmospherics (smoke) were used to add visual interest inexpensively. This economical approach to the show also effected the work I did on the show. Shots were designed that had high production value but didnt cost much to produce. The reason is they were paying one guy (me) to create a large space to sell the scene rather than having to building at as a set. Once the producer caught onto how much production value they could get for the money, the amount of shots I did exponentially increased from season to season. Now, as far as the look of the space stuff (spaceships, Jump gate, space station, and look of stellar phenomena) I had nothing to do with that. That was all done by Ron Thornton and Foundation Imaging. As for the shots I did. I simply created shots that I liked to look at. Again it was the autonomy of creating whatever I wanted as long as it fit the scene described in the script.

Q. 4) Can you tell me your brief and your thoughts behind the use of shapes, colour and overall appearance for your work on Voyager? Is there more matte work required for Voyager, or less, and what sort of brief are you given?

Star Trek obviously has a different look and feel than B5. On that show they have a very specific canon of what things should look like. I still can do whatever I want but I instinctively work within the style guidelines of the show. On a per episode basis, the amount of work I do on Voyager is significantly less than on B5. However, they pay better so as a self employed person is nice to do less work for the same money. Typically what happens on an episode of Voyager or B5 is I get a call from the Effects Supv who tells me what kind of matte shot is coming up in the next episode they are shooting. Sometimes they send me a script to read but more often what happens is I will get a rough cut of the show on video tape to watch so I get a feel for the story and have something to refer to for continuity purposes. For instance, its helpful to see how my shot will cut into a scene by watching the action that takes place before or after my shot. Along with the video tape, I will get a data tape or portable hard drive that has the plate element on it if the shot has a plate. A plate is what was shot on the set and is the part of the matte shot that the actors are performing in. Usually the set is built to just enough finish to work for the scene and no further. For instance, if its an interior there wont be a ceiling. If the

script calls for a shot that should show a ceiling then that is something I would add in the matte painting.

Q.5) This is less of a question really, and more an invitation to comment on anything your feel is relevant.

I don't really have any insights into the work I do. I'm really just a gun for hire. I always try to do work that I'm proud of but television is really a disposable medium. Actually feature films are as well. Occasionally one will become a classic but for the most part once something is out it will never be seen again. I don't really mind that if what 'Im working on is exciting to me at the time I'm working on it.

Any insights or personal readings of the imagery in either series that you can make would be great. I've attached a synopsis of my thesis.

I never really looked at either show that way. I've always said that the writing on B5 was vastly better than on Star Trek. Perhaps part of that was due to working within finite financial boundaries. But, of course, the big reason is star trek is a juggernaut that has existed for over 30 years. During that time the control of the Star Trek franchise has switched hands. Since Paramount knows it has a franchise with a known financial return it doesn't want to fool around with the formula. Consequently, it doesn't do anything very daring or original because that wouldn't be part of the Star Trek style. I'm actually amazed Voyager is still on the air. To be honest I don't watch the show. When I get the rough cuts of episodes I'm working I'm astounded how boring and formulaic they are. But I guess its kind of like the Bond films. Every Bond film is exactly like the first because no one wants to tamper with a known quantity. So the result is the movies never change with the times or with people's sensibilities. They have the same corny jokes, the same sexist portrayal of women, the same gadgets, explosions, arch villains and lack of character development. Star Trek is the same way with the exception of the role of women. B5 on the other hand was not only created by one person, but Joe wrote nearly every episode. A super human feat I might add. Because of this, the show had a direction that was designed to play out over a specified amount of time. It was designed from the original pilot to run only five years. That's why it works so. It's more like a really long mini series than a regular tv show. If more shows had that kind of integrity I think we would have a lot more quality dramas on tv.

Good luck on your thesis.

eric.

APPENDIX D

Title Sequence voice-overs

Pilot: (Video Extract 1)

I was there, at the dawn of the Third Age of Mankind. It began in the Earth year 2257 with the founding of the last of the Babylon stations, located deep in neutral space. It was a port of call for refugees, smugglers, businessmen, diplomats and travellers from a hundred worlds. It could be a dangerous place, but we accepted the risk because Babylon 5 was our last, best hope for peace.

Under the leadership of its final commander, Babylon 5 was a dream given form ... a dream of a galaxy without war, where species from different worlds could live side by side in mutual respect ... a dream that was endangered as never before by the arrival of one man on a mission of destruction.

Babylon 5 was the last of the Babylon stations. This is its story.

Ambassador Londo Mollari
of the Centauri Republic.

Season One: (Video Extract 3)

It was the dawn of the Third Age of Mankind, ten years after the Earth-Minbari war.

The Babylon Project was a dream given form. Its goal: to prevent another war by creating a place where humans and aliens could work out their difference peacefully. It's a port of call, a home away from home for diplomats, hustlers, entrepreneurs and wanderers: humans and aliens wrapped in two million, five hundred thousand tons of spinning metal, all alone in the night. It can be a dangerous place, but it's our last, best hope for peace.

This is the story of the last of the Babylon stations. The year is 2258. The name of the place is Babylon 5.

Commander Jeffrey Sinclair

Season Two: (Video Extract 4)

The Babylon Project was our last, best hope for peace. A self-contained world, five miles long, located in neutral territory. A place of commerce and diplomacy for a quarter of a million humans and aliens. A shining beacon in space, all alone in the night. It was the dawn of the Third Age of Mankind, the year the Great War came upon us all.

This is the story of the last of the Babylon Stations. The year is 2259. The name of the place is Babylon 5.

Captain John Sheridan

Season Three: (Video Extract 5)

The Babylon Project was our last, best hope for peace. It failed.

In the year of the Shadow war, it became something greater – our last, best hope for victory.

The year is 2260. The place: Babylon 5.

Commander Susan Ivanova

Season Four: (Video Extract 6)

It was the year of fire;	(Lennier)
The year of destruction;	(Zack Allen)
The year we took back what was ours.	(GKar)
It was the year of rebirth,	(Lyta Alexander)
The year of great sadness,	(Vir Cotto)
The year of pain	(Marcus Cole)
And a year of joy.	(Delenn)
It was a new age,	(Londo Mollari)
It was the end of history,	(Dr Stephen Franklin)
It was the year everything changed.	(Commander Susan Ivanova)
The year is 2261:	(Chief Michael Garibaldi)
The place – Babylon 5.	(Captain John Sheridan)

Season Five: (Video Extract 7)

(Images appear through the dates)

(2258)

And so it begins.

There is a hole in your mind.

What do you want?

No one here is exactly what he appears to be.

Nothing's the same anymore.

(2259)

Commander Sinclair is being reassigned.

Why don't you eliminate the entire Narn Homeworld while
you're at it?

I see a great hand, reaching out of the stars.

Who are you?

(2260)

President Clark has signed a decree today declaring martial law.

These orders have forced us to declare independence.

Why don't these people get off their encounter-suited butts and
do something?

You are the one.

If you go to Z'ha'dum you will die

(2261)

Why are you here?

Do you have anything worth living for?

think of my beautiful city in flames....

...giants in the playground....

Now get the hell out of our galaxy...

We are here to place President Clark under arrest.

(2262)

(Kosh)

(Minbari assassin)

(Commander Sinclair)

(GKar)

(Commander Sinclair)

(General Hague)

(Londo Mollari)

(Elric the Technomage)

(Sebastian the Inquisitor)

(ISN newscaster)

(Captain John Sheridan)

(Captain John Sheridan)

(Kosh)

(Kosh).

(Lorien)

(Lorien)

(Delenn)

(Captain John Sheridan)

(Captain John Sheridan)

(Captain John Sheridan)

Appendix E

An Interview with Ron Thornton by Eric Reinholt

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Originally published in **Babylon 5 - Online!**.

Week after week, Visual Effects Artist Ron Thornton and his staff at Foundation Imaging create the eye popping, Emmy Award winning, CGI (Computer Generated Images) special effects for J. Michael Straczynski's television universe of Babylon 5. Dissatisfied with working in an airport in England, Ron and a friend went to see the movie "Alien" where it occurred to him that someone got paid for making all those models out of plastic.

Thornton then left his airport job, took most of his remaining money and purchased plastics and other materials and began building and photographing models. He took the photographs and used them to get a job with BBC television.

Ron has since worked on the Peter Davidson Doctor Who series, then designed and built spaceships for final season of Blake's 7 (Ron built the Scorpio in his living room, in actuality he built about seven different versions of the Scorpio; different sized models, partial models etc.) and Tripods, all British television series. Thornton then moved to Los Angeles where he worked on props and miniatures for Real Genius, Class of 1999, Robot-Jox, T2 (in which he created the battle rifles), The Addams Family, Highlander 2, Critters and Spaceballs. Prior to working on Babylon 5, Thornton worked on Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future television show where he first saw computer generated images for television special effects.

Television and computer screens are arrays of small dots or "pixels." Each pixel is assigned a color, contrast and intensity and when thousands of these pixels are combined, an image results. Computer paint programs allow artists to arrange pixels to form pictures. 3-D image programs allow artists to manipulate those pixels to simulate images of objects as if they actually existed in three dimensional space.

The pilot "The Gathering" was rendered by eight interconnected Amiga 2000 computers with Video Toaster boards which were connected to an IBM computer that stored the images in five gigabytes of memory. Foundation Imaging's computational power has increased tremendously with each work station now being equivalent to the original eight Amigas and Ron's being the equivalent to sixteen Amigas. The computer generated effects industry is still in its infancy and with only one exception, all the effects for Babylon 5 have been created by Thornton and his team. The one exception was Jason Ironheart's god-like torso effect at the end of "Mind War" from Babylon 5's first season.

Eric: "Fans from the first season of Babylon 5 (like myself) have wanted to know if LightWave has a pre-packaged torso in it, because of the Jason Ironheart god-like creature in "Mind War."

Thornton: "No, That is an off-the-shelf-bought database that we modified."

Eric: "Have you had anything else that you've been able to use right off the shelf?"

Thornton: "I wish! Nobody's really got anything, we've got to build the stuff from scratch. This show's got a look and it's got to stay in line with that look."

Models are created in Lightwave's 3-D modeling program in an elaborate connect-the-dots fashion that places the dots in three dimensional space. The dots are used as references for surfaces (polygons) which form the actual exterior of the computer models. To help create and improve that look, Thornton and his team have built physical models which were photographed and scanned into their computers.

Thornton: "We've built models and scanned them. Basically it's just a flat object, it's just a flat piece of plastic that we've scored and painted and panel lined."

"You can get more organic patterns. Anybody who paints with paint will tell you that it's totally different to paint on a computer. There are certain things that paint does; like for instance you can get very, very thin paint, brush it over something and then wipe it off and it will go into the grooves, there's no way you can synthesize that on the computer, that sort of 'capillary bleed' effect that only happens with thin washes of paint. And so you can get some really gorgeous organic textures which you can't get any other way and there's been a couple of times we've done it.

According to Thornton, this is done just for that special organic effect which is then "bit mapped" onto the surface of the electronically constructed ship. Jason Ironheart's ship in "Mind War" was the first ship Ron built via computer (and was also seen in the pilot "The Gathering" in tribute to some of his "teachers" and is reminiscent of the Zep One from the British television show Captain Zep. Ron designed Babylon 5 (including the Cobra Bays) mostly by himself and "built it" in two weeks on the computer where a conventional model may have required six weeks or more and a larger team! Some of the ships that are seen on the Babylon 5 series have actual physical counterparts. The blocky transport ships were among the models that Thornton created and photographed to land a job in Special Effects.

Steve Berg and Ron split the designing of the ships of Babylon 5 about 50/50.

Eric: "Ron, how did you get the idea of using computers for creating Special Effects?"

Thornton: "It just sort of happened. I ended up getting one of these machines, the Video Toaster, and I started playing with it and it was like 'give it a year or so and this could work.'

"This was way after Captain Power. Captain Power had turned me off it (Computer Generated Special Effects), 'cause the stuff didn't look very good and there was no texture mapping per se. It was all very blocky looking, the animation wasn't that hot and they had real problems delivering the stuff; it was just taking them forever to do it."

"I had an Amiga for a while and it had a number of 3D packages which I sort of toyed with, but the Toaster was the first decent one."

Eric: "How long did it take from realizing that the Toaster could be used for effects work until Foundation Imaging was up and running?"

Thornton: "It was probably about a year and a half, during which time I was working with Todd Rundgren in Northern California on one of his shows."

"But a lot of it was the wait. Once I convinced Joe [Straczynski] and John Copeland that this could be done this way it suddenly opened up a whole new venue and I did a bunch of tests; then we went in and pitched it once more to Peter [Ledger]. At least this time they could see that we could do it, that we could create some of this imagery."

Eric: "What is the cost of producing special effects with computers as opposed to those done with conventional means?"

Thornton: "I'd say that we're between a third and two thirds the cost."

Eric: "What are the basic steps in creating a CGI scene?"

Thornton: "Well, you build your model. You pull it into the layout. You light it. You shoot it. It's very similar to having a motion control stage except you've got no limitations."

The Starfury design is unique in science fiction and Thornton says that it is in no way based on that of the Star Wars X-Wing Fighters and are more of a tribute to Ron Cobbs' designs in "The Last Starfighter." The Starfury is able to move more realistically in flight, can move in one vector, spin on it's axis to track and fight other ships and not engage in "Battle of Britain" style dog fights (that are favored in other films).

Thornton: "If you actually think about it, the Starfury is a totally impossible model to motion control. Unless you did it on wires, because of the way the engine deflector plates are at the back, you couldn't put a mounting rod up the middle of it because the mounting rod would eclipse the plates that were rolling behind it. The only way you could mount it is from the front. It's just one of those 'impossible models.'"

Foundation Imaging started out with five people and has grown to fifteen for the Babylon 5 series. Thornton, along with his partner Paul Beigle-Bryant (who created the software network that enables rendering and who also performs computer hardware repairs), senior animators, Mojo (from New York) and John Teska supervise other computer animators. Computer animator Mark Swain, Effects Coordinator Shannon Casey and Cherry Hitch

(who does 2-D rotoscope work on the virtual sets and overlays such effects as laser fire) are the core of talented people who make the computer generated effects of Babylon 5 a reality. Effects are designed on an accelerated Amiga 2000 with a Video Toaster board in it, using LightWave 3-D and Modeler 3-D.

Eric: "How is building computer models different from building physical models?"

Thornton: "You still have to build the models, only you use polygons and pixels instead of plastic and paintbrushes."

Another unique organic look to Babylon 5 is the shape of the Vorlon vessels such as Ambassador Kosh's ship. The inspiration for the squid-like vessel is as original as it is surprising:

Eric: "One of the really unique looking vessels right from the start was the Vorlon Cruiser. It's rather squid-like in look. Was that the inspiration for the ship?"

Thornton: "It's a clove of garlic, actually. I got the idea driving through the town of Gilroy which is kind of like the garlic capital of the world and has this absolutely delicious smell."

The clove of garlic grew into an organic ship which Thornton used to sell the idea of Organic Technology to Straczynski to be used by some of the alien races.

Thornton: "If you have space traveling ability and genetic manipulation, why can't you grow a ship suited to the environment of space? I had this idea of walking into a spaceship like stepping into the mouth of a whale and going for a ride."

Eric: "The Vorlon ship exterior is sort of mottled and is fractal generated. I know about that and Kosh's environment suit has a similar look. Was that intentional?"

Thornton: "They sort of evolved together."

Using computers for special effects also allows for some rather intricate and spectacular effects which might be impossible to create realistically using conventional means, such as the Starfury launches. J. Michael Straczynski had envisioned ships on platforms that would flip the ships over and out into space or to launch ships from the front of the rotating station but Thornton had other suggestions, including pointing out that the only way to launch ships from the front of the station would be through the central spinning bay because of the rotation of the station. As for the Starfury platform launch:

Thornton: "The easiest way to launch the ship and save energy is to literally just drop the ship out, you've dropped it out . . . it's already got momentum . . . and depending on where in the rotational cycle you drop the ship it decides what sort of direction it's going to go away from the station"

Eric: "You just have to be careful not to hit the non-rotating arm!"

Thornton: "Uh, yeah! [laughs] I think that would be kind of like one of those World War One cannons that fired through the propellers. The whole thing [launch cycle] would be disabled when that [non-rotating arm] came around."

Eric: "What was your most technically complex shot so far? I remember a shot from "The Gathering" of two hundred Vorlon vessels exiting Babylon 5's Jump Gate (which beat the record number of On Screen ships in "The Return of the Jedi")."

Thornton: "That was actually a piece of cake. It's just making up a bunch of them and layering them and layering them. It's just one of those things that's really easy to do on the computer but is really incredibly difficult to do anywhere else."

"I think actually, in terms of tweaking . . . I think one of (the technically) hardest shots that's paid off very well was John Teska's shot of these little demons all clustered over Londo's back in "The Geometry of Shadows" which was very interesting because we had to motion-match the demons and move them along with Londo. And we had to do it manually; there was no automatic tracking like there is in some of the more expensive packages so it was all done manually, by eye and it was very, very tasty. I was extremely pleased with that."

"Unfortunately it's a shame because John Flinn [Director of Photography John C. Flinn, III A.S.C.] lit the scene really dark and so you can't really see what's going on. They [the demons] were scrapping on his back and were hitting one another, it was kind of like having the Three Stooges strapped to his back and was incredibly funny!"

One major similarity between computer generating effects and that of conventional motion control effects for an ongoing series is a lack of production time. The time between being handed a completed script and generating the thirty or so effect shots needed for a complete episode is only a matter of weeks. Each computer generated frame for "The Gathering" took almost one hour to render but that time has been substantially reduced to approximately twenty minutes. Considering that there are about thirty frames generated per second, time is one of Foundation Imaging's most important factors.

Thornton: "There's an icon that you click [at each of the computer stations] before you leave your station and automatically that station becomes a slave and starts rendering images. By the time we leave at night, the whole system is rendering. We try not to waste a single minute!"

Much like enthusiastic Babylon 5 fans, Thornton wishes that he could know what will happen later down the closely guarded Straczynski story line but for reasons differing from fans. This would enable Thornton to plan more exciting visuals. Thornton believes that such incredible scenes such as the Battle of the Line (And the Sky Full of Stars") could have been made even better with more time for planning.

Eric: "What shots from the series do you think could have been better, if you'd had more time?"

Thornton: "Oh, the battle of "The Line" is one I wish we'd had more time to prepare for. It was supposed to be really emotive but it wound up kind of ordinary."

"I'll tell you what I'd really like to do. I'd like to do a really decent scene with the Minbari Cruisers. I think the Minbari Cruisers are really cool looking and I'd really like to do a decent battle scene with them."

With Foundation Imaging's increased ability to create dynamic images in a short period of time, there are approximately thirty ship effects scenes in each episode but instead of visualizing more and more such shots in later episodes as computational speed increases, Thornton has asked that number of shots to remain a constant, giving him the ability to concentrate on quality instead of quantity.

However Foundation Imaging does more than just space ship scenes and these special effects sometimes are mixed with the live action plates shot for the series. This requires a supervisor on set to aid the director with the special needs for shooting background plates (for Virtual sets and "Blue Screen" shots) which are later given to Foundation Imaging.

Eric: "What's required for Virtual sets? Do you have to help directors with what's needed for Blue Screens and so on?"

Thornton: "Virtual sets are basically matte paintings; there's a supervisor that's on set who basically watches over all the 'On Set' stuff and that's Ted Rae this year. Virtual sets are a technique that's been around, as I said, for a long time."

Back at Foundation Imaging, Cherry Hitch is then responsible for 2-D rotoscoping, virtual sets and overlays such as laser fire and so on. She must take the background plates and introduce the computer generated effects onto them. "Blue Screen" shots are live action plates that have a specific area which is color-coded that is capable of being digitally "removed" so that special effects can be "placed" into the shot. Virtual sets are sets which do not exist in the real world. Actors perform (again) before a color-coded area, then later an entire set is painted in Foundation Imaging's computers and inserted around the actors. Examples of this sort of imaging include the Narn War Cruiser bridge set and the Babylon 5 Observation Deck where the Centauri Emperor met with Captain Sheridan in "The Coming of Shadows"

Another, similar effect is Matte Painting which also can be done on Foundation Imaging's computers. The bi-level Zocalo visualized in the opening title sequence of each of Season Two's episodes are examples where one plate of the Zocalo was shot, then a second plate with actors walking along specifically defined areas was computer inserted over the first.

Eric: "I know you're busy right now creating effects for the third season of Babylon 5, but has Foundation Imaging produced effects for other shows or movies as well?"

Thornton: "Oh yeah. Right now we're working on a show of mine called "Hypernauts" a sort of kid's show."

"We did a show last year called 'Journey to Mars' which is . . . not great. And I don't know if they're ever going to show it on TV, it's that 'not great.' When you're asked to do rubbish, you have to do it. I mean the shots were good but they were very, very long, I mean we had shots flying over the Mars landscape that were like a minute and a half long so it's like 'go to sleep, go out and get yourself a cup of coffee and a sandwich' and come back and the shot's still running.

"There was this kind of strange director that they had that was coming up with all this stuff."

But with the talents of Ron Thornton and his team at Foundation Imaging, imaginative producer J. Michael Straczynski and the gifted directors of Babylon 5, computers are sure to keep producing attention-riveting special effects.

**THESIS
CONTAINS
VIDEO**