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Terra Nova, An Experiment in Creating Cult Televison for a Mass Audience

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Abstract

When it aired in Fall 2011 on Fox, *Terra Nova* was an experiment in creating a cult television program that appealed to a mass audience. This thesis is a case study of that experiment. I conclude that the show failed because of its attempts to maintain the sophistication, complexity and innovative nature of the cult genre while simultaneously employing an overly simplistic narrative structure that resembles that of mass audience programming. *Terra Nova* was unique in its transmedia approach to marketing and storytelling, its advanced special effects, and its dystopian speculative fiction premise. *Terra Nova*'s narrative, on the other hand, presented a nostalgically simple moralistic landscape that upheld old-fashioned ideologies and felt oddly retro to the modern SF TV audience. *Terra Nova's* failure suggests that a cult show made for this type of broad audience is impossible. However, as ratings continue to drop yearly, programmers' definition of what constitutes a mass audience adjusts accordingly. Inevitably, and in the near future, any distinction between mass and fragmented audiences will be moot and, when this happens, the cult audience will be synonymous with the mass audience.

TERRA NOVA
AN EXPERIMENT IN CREATING CULT TELEVISION FOR A MASS AUDIENCE

by

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B.A. English Literature
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Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Master of Arts in Media Studies.

Syracuse University
August 2012

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Although speculative fiction has been an extant genre on network schedules since the inception of television, until the late 1980s the genre was based on derivative formats from radio and cinema. In the early days of TV, speculative fiction (hereafter 'SF') programming - such as *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (DuMont, 1949-55), *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-64), and *The Outer Limits* (ABC, 1963-65) - was based on the space opera and anthology series templates that were successful on network radio. In the late 1970s, SF television took its influence from cinema, and the *Star Wars* legacy manifested in such shows as the original *Battlestar Galactica* (ABC, 1978-79), *Blake's 7* (BBC1, 1978-81), *Space 1999* (ITV, 1975-77) and *Buck Rogers in the 21st Century* (NBC, 1979-81). In 1987, however, the derivative nature of SF TV changed, and with the premiere of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (synd., 1987-94)[1] SF television began to develop its own sense of identity as a genre that played to the particular strengths of the medium that was itself maturing in the 1980s.

In the beginning of the 1980s, cable television became a legitimate competitor for broadcast television. This new competition, along with the technological advancements of the VCR and the remote control, catalyzed a revolution in televisual narrative, audience construction, and business practices that is still affecting the industry today. Audience fragmentation was particularly profitable for SF television, which includes such genres as science fiction, fantasy, horror, and fairy tales, and generally appeals to a relatively small, niche audience.

In literary circles, SF has been hailed as a genre that is uniquely able to capture and comment on historical sociopolitical conditions. The academic study of SF literature was legitimized as part of the scholarly literary field in the 1970s, and since then critics such as

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[1] *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is the sequel to *Star Trek: The Original Series* (NBC, 1966-69) which,

Darko Suvin (1972; 1979), Marc Angenot (Angenot & Suvin, 1979), Raymond Williams (1988),

Tom Moylan (1986; 2000), and Frederic Jameson (2005) have commented on SF's ability to

illuminate and reflect on the historical and cultural realities of the current human condition, and

also to stimulate independent thinking about relevant and timely issues.

Although less critical attention has been paid to SF TV, the genre has the capability to

play the same role on television as it has in literature. Since the inception of television, shows

such as *The Twilight Zone* used the peculiarities of the genre to comment on The Cold War,

McCarthyism, and apprehension over technological advancement in ways that would not alarm

the networks' standards and practices departments, who at the time feared controversy of any

kind. The *Twilight Zone* legacy reached into the late 1980s, when SF TV began to mature. It

emulated this original type of socially and politically relevant commentary, but it did so in ways

that were unique to the new broadcast and cable television structures. SF programs such as *The

X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002) and *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-91) were perfectly situated to capture the

paranoia of the postmodern American consciousness. Other popular shows such as *Babylon 5*

(PTEN/TNT, 1994-98)*, Stargate: SG-1* (Showtime/Sci-Fi, 1997-2007)*, Farscape* (Sci-Fi, 1999-

2003)*,* and the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci-Fi, 2004-09) formed the new postmodern

space opera sub-genre that seems more indebted to the TV medium than to film, radio, or even

literature. These shows use a narrative complexity predicated on a uniquely serialized-television

structure to address issues such as uneasiness over technological advances, artificial intelligence,

and gender identity in a way that appeals to the complex and fractured world of the late 20th and

early 21st centuries.

This new kind of SF TV, however, seems destined for the low ratings and high audience

involvement that characterizes many entertainment texts that achieve "cult" status. Although the

first season of *Twin Peaks* was wildly successful, and the early seasons of both *Lost* (ABC, 2004-10) and *Heroes* (NBC, 2006-10) were highly popular, these are rare exceptions, and few SF programs finish their seasons in the Nielsen Top 10. Instead, these cult shows engender a degree of commitment, loyalty, and conversation that makes for low-rated shows with passionate audiences.

In the spring of 2011, Fox announced that it was going to do something different: it was going to produce a big-budget SF series with broad appeal. Despite, or perhaps because of, its SF elements, the show was meant to be broad family entertainment of the kind TV has not seen in the SF genre in decades. Bringing in superstar film director Steven Spielberg as producer and promoting the series months ahead of its September 2011 premiere, *Terra Nova* was designed to be event programming for the 21st century. Kevin Reilly, the Entertainment Chief at Fox, said that

> *Terra Nova* is a big swing – and the best of Fox tend to be big swings, in concept and/or tone . . . We are in the big-bet business. So, if you're looking to break through and garner a big share of a fractured audience, and it is going to be costly regardless, you take the most exciting shots you can for your audience. (qtd. in Rose & Goldberg, 2011, p. 34)

In fact, original writer Kelly Marcel chose to go with Fox, after fielding offers from networks in the UK and from CBS, because of Fox's track record with out-of-the box shows such as *24* (Fox, 2001-10)*, Prison Break* (Fox, 2005-09)*,* and *Glee* (Fox, 2009-).

Terra Nova executives assumed that the way to reach a large audience was through a big budget and a broad concept with mass appeal. Justin Falvey, co-head of Dreamwork TV and one of *Terra Nova's* many producers, praised the large budget for providing the "filmgoing experience" that audiences want (qtd. 38). Dana Walden, Chairman of 20th TV, said that *Terra Nova* was going to be "event programming" (qtd. p. 35), a sentiment shared by executive

producer Brannon Braga: "It has broad appeal . . . it has a timeless and ageless premise, and there's no reason it wouldn't be appealing to virtually everybody" (qtd. p. 37). Alex Graves, who directed the pilot, agrees: "This has nothing to do with *Lost* for one major reason: It's made for a massively broad audience" (qtd. in Abrams, 2011).

While the executives at Fox and the producers of *Terra Nova* were arguing that the show was meant for a mainstream audience, they were promoting it as a cult television program. Throughout the summer of 2011, Fox launched an impressive promotional campaign that included on-air ads, a complex website that emphasized the program's socio-political elements, and a pre-screening and Q&A panel at Comic Con, the cult mega convention in San Diego every August. This promotional campaign suggested that *Terra Nova* was the next socially relevant, innovative, cult SF television program, but all of this in the context of a show meant to be mainstream, broad, family fun.

Terra Nova was innovative in the ways it stretched beyond the confines of the medium. With an extravagantly large weekly budget and a pilot that reportedly cost between 20 and 30 million dollars to produce, the show's special effects experts developed an entirely new special effects technique that allowed the show to highlight a different dinosaur species each week. *Terra Nova* also focused a great deal of time and money on its transmedia elements, such as an initial pre-promotional campaign with videos and images released on-line and a smartphone application that unlocked additional material as each episode aired. These elements highlight an innovative approach to transmedia storytelling perfectly suited to a cult audience which, in the age of convergence, wants and expects increased levels of activity and participation.

Terra Nova, however, matched aesthetic innovation with a simplistic narrative structure that vastly underestimated the narrative savvy of the so-called mass audience. The way the show

positioned itself as cult SF television primed audiences to expect a show that's narrative structure was complex, innovative, and self-referential. Instead, the show focused mostly on the aesthetic innovation of its special effects. J. P. Telotte (2008), writing on the current state of science fiction TV, warned that such a heavy reliance on special effects "threaten[s] not only to dominate but also to completely formulize their narratives, turning them essentially into showcases of wonder and, in the process, rendering the instances of wonder all too predictable" (p. 6). SF TV has always had limited budgets and the constraints of the small screen to contend with, so while cinematic SF has tended toward campy b-rated science fiction films and big-budget summer blockbusters, SF TV programs have relied on plot twists, character development, and innovative narrative structures to connect with their cult audiences. *Terra Nova's* emphasis on special effects, top personnel such as Steven Spielberg, large budgets, and a longer and more flexible production schedule symbolize an attempt to make TV cinematic, which is a step backwards and not a step forwards in the trajectory of SF TV.

The problem with *Terra Nova's* narrative is that it presents a nostalgic dream for a simplistic moralistic landscape and upholds the dominant ideologies of an older era. It is, therefore, out-of-step with SF TV audiences. Audience expectations are primed by both genre and medium, and televised SF has positioned itself over the last 25 years as a genre that understands, reflects, and comments on a world that is fragmented and complex. While shows such as *Twin Peaks* are criticized for being too complex to be realistic, *Terra Nova's* simplistic world is just as disconnected from the empirical world as *Twin Peaks'* complicated world is. In a postmodern world of media convergence, SF audiences have come to expect a level of moral ambiguity and narrative complexity in SF TV that reflects their contemporary situation, and not to receive it can be frustrating and alienating to an audience.

What this suggests is that SF television has developed into an art form with a unique identity separate from that of SF film, literature, or radio. Over the past 25 years, the SF TV genre has undergone a complete transformation and the expectations of the new genre go far beyond the male-oriented, closed ideological messages that SF TV of the 1980s and earlier presented. Cinematic-level visual effects are not enough to attract cult TV audiences that expect and value TV's emphasis on character and story. Instead, SF TV audiences are primed to look for interesting, complex programming that addresses the human condition in a way that non-SF programs do not. Thus, it is no longer possible for a SF TV program to be event programming for the mass audience of the type *Terra Nova* targeted. Perhaps Braga's reference to a "timeless and ageless" premise is an impossibility for a genre that defines itself as being complex, narratively innovative, and socially and historically relevant.

Chapter Two: Issues of Generic Definition

Genre has been an important element in the classification of entertainment forms since the beginning of popular entertainment. In *Poetics*, Aristotle broke 4th century BC literature into three genres: the lyric, the epic narrative, and the drama. Shakespeare's plays in the 16th and 17th centuries AD are most commonly split into generic classifications of comedy, history, and drama.[2]

As American popular culture developed in the 19th century, genre continued to be an important element of classification both for content producers and for audiences. For instance, melodrama was one of the earliest forms of American theatre, most often in the form of abolitionist plays or temperance stories. As the 20th century began and mass entertainment developed in the form of film, radio, and, ultimately, television, genre became an almost necessary means of unifying the cultural industries with audience expectations.

Mirroring the industry itself, television's first theorists organized their forays into the new medium around genre. Horace Newcomb's foundational texts, *TV: The Most Popular Art* (1974) and its follow-up anthology *TV: The Critical View* (1986), are both organized around what Newcomb termed "formulas" such as the sitcom, the western, the adventure show, and the soap opera. Newcomb, himself, was influenced by the work of John G. Cawelti, particularly his unique generic exploration of the Western novel in *The Six-Gun Mystique* (1971). Cawelti was a pioneer in the study of popular culture, particularly film and popular fiction, and his work built specifically on Aristotle's method of defining genre through close readings of individual texts. Thus, Newcomb's genre analysis in *TV: The Most Popular Art* is a textual one.

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[2] Interestingly, there was a fourth genre of Shakespearian plays. Typically referred to as the problem plays, these were plays – such as *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* – that did not easily fit into the comedy, drama, history classification system. Thus, as far back as the 16th century, popular entertainment was seeing generic cracks of the kind I will be discussing in this thesis.

TV: The Most Popular Art also builds an argument for "a range of quality within television comparable to the range within other media" (1974, p. 242). This sentiment is continued in David Thorburn's article "Television Melodrama" (1976), which argues for a new television-specific approach to the study of prime-time melodrama. Similarly, Raymond Williams' seminal work *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) argues that television should be studied in relation to flow rather than particular programs or genres. The study of flow promotes a definition of television based on context rather than text, thereby moving the focus of media studies to one of the viewer and his/her experience.

Television criticism throughout the 1980s continued to focus on audience experience and cultural studies approaches, as influenced by Williams, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall's essay "Encoding/Decoding" (1980/2006), and Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony and ideology. As became fashionable, E. Ann Kaplan's anthology *Regarding Television* (1983) looks at television genres through the cultural studies lenses of psychoanalysis, feminism, and structuralism. Similarly, Hal Himmelstein's *Television Myth and the American Mind* (1984) argues that individual genres such as the sitcom, the melodrama, and the talk show work to uphold the dominant ideology.

In 1985, two important books combined the study of genre with critical and cultural studies. In *American Television Genres* (1985), Stuart M. Kaminsky and Jeffrey H. Mahan argue that genre is an imperative element of television viewing as it aids viewers in understanding "the cultural context in which the information is given" (p. 33). Kaminsky and Mahan then go on to present a survey of television genres analyzed through the lenses of historical and structural theories. For instance, they apply Vladimir Propp's narrative structure of fairytales to the police genre, analyze the detective genre from a Freudian perspective, and take a Jungian approach to

the science fiction and horror genres. Taking a critical studies approach, Brian Rose's anthology *TV Genres* (1985) focuses on economics, presenting an overview of the historical development and major themes of a number of genres that have proven economically successful throughout television history.

By the late 1980s, television theorists began to focus on the uniqueness of the television medium and argued for the importance of studying television genre as separate from genre studies in other media. In her chapter "Genre Study and Television" (1987, reprinted 1992), Jane Feuer lays out three categories of genre study – aesthetic, ritual, and ideological – but ultimately concludes that genre works better on film than on television. John Fiske (1987), however, argues that the ritual and ideological approaches to television genre are useful, defining television genres as "intertextual or even pre-textual, for they form the network of industrial, ideological, and institutional conventions that are common to both producer and audiences out of which arise both the producer's program and the audience's readings" (p. 11).

As the television industry began to change in the late 20th and early 21st centuries[3], so did the study of television genre. Gregory A. Waller's essay "Flow, Genre, and the Television Text" (1997) situates television genre in broader debates over postmodern intertextuality and transmedia issues. Glen Creeber's anthology, *The Television Genre Book* (2001), is an introduction to modern genre theory at the turn of the century. In *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (2004), Jason Mittell persuasively argues that television genre is as relevant in 2004 as it was six decades ago. Mittell reasons that genre is still imperative for the way that television is classified and organized and, therefore, that genre should be studied as a cultural category, i.e. how it "operates across the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics, and historical contexts" (p. xii). However, Mittell's

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[3] For more on the changes in the television industry, see Chapter Four.

argument needs an asterisk from recent researchers, such as the contributors to the anthology *The Shifting Definitions of Genre* (2008) who caution against the retroactive application of genre labels in ways that are historically inaccurate.

Returning full circle, Horace Newcomb revisited *TV: The Most Popular Art* in his contribution to *Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader* (2005). Newcomb's chapter is just one of the many chapters that argue for both the continued importance of genre in television studies and the further need to conceptualize genre specifically for television. Although television genre theory borrows heavily from such seminal film genre texts as Thomas Schatz's *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (1981), Steve Neal's *Genre* (1980) and "Questions of Genre" (1990), and Rick Altman's *The American Film Musical* (1987) and *Film/Genre* (1999), the future of television genre studies must focus on medium-specific peculiarities. In their chapters, both Newcomb (2005) and Jason Mittell (2005) bemoan the fact that the study of genre mostly fell by the wayside as television studies moved away from humanistic studies and textual analyses to a social science emphasis on audience effects. Therefore, contemporary television studies are in desperate need of a holistic genre analysis that studies texts, industries, and audiences in a television-specific context. This thesis begins to fill that need.

What is That Genre?

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the publication of individual book-length analyses of particularly popular genres became common, with specific emphases on the soap opera (e.g. *Watching* Dallas*: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (1985) and *Speaking of Soap Operas* (1985)) and the sitcom (e.g. *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture* (1989)*, MTM 'Quality Television'* (1984) and *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Post-war*

America (1989)). In the last two decades, individual analyses of almost every television genre

have been published. Books on the speculative fiction (hereafter 'SF') genre are no different;

what is different is that they are not as easily labeled as are books on sitcoms or soap operas.

The debate over what to call the SF genre goes back four decades, to the first SF theorists

in literature, film, and television. The definition of the SF genre(s) is a debate as varied as the

debates over the definition of genre, itself. No two academics can agree on whether genre

classifications refer to textual elements, audience reception, or industrial practices, or perhaps

some combination of all three.

Since the 1970s, literary scholars such as Darko Suvin (1972; 1979), Carl Malmgren

(1988; 1991a; 1991b), Patrick Parrinder (1980), Stanislaw Lem (1984), and Marc Angenot

(1979) have attempted to develop rigid semantic definitions to separate science fiction from

fantasy and both genres from fairy tales and horror. I will discuss these definitions in much

greater detail in Chapter Three, but for now I want to explain why I will not simply be adapting

these literary definitions to television.

My reasons are two-fold. First, the definitions of literary science fiction, fantasy, horror,

and fairy tale are too rigid. Early SF literary theorists focused almost entirely on categorizing

works rather than on illuminating the more important aesthetic, narrative, and functional aspects

of SF fiction. These exclusive definitions also lead to the ridiculous and unnecessary creation of

subgenres such as science-fantasy (Malmgren, 1988) and unreal TV (Wilcox, 2005). While

these rigid genre delineations might be useful in literary theory, they are useless for a TV

medium prone to genre slippage and genre hybridity.

The murky delineations between the SF TV subgenres is highlighted by the Sci-Fi

Channel rebrand in July 2009. The Sci-Fi Channel was launched in September 1992 as a

subsidiary of what is today Comcast-NBCU.[4] After 17 years on the air, the station underwent a

massive rebrand to become the SyFy Channel. In explaining the rebrand, Sci-Fi/SyFy president

David Howe argued that Sci-Fi "didn't capture all that we could do. The network wasn't just

about aliens, space, and the future" (Hira, 2009). With the rebranding, the SyFy channel opened

itself to genres that are not generally considered science fiction, including, but not limited to,

fantasy, supernatural, paranormal, mystery, action and adventure (Blastr Staff, 2009). Thus,

even the science fiction-specific American cable channel found it impractical to rigidly separate

the SF TV genres.

The second reason that I reject these rigid generic definitions is that they are inadequate

for the argument I am making in this thesis. The phenomenon I am exploring - namely the

argument that SF TV, by definition, has only succeeded because it attracts cult audiences – is

relevant to a number of specific genres, including science fiction, fantasy, horror, the fairy tale,

and the many hybrid shows that the SyFy rebrand was meant to attract. The phenomenon is,

however, encompassed by what I am calling speculative fiction.

So, literary terms will not suffice. The term "SyFy" is also insufficient, as it has no

meaning beyond what the SyFy Channel has given it. Other SF TV theorists have grouped

genres together – Kaminsky (1985) wrote about "science fiction and horror" – and many others

have simply used the term science fiction when it is not wholly accurate to do so (e.g. Booker

(2004), Johnson-Smith (2005), Telotte (2008), and Geraghty (2009)). None of these options are

sufficient, for the reasons I have already discussed.

The other way that theorists have dealt with this issue is to co-opt another term. In recent

scholarship on SF TV, the phenomenon has been termed "telefantasy" by Catherine Johnson

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[4] In January 2011, Comcast and General Electric entered a joint venture, and NBC Universal became
Comcast-NBCU.

(2005) and Sue Short (2011). Johnson's study focuses on the visual aspects of telefantasy programs, an area of inquiry that she finds extremely lacking in current academic criticism. Short's (2011) study expands on and extends Johnson's work, focusing on the links between individual telefantasy series in an effort to make a case for the telefantasy genre. Telefantasy started to be used by fan magazines in the 1970s to refer to a wide range of science fiction, fantasy, and horror television shows. The term, however, is not used by the industry or by mainstream audiences, nor was it in use in the academy before Johnson (2005) adopted it.

I have a number of reasons for rejecting the term "telefantasy." First, the inclusion of the prefix "tele" is a nod towards a television-specific genre. While I am arguing that the SF TV genre has matured into an original and self-sustaining genre, another aim of this study is to fit the SF TV genre in is historical and cultural contexts. To use the prefix "tele" would be to exclude it from its long literary, cinematic, and radio history and thus work against what I am trying to do in this thesis. Second, I reject the emphasis on "fantasy." While the phenomenon that I am addressing in this thesis is similar across the science fiction, fantasy, horror, and fairy tale genres, I will argue in the next section that there *are* differences between these genres. Fantasy is not an umbrella genre, with science fiction and horror as subgenres; science fiction, fantasy, horror, and fairy tales are all individual genres unto themselves. Therefore, by definition, the term for the umbrella genre may not incorporate any of the terms for its subgenres. Finally, "telefantasy" is a term created by fan magazines and adopted by a few members in the academy. In the section below on cult television, I will address the issues with defining genre in relation to audiences. For now, suffice it to say that in this study I am looking at texts, industries, and audiences and do not want to emphasize any one over the others.

Speculative Fiction

Between 2009 and 2011, SF writers Margaret Atwood and Ursula K Le Guin had an argument in the British newspaper *The Guardian* about naming conventions in the SF subgenres. Le Guin (2009) accused Atwood of using an "arbitrarily restrictive definition" for science fiction in order to keep her novels from being labeled as such. Atwood (2011) responded by arguing that the confusion was one of definition, not of content: Atwood's definition of *speculative fiction* as "things that really could happen but just hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books" was equivalent to Le Guin's definition of *science fiction*, while Atwood's definition of *science fiction* was similar to what Le Guin called *fantasy*. Atwood concluded that "when it comes to genres, the borders are increasingly undefended, and things slip back and forth across them with insouciance" (2011). A sentiment I agree with. In spite of the complicated discursive tic-tac-toe between academics, popular critics, and hardcore fans, there is a 'we know it when we see it' quality to the SF genre. Atwood and Le Guin were writing about the same genre, they were just calling it different things.

If two of the best SF writers of the 20th century, are having these arguments, it is not surprising that SF scholars are caught in a similar definitional trap. In light of all this semantic confusion, in this thesis I will be using the term "speculative fiction" and will be referring to it as "SF." Speculative fiction is the most broad, umbrella term for science fiction, fantasy, horror, fairy tale, and the numerous texts that slip between the borders of these subgenres.

Robert A. Heinlein is generally credited with the first use of "speculative fiction" in the headline of a *Saturday Evening Post* article on February 8, 1947. The term has a long history in popular criticism, if not as much in academic theory. Damon Knight, an important figure in 1950s SF criticism, argues in *In Search of Wonder* (1956):

> [that] the term "science fiction" is a misnomer, that trying to get two enthusiasts to agree on a definition of it leads only to bloody knuckles; that better labels have

been devised (Heinlein's suggestion, "speculative fiction," is the best, I think), but that we're stuck with this one; and that it will do us no particular harm if we remember that, like *The Saturday Evening Post*, it means what we point to when we say it. (qtd. in Westfahl, 1999, p. 197)

Judith Merrill, who edited the *Year's Best* SF anthologies between 1955 and 1967, similarly argued that "*science fiction* as a descriptive label has long since lost whatever validity it might once have had. By now it means so many things to so many people that . . . I prefer not to use it at all" (qtd. in Westfahl, 1999, p. 202). Merrill, herself, preferred the simple abbreviation SF.

The New Wave movement in the 1960s picked up on Merrill's argument and fought for an industry-wide adoption of the term speculative fiction. More broadly, the New Wave movement called for new directions in SF literature and advocated for the use of the genre to explore controversial and unusual narratives. Michael Moorcock, a major spokesman for the New Wave movement, sought to minimize the genre's emphasis on science and maximize story and character. Therefore, Moorcock used the term speculative fiction rather than science fiction. Similarly, Harlan Ellison, the most important figure in popularizing the New Wave movement, used the term speculative fiction and defined it as follows:

In any definition of speculative fiction, there is an unspoken corollary: the most effective fiction in the genre is that which touches on reality in as many places as possible while maintaining the mood of speculation . . . The reader must be able to draw lines of extrapolation from his own experience or environment – the world in which he lives today – through the intervening linkages of logic, emerging at the new place to which the writer has taken him. (qtd. in Westfahl, 1999, p. 208)

Ellison's emphasis on what I will call the scientific *method*, i.e. the logical extrapolation of a coherent and holistic world from the novum - as discussed in much greater detail in Chapter Three, the element of difference that separates the SF world from the empirical world - is much more important than a focus on actual scientific accuracy as scientific accuracy is understood at any historical moment.

When SF academic theory developed in the 1970s, literary theorists such as Darko Suvin (1972; 1979), Carl Malmgren (1988; 1991a; 1991b), and Stanislaw Lem (1984) dropped the term speculative fiction and instead attempted to develop rigid semiotic definitions to separate science fiction from fantasy, both from fairy tale, and all three from the horror genre. Speculative fiction went out of vogue and has been used sparingly since. Exceptions include Maureen Barr in *Alien Femininity* (1987) – who used SF to "include feminist utopias, science fiction, fantasy, and sword and sorcery" (p. xxi) – and Heather Urbenski in *Plagues, Apocalypses and Bug-Eyed Monsters* (2007) – who included everything from *Invisible Man* (1952) to *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB/UPN, 1997-2003) in her definition of speculative fiction.

I have similar reasons to Barr and Urbenski for choosing speculative fiction. I think that scientific accuracy is an unnecessary restriction, and I reject it in favor of a definition built on logical extrapolation using the scientific method. *True Blood* is an enlightening example of the argument I am making. *True Blood* is clearly fantasy, as the main way it differs from the empirical world is through the existence of vampires, shapeshifters, and other mythical creatures. However, once the existence of these mythical creatures is accepted as part of the show's mythos, the logic of the world is consistent, predictable, and comprehensive. The scientific method was followed in the world-building of the *True Blood* world, as if the writers sat down and asked how the empirical world would *logically* and *scientifically* respond to the introduction of mythical creatures in their midst. Therefore, *True Blood* fulfills the same metaphoric and allegorical functions that the more scientifically accurate *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica* do.

Speculative fiction is, then, most importantly, a thought experiment. It includes everything from *The Twilight Zone* to *Heroes*, *Twin Peaks* to *Lost* and *Battlestar Galactica*, and everything in between. By using the term speculative fiction, I hope to transcend the inhibitions

and limitations of definition and instead focus on the phenomena that are similar across all instances of the speculative fiction subgenres.

Before I turn to the particular case study of this thesis – *Terra Nova* – the show must first be situated in the long history of speculative fiction media. When *Terra Nova* debuted on Fox in September 2011, it was capitalizing on the sort of dystopian view of humanity's future that has grown increasingly common in a 20th and 21st century marked by the violence of two cold wars, the ideological Cold War, and questions over our ecological, economic, and scientific futures. Throughout the last century, the speculative fiction genre has become increasingly capable of capturing and commenting on the historical moment. The academic study of the speculative genres was only legitimized as part of the scholarly literary field in the 1970s, however, and has only been addressed by film and television scholars over the last decade or so. Before I can focus on *Terra Nova*, specifically, I will first situate it in the history and theory of SF literature, film, radio, and television.

Chapter Three: History and Theory of the SF Genre

The relationship between speculative fiction scholarship and the academy has historically been problematic. Before the legitimization of popular culture studies in the latter half of the 20th century, speculative fiction (hereafter 'SF') and similar genres were considered merely entertainment and not worthy of scholastic attention. SF writer and scholar Stanislaw Lem (1984) argued that there are two fields within literature – the high and low realm – and that SF had been denigrated to the low realm even though it holds the same cultural and critical significance as many of the high realm genres. Carl Freedman (1987) added that SF is in this so-called low realm only because the literary powers-that-be do not want SF to be anything *but* low culture. Traditionally, genres inhabiting the lower cultural sphere suffer from a lack of criticism and cultural authenticity, which means that SF has had little chance of breaking into the higher realm of the literary canon (Lem, 1984). Despite this, SF has played an important role in the history of literature, film, radio, and television and, since the 1970s, the academy has slowly begun to recognize the importance of the genre.

Literary Theory

In the 1970s, cultural critics at the Frankfurt School began to argue against the quick dismissal of popular culture (Luppa, 2009), and SF scholars such as Bertolt Brecht (in Suvin, 1979), Ernst Bloch (1986), Joanna Russ (1975), Robert Scholes (1975), and Stanislaw Lem (1984) began to pay SF the critical attention it deserves. The importance of SF, they argued, lies in its ability to both explain and criticize the current sociopolitical situation. Thus, they warned that the genre's social function should not be underestimated (Elkins, 1977; Freedman, 2001).

This was the state of SF criticism when Darko Suvin entered the stage. Born in Zagreb and imprisoned for his leftist sympathies, Suvin fled to Canada in the 1960s. In order to pull SF

from the gutter and into Lem's high literary realm, Suvin believed that the genre must be

legitimized with clear exclusive generic definitions (Parrinder, 2001a; Suvin, 1979). This

definition, he argued, would lend SF historical credibility and would lead to more critical

attention from the academy (Parrinder, 2001a).

Suvin's (1972) foundational definition of science fiction as the genre of cognitive

estrangement "whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's

empirical environment" (p. 375) is thus where all serious attempts at defining SF begin. This

definition has, however, been highly criticized by SF critics after Suvin. Carl Freedman (1987)

argued that genre categorization should be a dialectic, not a stable, process, Scholes (1975)

argued that genre is a historical phenomenon, and Eric Rabkin (1976) and Kathleen Spencer

(1983) both argued that genre is determined by the reader, not the text. Later in his career, Suvin,

himself, backed away from his early assertion that science fiction literature was necessarily

better than fantasy texts. In fact, as I will show below, Suvin's definition of science fiction as

the genre of cognitive estrangement can be applied to all SF genres, making it the imperative

place to start a discussion about the role, function, and definition of SF.

SF as the Genre of Cognitive Estrangement.

Estrangement.

All art is estranged. There is, inherently, a sense of distance in the relationship between art and

its audience. In calling this distance *estrangement*, Darko Suvin (1972) built on the Russian

Formalist theories of Bertolt Brecht. A German dramatist in the first half of the 20th century,

Brecht worried that hundreds of years of normative theatre protocols had made the experience

stale for the well-versed theatergoer. To counteract this, he used new techniques – e.g. writing in

the third person or present tense or varying a production's lighting – to make the theatre new,

astonishing, and wonderful again. Brecht termed this technique *verfremdungseffekt*, which can be translated as defamiliarization or distancing, and which Suvin translated as *estrangement*. The role of estrangement, then, is to throw off the audience's trained assumptions, allowing them to view the story with what Brecht refers to as a "detached eye" (qtd. in Suvin, 1972, p. 374). In SF, the practice of estrangement creates a distance between the audience and the SF text so that the audience can look at the hard, uncomfortable questions that SF asks with what Suvin refers to as a *cognitive* eye.

Cognition.

Estrangement allows the audience, then, to look at the issues that SF poses with a level of detached cognition. The task of SF, Suvin argues, is to take the norms of a particular society and turn them on their heads in order to explore them from different angles. Therefore, SF is not "only a reflecting *of* but also *on* reality" (1972, p. 377). SF is not only a mirroring of society, but a dynamic transformation of society in a way that is cognitively interesting and important.

Cognitive Estrangement.

Cognition and estrangement in SF, then, are inseparable; inherent in the estrangement process is a space for cognition. This phenomenon was first recognized in SF by H.G. Wells (1980/1934) as the sense of wonderment and fear that the audience gets when it first encounters a SF world. The SF writer's job is to "*domesticate* the impossible hypothesis" to address the hard socio-political questions (p. 241). Early SF scholar Robert Scholes (1975) termed it defamiliarization, i.e. the means of trickery by which the writer staves off the audience's natural human instinct to turn things that are strange into things that are known, familiar, and understandable.

Suvin (1979) describes the interaction between cognition and estrangement as an oscillation loop. The audience moves from the empirical world to the SF world, then back to the

empirical world "in order to see it afresh from the new perspective gained" in the SF world (p. 71). I see it as a pendulum, swinging back and forth between the empirical world and the SF world. At each point on the pendulum, the audience member is asked to use his or her own cognition to make sense of the world – fictional or real - creating an enlightening triangulation (Moylan, 2000) between the viewer's perspective, the estranged vision of the SF world, and the empirical world.

As the audience is an active participant in the process of cognitive estrangement, SF is necessarily understood from the audience's unique socio-politico-economic framework (Angenot & Suvin, 1979; Malmgren, 1991a). This active cognitive process permits SF to be "integrated into social practice and to become self-corrective on the basis of social practice" (Angenot & Suvin, 1979). SF, then, is a "stimulus for independent thinking" (Suvin, 1972, p. 379) that trains the audience's minds to be open to new and radical ideas that have an effect both in theory and in praxis (Suvin, 1979).

Cognition, Revisited.

The process of cognitive estrangement can be applied to all SF genres. Thus, while the definition of cognitive estrangement sets SF apart from other types of fiction, it does not separate science fiction from fantasy, horror, or the fairy tale genres. The definition of a genre must be necessary, sufficient, and exclusive. Suvin (1972; 1979) attempted to address these concerns in a couple of unsatisfactory ways by arguing that cognition is the element in science fiction that sets it apart from all other genres.[5] This has been one of Suvin's least appreciated arguments, as scholars have taken extensive issue with the implication that other genres are *not* cognitive.

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[5] One of the other differences between the SF subgenres, Suvin (1972) argued, is in how the narrative is oriented towards the protagonist: the fairytale is positively oriented towards the hero, in fantasy the hero is helpless against the whims of the world, and the science fiction hero is predisposed to either fail or succeed. Fantasy, then, is less interesting than science fiction because it is ruled by a set of axioms that

The root of this confusion lies with the conceptualization of cognition, which has rarely been sufficiently and rigorously engaged. Suvin, himself, argued sometimes that cognition *is* science, i.e. that a science fiction text must be consistent with the scientific realities of the day[6], and at times he said that science fiction must only be consistent with the scientific *method*, i.e. that a SF text must be rigorously logical, philosophical, and mutually consistent (1972; 1979). SF scholars after Suvin have had the same difficulty with the concept: Freedman (2000) differentiates between cognition and cognition effect; Carl Malmgren (1988) creates a whole new category, science-fantasy, to explain how fantasy texts can also contain cognitive elements; Patrick Parrinder (2001b) argues that there are levels of cognition ranging from rational to metaphysical cognition.

I find all of this discussion to be unnecessarily complicated linguistic tap-dancing. While I agree that it is false to say that cognition, itself, is what separates science fiction from other genres, the answer to what *does* set science fiction apart is right there in Suvin's definition of SF as the genre of cognitive estrangement. It is the *way* in which SF is estranged, and therefore the way in which a SF audience is cognizant, that sets the SF subgenres apart. For example, science fiction employs "factors of estrangement based in scientific possibility" (Malmgren, 1991b, p. 6) so that the audience is placed on "a cognitive continuum with the actual" (Freedman, 1987, p. 187). To understand this better, I turn my attention to the third aspect of Suvin's definition of SF, to the "main formal device" that Suvin calls the *novum* (1972, p. 375).

The Novum.

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fantasy authors must comply with (Lem, 1984). However, I would argue that there are as many rules in science fiction as there are in fantasy and, therefore, I do not find this argument in any way satisfactory.

[6] *Science* here does not mean only the hard sciences, but also includes the historical-cultural sciences, such as anthropology, sociology, and linguistics (Suvin, 1979, p. 67). See Jameson (2001) for a more in-depth discussion of how the scientific theses in SF are allegories for social, political, and historical issues.

In the thirty-five plus years since Suvin presented his theory of cognitive estrangement and defined the novum in *The Poetics of Science Fiction* (1972), much commotion has arisen around the cognitive and estrangement aspects of the definition, but little attention has been paid to the novum. Whether it is because, as Suvin (2000) hypothesizes, critics have merely accepted the idea and function of the novum, or whether, as Tom Moylan (2001) hypothesizes, the novum is too highly-charged and political a topic to be touched on lightly, the novum has not received nearly the level of critical attention it deserves. Which is strange, considering that an in-depth study of the novum and its role in the process of cognitive estrangement will go a long way in conceptualizing the meaning of cognition in SF.

In Suvin's definition of cognitive estrangement, the novum is the "imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (1972, p. 375), and is, therefore, the necessary and sufficient condition of SF. The novum is the totalizing principle of the cognitive estrangement relationship, because the imaginative framework, that which is different from the empirical environment, catalyzes the change between the SF world and the empirical world (Suvin, 1979).

In Russian Formalist terms, the novum is the Dominant. It is the "focusing component of the work" (Jakobson, 1971, p. 82), the essential and primary aspect that determines the rest of the text. As the hegemonic feature of the SF world, it is the Dominant that informs the tension between the viewer and the SF world and, therefore, determines the estranging and cognitive factors of the work (Suvin, 1979). The SF world is classified by the novum, and, therefore, the novum defines the aesthetic and cognitive functions that form the core and meaning of the work (Jakobson, 1971; Lem, 1984; Malmgren, 1991a; 1991b).

In all fictional texts, there are two important factors: the story and the world (Malmgren 1991b). Fiction, by definition, has a new, original story; it is in the creation of a SF world, i.e. in fantastical world-building[7], that SF as a genre is distinctive. SF world-building is incredibly complicated, as it has to form a world that is, by definition, new and strange, while also making it real and believable. In SF, then, special attention is paid to maintaining the four well-defined, interlocking, and complex structures that make up any world: actants, social order, topology, and natural laws (Malmgren, 1991a). The SF world is then created when the novum is introduced into one or more of these systems (Malmgren, 1991a) and the SF text explores the effect of the novum on the other three world structures.

The first world structure, actants, is the population or the inhabitants of the world. In SF, the actant novum is commonly an alien race or a sentient robot. This estrangement between the viewer and the population creates a cognitive thrust to better understand the self and the other. The second structure, social order, refers to the rules, regulations, and hierarchies that regulate the relationships between the citizens of this world. The novum in this case would be something such as traveling to a utopian or dystopian society, which leads to a cognitive thrust to better understand the relationship between the self and society.[8] Third, topology includes all the physical objects of the world. The novum here could either be a new technology that revolutionizes the empirical world – leading to cognitive questions about the relationship between self and the machine/technology – or could be an entirely new world, such as a new planet or the Earth radically transformed through something such as nuclear war – leading to cognitive questions about the relationship between self and the environment (Malmgren, 1991a).

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[7] For more on SF world-building as it applies to television, see the sections on transmedia storytelling in Chapters 4 and 6.
[8] The social order novum will be particularly important in Chapter 7, when I discuss *Terra Nova's* dystopian world.

So far, all three of these novums create estranging factors that are science fiction in nature. These are all scientific novums, i.e. novums that can be scientifically validated. It is in this way that science fiction is based in science: in the novum, i.e. the estranging element, not in the cognition (Suvin, 1979). A novum introduced into the fourth structure - changes in natural laws - is what makes the fictional world fantasy, horror, or fairy tale instead of science fiction (Malmgren, 1991a). Malmgren (1991a) writes it another way: fantasy, "intentionally violates or contradicts the conventional norms of possibility, whereas [science fiction] adheres to them" (p. 135). In fantasy, horror, or fairy tale, then, there is no possibility that the empirical world could ever *become* the fantasy world, while in pure science fiction that possibility exists.

Working Definition of Literary SF, Science Fiction, and Fantasy.

With this conceptualization of what it means to be *science* fiction in mind, then, I will define SF in Suvin's language as the genre of cognitive estrangement whose dominant component is the novum. When applied to science fiction literature, the novum is a scientific extrapolation from the historically-situated empirical world. When applied to fantasy, horror, and fairy tale, the novum is more speculative in nature, as the reader must take a mental leap from the empirical world to the novum world. As we will see in the following chapters, the totalizing genre distinction of SF as the genre of cognitive estrangement is the most relevant and most important factor in SF television.

The last note I want to make is on the didactic nature of SF literature. While in other fictional genres it is commonplace to mimic the existing social order, perhaps even to satirize or criticize it, SF has the unique ability to explain and understand the historical sociopolitical situation (Elkins, 1977; Freedman, 2001). SF gives the audience tools to think about the world in ways that are not sanctioned by hegemonic institutions and ideologies (Moylan, 2000). Fitting

(1993) argues that SF texts are the epitome of the transformative power of art. As SF is the only modern genre to take knowledge, itself, as an end and not merely as a means to that end (Russ, 1975), SF has the possibility to be, as Suvin says, a "stimulus for independent thinking" (1972, p. 28), or as Moylan (2000) calls it, a means of "mobilizing the cultural imagination" (p. 93). In literary SF, aestheticism comes from the mind, not the eye (Russ, 1975).

In the next few chapters, I will be applying the concepts of SF to the medium of television and SF's didactic nature will be an important aspect of that. I admit that, while SF's counter-hegemonic role may be defensible enough in literary terms, and maybe even in film production, it seems, at the outset, to go against the very grain of broadcast television. What I have posited so far, however, is that cognitive estrangement provides SF with a means of bypassing some of broadcast TV's less desirable hegemonic qualities to ask the audience to truly question the sociopolitical situation in which television, itself, is created.

Film Theory

SF has played an important role in the history of film since the very moment film was invented. One of film's first pioneers, Georges Méliès, was fascinated by both the medium's technical possibilities and the opportunities provided by SF narrative. As Méliès' first career was as a magician, he was captivated by the camera's ability for illusion and trickery and his innovations made him an early special effects engineer.

M. Keith Booker (2004) traces the origins of modern SF entertainment to Méliès' most famous film: *Voyage dans la Lune* (*Trip to the Moon*) (1902). The film is based on Jules Verne's *From the Earth to Moon* (1865) and H. G. Wells' *The First Men in the Moon (1901)* and follows a group of astronauts as they travel to the moon, where they encounter aliens and other mysteries. The iconic stop motion effect of a rocket crashing into the eye of the moon is

symbolic of Méliès' obsession with both imagination and special effects. This image is also an example of how Méliès' use of technical trickery calls attention to illusion, deception, and the very act of watching a film (Geraghty, 2009, p. 8). Although short films such as Méliès' *Voyage dans la Lune* quickly gave way to longer narrative films, Méliès work served as the forefather to SF films, particularly to the special effects-focused work of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg (2009).

Although there were isolated instances of SF film between Méliès' work and World War II, the modern SF film genre emerged in the wake of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Sobchak, 1987). The greatest exceptions to this were the monster and creature horror films of the 1930s. The classics made icons out of Boris Karloff, Lon Chaney, and Bela Lugosi, including *Frankenstein* (1931), *Dracula* (1931), *The Mummy* (1932), and *The Wolf Man* (1941).

The monster films of the 1930s were the predecessors to the monster films of the 1950s. As WWII ended and the 1950s began, America was facing two major changes. The first was the Cold War, which manifested in film as the SF B-Movie, otherwise known as the Bug-Eyed Monster film. These films capitalized on and instilled in viewers anticommunist sentiments (Geraghty, 2009) and films such as *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *Them!* (1954), and *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) dealt with the preservation of social order and addressed fears of nuclear fallout (Sobchak, 1987). The second big change in the 1950s was suburbanization spurred on by the return of soldiers and the G.I. Bill. The move to the suburbs instilled a feeling of lost masculine identity in many veterans, a feeling manifest in films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) (Geraghty, 2009).

The threat of nuclear war carried over into the 1960s. Films such as *Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) and *Planet of the Apes* (1968) capitalized on fears of the long-term effects of nuclear power. Among both viewers and producers, however, there was a sense that real science was taking over from science fiction and that the genre was in crisis (Geraghty, 2009, p. 36). The most important film of the decade, and arguably, the most important SF film so far, was Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The film showed how a SF film could successfully combine a breath-taking visual experience with the wonder of the SF genre and ushered in the modern standard of SF film quality based on visual effects (Zebrowski, 2009). This movement led Vivian Sobchack to argue in her seminal book *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (1987) that the look and sound of SF films are seminally important to understanding the SF film genre.

Despite the commercial success of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, SF film struggled in the decade that followed. Joan F. Dean (1978) argues that every SF film between *2001* and *Star Wars* (1977) failed both aesthetically and financially. These films, such as *Soylent Green* (1973) and *Logan's Run* (1976), suffered from a focus on dystopian visions of the future brought on by Nixon's impeachment and continuing dissatisfaction with the War in Vietnam. This depressing focus on dystopian futures was detrimental to the SF film genre, which was entirely unsuccessful at the box office until the success of *Star Wars* ushered in a new era of SF films based on alien encounters and interplanetary travel.

The release of *Star Wars* and Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) was a turning point in SF film.[9] These films emphasized special effects and a return to

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[9] Also of note here is the release of the first *Star Trek* film adaptation. The televised *Star Trek* series was enjoying cult success in syndication, and the success of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* led Paramount to finally produce the film version, which had been almost-produced for years. After the relative success of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), Paramount went on to produce nine more films, four television

nostalgic narratives about benevolent aliens, a trend that continued with the most important films of the 1980s, including Spielberg's *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) and **batteries not included* (1987) (Geraghty, 2009). While SF film enjoyed commercial success during this time, critics were less impressed. Brooks Landon (1992), for example, argues that narrative would have to transform to catch up to advancements in special effects technologies as special effects were more sophisticated than SF film's narrative capacity.

The other important trend in the 1980s and 1990s was the rise of alien and cyborg films that explored issues of individual identity. In her important book *Alien Zone* (1996), Annette Kuhn sees three different types of these films. The first addresses masculine mastery over nature, as in *Alien* (1979) and *Blade Runner* (1982). The second is in films that other the human body, such as in *The Thing* (1982) and *The Fly* (1986). Finally, the third type explores the relationship between the body and technology in cyborg movies such as *The Terminator* (1984). This third category would also include *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) and *The Matrix* (1999).

The final era of SF film is the post-9/11 era that we are currently inhabiting. This era is marked by nostalgia (Geraghty, 2009): remakes (e.g. *War of the Worlds* (2005) and *I am Legend* (2007)), prequel and sequel films (e.g. the *Star Wars* prequels (1999, 2002, 2005) and the *Indiana Jones* sequel (2008)), and comic book hero adaptations (e.g. *Spiderman* (2002, 2004, 2007), *Batman* (2005, 2008, 2012), *Superman* (2006), and *Iron Man* (2008, 2010)). These nostalgic films have become synonymous with Blockbuster films and have become an extremely successful genre in the first decade of the 21st century.

Radio and Television History

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series, and a new movie adaptation in 2009. I will talk about the legacy of the *Star Trek* franchise in Chapter Four.

As in film, SF was a stable radio genre from the beginning of radio programming. While early SF film and television had to contend with limited visual technologies and small screens, radio could create worlds and explore SF wonders with only words and the audience's imagination. Thus, radio could explore things that could never be explored in film or television and there was a connection between radio SF and literary SF that the visual mediums could never have.

Radio serials most often adapted stories from comic strips and pulp magazines. One of the most popular radio characters was the Shadow, who was a pulp character who fought crime with his psychic powers. He came to radio as the star of *The Detective Story Hour* on CBS in 1930 and stayed on radio in one form or another until 1954. *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* followed the story of a man exposed to radioactive gas who time-traveled to the 25th century. *Buck Rogers* started as a pulp character and became a radio star from 1932-1946, as well as a star of comic strips, film, and television. *Buck Rogers* is often credited with bringing the idea of space exploration to radio, a theme that continued with the popular series *Flash Gordon*. *Flash Gordon* follows the story of a man who escaped the meteoric destruction of Earth and found himself and his friends on the planet Mongo. *Flash Gordon* aired on radio from 1935 to 1936 before becoming a television series.

Perhaps the most important SF radio show of the 1930s was Orson Welles' adaptation of H.G. Wells' *The War of the World*. Welles repositioned H.G. Wells' original story in contemporary New Jersey and reframed the Martian invasion as a series of interruptions from a radio news department. Therefore, Welles' story commented on the new radio medium as much as on the fear and paranoia of 1930s society. In fact, the play seemed so realistic that many listeners failed to realize that it was fiction and feared an actual alien invasion of Earth.

Despite these early examples, however, M. Keith Booker (2004) argues that SF radio did not come of age until the 1950s with *2000 Plus* (Mutual, 1950-52) and *Dimension X* (NBC, 1950-1). *2000 Plus* was an anthology series that focused on alien invasions and contemporary fears of technological advancement. *Dimension X* was thematically similar to *2000 Plus* and was much more popular, mainly because it featured episodes written by the best SF writers of the time, including Kurt Vonnegut, Ray Bradbury, and Robert Heinlein.

SF continued to be an important genre as the popularity of radio serials gave way to television series. In the early days of television, there were two main types of SF programming: children's series and anthology series. SF series aimed at children included *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (DuMont, 1949-55), *Rocky Jones, Space Ranger* (synd., 1954), and *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* (CBS/ABC/NBC/DuMont, 1950-5). Although these shows were made for children, they tapped into the social anxieties of the day - mainly Cold War fears over the arms race - and indoctrinated Cold War ideologies into young viewers (Dixon, 2008).

The two most important SF anthologies were *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-64) and *The Outer Limits* (ABC, 1963-5). Booker (2004) argues that *The Twilight Zone* is "the series that marked the maturation of science fiction television as a genre" (p. 6), an almost-deserving sentiment that is, I will argue in Chapter Four, premature. However, I do agree with Jan Johnson-Smith when she calls the show "daring" because it "grasped the potential for social commentary" (p. 58). *The Twilight Zone* is a precursor to the mature SF TV genre that I will argue developed in the late 1980s and later.[10] It showcased elements that would become very important in later SF shows, included, but not limited to, genre slippage - *The Twilight Zone*

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[10] Another important precursor is *Star Trek: The Original Series*. While I have chosen to focus on *The Twilight Zone* because of its popularity and thematic importance, I will address *Star Trek* in the Chapter Four.

episodes incorporated science fiction, horror, and fantasy, often in combination – and an emphasis on ideas over the expensive and flashy special effects of SF films (Booker, 2004, p. 9).

The Twilight Zone is an example of how readily TV SF adopted the cognitive estrangement model of SF literature. Rod Serling, the creator of *The Twilight Zone,* knew that he was creating a show that was different: "Sure, there have been science fiction and fantasy shows before, but most of them were involved with gadgets or leprechauns. *The Twilight Zone* is about people" (qtd. in Presnell & Mcgee, 1998, p. 15). Norris (2009) argues that Serling was the first TV writer to realize the power of the SF genre to address current issues and, thus, his use of the final frontier of space "is less about an outward exploration than about an inner one" (p. 19). The show's anthology format meant that each episode was a mini-morality play, with Serling's short introductions and conclusions hitting home the lessons learned during each episode (Worland, 1996).

The Twilight Zone uses SF tropes comment less on an imagined future and more on the loneliness, paranoia, and anxiety of the Cold War mentality. In "The Mind and the Matter," the bitter, alienated protagonist uses a paranormal book to rid the world of people, then when he got bored, he filled the world with clones of himself. The episode is a commentary on the alienation of both post-Holocaust fears and the modern corporate world. Similarly, the protagonist in "Time Enough to Last" would rather spend time with books then people so is unfazed when nuclear war destroys the world while he is in the library. However, at the end of the episode, his glasses fall and shatter and, without anyone to fix them, he is trapped in a lonely world without the ability to read the books that are so tantalizingly close. "Time Enough to Last" is a stirring commentary on both the importance of community and nonconformity.

Issues of conformity were extremely relevant to an American audience subject to the paranoia of McCarthyism. In the season two episode "The Obsolete Man," the protagonist is on trial for being a librarian and, therefore, for being obsolete. These hearings were filmed in the same cinematic tone as the Army-McCarthy hearings, suggesting a parallel between the dystopian society in "The Obsolete Man" and 1950s American society (Booker, 2002).

These episodes are just examples of *The Twilight Zone's* social and political relevancy. Notably, *The Twilight Zone* was much more pessimistic than its SF TV successors, especially in relation to *The Twilight Zone's* outlook on the effects of technological advancements (Booker, 2004), a pessimism that will return decades later in the important SF series of the 1990s and 2000s.

Before then, however, SF TV was much more optimistic about contemporary, and the future of, American society. In the decade following *The Twilight Zone*, the show's influence was seen more in the variety of SF shows on the air than in their cultural relevance (Telotte, 2008). The most important figure at the time, for example, was director, writer, and producer Irwin Allen. Allen created four of the most popular SF series of the 1960s: *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (ABC, 1964-8), *Lost in Space* (CBS, 1965-8), *Time Tunnel* (ABC, 1966-7), and *Land of the Giants* (ABC, 1968-70). These shows focused less on social issues and more on bringing a cinematic appeal to SF TV through larger budgets, large casts, and more impressive special effects (Telotte, 2008, p. 13-4). They also promoted space travel at a time when the Cold War Space Race was going full throttle (Gheraghty, 2009).

SF TV continued to draw inspiration from SF film throughout the 1970s. *Planet of the Apes* (CBS, 1974) and *Logan's Run* (CBS, 1977-8) were both directly adapted from popular films. More importantly, the huge success of *Star Wars* in 1977 catalyzed a series of ambitious

shows with large budgets and a focus on special effects, including *Battlestar Galactica* (ABC, 1978-80), a recreation of *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (NBC, 1979-81), and *Blake's 7* (BBC1, 1978-81) and *Space: 1999* (ITV, 1975-7) in the United Kingdom. Although a couple of shows – *Six Million Dollar Man* (ABC, 1974-8) and *The Bionic Women* (ABC, 1976-80) – dealt with the social and political concerns of their viewers, such as fears over biotechnology, they did so with humor and special effects rather than the seriousness of *The Twilight Zone*.

As the 1980s began, the entire television industry was beginning to change, catalyzing a revolution in TV programming. SF TV, specifically, was at a turning point. In the next chapter, I will discuss how SF TV was perfectly situated to take advantage of these industry changes.

Chapter Four: Transformation of SF TV to Cult TV

TV executive Scott Siegler can be forgiven for declaring that "science fiction doesn't work on TV" (qtd. in Johnson-Smith, 2005, p. 56). SF's use of cognitive estrangement implies a sense of wonder and continual awe that does not fit with television's tendency to domesticate stories and characters over multi-episodes and successive seasons. Siegler might have had a point. As I showed in Chapter Three, SF TV has a long history of promising yet short-lived shows. In the Network Era, a television program had to garner thirty percent of the television audience on any given night, which translated to thirty or forty million viewers. Due to its niche audience appeal, SF programming always struggled to attract those types of numbers. However, the development of cable and satellite television, the VCR, and better visual technologies in the 1980s perfectly suited the SF genre. These technologies led to audience fragmentation and niche advertising, which made cult television, itself, a viable and successful genre. Over the past thirty years, then, SF TV has matured and transformed into an aesthetically complex and economically successful cult genre.

Television Industry in Transition

In direct opposition to Scott Siegler, Jan Johnson-Smith (2005) argues that television, far from being a bad place for SF, is the *perfect* medium for the genre. The technological shifts in the 1980s led to a new wave of television that is stylistic, original, narratively complicated, and supremely visual. Thus, Johnson-Smith argues, television has become an increasingly appropriate medium for SF. She praises SF television, for "not only can it tell stories of cognitive estrangement, it can also deliver them with persuasively 'realistic' visuals" (p. 71). In the half decade since Johnson-Smith (2005) wrote, the advent of Internet streaming and mobile

technology has hastened the development of active audiences attuned to media convergence and transmedia storytelling, which, in turn, benefit the economic viability of SF TV.

Audience Fragmentation.

Before the advent of cable and satellite television in the late 1970s, there were three television networks vying for viewers: NBC, CBS, and ABC. To be considered successful, a program would have to attract at least a third of the viewing public and, to attract these huge audiences, network programming had to be what CBS executive Paul Klein termed "least objectionable programming" (qtd. in Lotz, 2007, p. 11). Genres that were not universally liked by a number of demographics were not economically feasible. SF TV was one of those genres.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, technological advancements led to a gradual change in television aesthetics. Amanda Lotz (2007) identifies the remote control, the VCR, and the development of cable and satellite television as the three innovations that increased viewer control of programming and, therefore, the development of viewer choice. Between 1980 and 1988, the percentage of Americans with cable subscriptions grew from 19.9 to 50 (p. 52-3). With increased choice, audiences grew fragmented. Before 1980, television functioned as a mass medium; after, the television audience was more accurately categorized as "a collection of niche audiences" (p. 5).

Increased cable penetration also led to the buying and selling of advertising based on demographics. Until the rise of the cable industry, there was a direct correlation between numbers of viewers and advertising dollars, so the three broadcast networks produced programs with mass appeal. In the 1970s, advertisers began to shift attention from *numbers* of viewers to *types* of viewers. This was evidenced by the Rural Purge, when CBS cancelled extremely popular lowbrow shows such as *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Green Acres* to make room on the

schedule for *Mary Tyler Moore* and *All in the Family*, which, while lower rated, attracted an affluent, well-educated, urban, youthful demographic (Johnson, 2010). The yuppie demographic, as it was called, became even more appealing in the late 1980s, when deregulation in the cable industry and a softening of anti-monopoly regulations in the telecommunications industry converged to increase competition and fragment audiences (2010). Instead of looking for numbers, advertisers began looking for *quality* audiences, quality defined in financial terms, so that low-rated shows such as *Hill Street Blues* attracted high-paying advertisers - such as BMW – who were attracted to *Hill Street Blues'* critical acclaim and popularity with affluent 18-49 year olds (Caldwell, 1995).

With audience fragmentation, the definition of program success began to change. John Caldwell (1995) argues that the yuppie demographic was attracted to the high level of cultural capital in what he calls *televisual* programming. Televisual shows use narrative complexity, large casts, and rich alternate worlds to keep audiences invested in a program, and therefore attract viewers with the cultural acumen to keep up with the narrative. Therefore, televisual shows both require and cultivate active audiences. Televisual is another word for niche, and while these shows run the gambit from the gritty cop drama *Hill Street Blues* to the quirky comedy *Seinfeld*, the move towards niche programming was particularly suited for SF TV, with its active, vivid world-creation and complex narratives. In fact, the SF TV genre could not have matured as it did without the advertising shift to fragmented, niche audiences.

Realistic Visuals and Televisuality.
Although SF TV primarily employs an aesthetic style of the mind, that does not dampen the appeal of stylistic visual aesthetics such as intricate space ships and awe-inspiring battle scenes. An important aspect of SF TV's visual style is the active process of unique world-building. As

Moylan (2000) argues, the process of world-building in SF is both the deepest pleasure and the site of the genre's most powerfully subversive potential. While the challenges of SF world-building lead to long, expository chapters in literary fiction, on television SF is able to capitalize on all the potential of the medium's visual features.

In order to create realistic narratives, SF worlds must be made of four interlocking and complex structures: people, social order, topology, and natural laws (Malmgren, 1991a). Every SF world has a fully-realized foundation of all four of these elements. In developing this foundation, SF does what Samuel Delany (1991) calls foregrounding the background, i.e. SF pays great attention to the things (e.g. setting, social norms, history) that are generally taken for granted in realistic fiction.

Foregrounding the background is also what Caldwell (1995) refers to as structural inversion (p. 6). Structural inversion is one of the important elements of Caldwell's theory of televisuality. Above, I referred to televisuality's fragmented audiences, but here I want to focus on the aesthetic part of Caldwell's theory, as televisuality included a move from a static visual style to a more active "performance of style" (p. 5). With the shift to niche programming, stylization became a way for a television show to stand out and attract audiences. This perfectly suited the SF TV genre with its stylized emphasis on background aesthetics and rich world-building. In fact, Caldwell (1995) draws important parallels between televisuality and SF TV programming:

> Their [televisual shows] preoccupation with alternative worlds – a defining focus of virtual reality – justified and allowed for extreme narrative and visual gambits and acute narrative variations. 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. (p. 261)

Televisual programming, then, opened the door for the more visually stylistic genre of SF TV and trained viewers to not only watch television, but to actively participate in the SF world-building process.

SF World-Building and Active Audiences.

In Chapter Three, I discussed how the text-audience relationship develops in SF in a way that asks the audience to understand the text from his/her own sociopolitical situation, implicating the audience in the didactic learning process. This is one way in which SF audiences are actively involved in the text; the second is in the process of SF world-building.

In SF, narratives generally start *in media res* and are told from the perspective of the narrative's hero. Kathleen Spencer (1983) argues that the relationship between the SF audience and the SF text is unique, as SF texts rarely explain the SF world and the SF audience does not expect it to. Rather, SF texts set the "threshold of functional relevance" (p. 40) above the viewer's knowledge so that the viewer must *imply* the meaning of objects, actions, and language from ancillary developments in the narrative. This is what Marc Angenot (1979) terms the absent paradigm. Using the absent paradigm, the viewer extrapolates from what is shown to understand what is not shown. The audience, then, must be active in order to understand a SF world. More interestingly, and perhaps more importantly, Angenot argues that a SF world is more credible and realistic when the viewer believes as much in what is assumed and proposed as in what is actually explained.

With its low threshold of functional relevance and the use of the absent paradigm, SF texts implicate the audience in the construction of the SF society. To take this a step further, consider that every SF text is understood from the viewer's own sociopolitical framework (Angenot & Suvin, 1979). Therefore, in the active process of world-building, the audience is

offered the opportunity to reassess their own empirical world (Moylan, 2000). This is what

Moylan (2000) means, then, when he argues that in SF world-building lays the critical potential

of a SF text.

New Ways of Watching TV, i.e. Convergence.

During the Network Era, SF's need for, and cultivation of, active audiences was detrimental to

its success as a TV genre. In the Internet Era, however, active audience engagement is both

encouraged by, and required for the success of, TV programming. Although the trend in media

studies in the 1970s and 1980s was towards media effects research and the assumption that

audiences are passive agents upon which media acts, research in the Digital Age has thrown this

assumption into question. Building on Caldwell's theory of televisuality, John Caughie (2000)

argues that what he calls *art television* relies on an intelligent, critical, and aware audience in

order to produce complicated epic narratives. Just as the development of cable and satellite TV

led to fragmented TV audiences, the creation of the VCR played an important role in the success

of complex, continuous, epic narratives. The adoption of the VCR in the 1980s catalyzed two

important changes in viewing habits: first, the viewer could record shows and watch them at their

own convenience; second, viewers could watch episodes more than once, encouraging television

creators to develop complex narratives that would be new and interesting on each of multiple

viewings.

Thirty years later the VCR is almost extinct, but a slew of technologies have developed in

the vein of the VCR that allow viewers to watch what they want, when they want, and however

many times they want to. Media convergence allows viewers to watch the same content on

video-on-demand, recorded on DVRs, on Internet streaming sites such as Hulu and Netflix, and

mobile phones. Each of these technologies encourages viewers to watch shows outside of the

traditional broadcast schedule. In the 2011 *State of the Media* report, Nielsen found that 288 million people watched traditional TV while 143 million watched video on the Internet, 111 million watched timeshifted television (up 11% since Q2 2010), and 30 million watched video on their mobile phones. No numbers were reported for viewing video on tablet computers.

Viewers are no longer watching TV on a Network-dictated schedule. During the 2010-2011 broadcast season, an average of 3,484 viewers a week watched ABC's *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009-) via DVR, and Fox's *Fringe* (FOX, 2008-) had a 41% increase in viewership when DVR figures were factored into the equation (Gorman, 2011). In the 4th Quarter of 2010, viewers 25-64 years old watched more than 30 hours a month of television on a DVR, and adults overall watched 17% more timeshifted programming in 2010 than they did the year before (*State of the Media*, 2011). Also, in Q1 2011, mobile viewing increased 41% year-to-year, and monthly time spent watching timeshifted TV and video on the Internet both increased by an hour and ten minutes (*The Cross-Platform Report*, 2011). In summary, what all these figures mean is that viewers are watching *more* content than ever, but are doing so at their own convenience and choosing.

The concept of choice is playing an important role in changing the definition of television. As Henry Jenkins (2006) argues, the digital revolution does not spell the death of television, but it is forcing new and old media to interact in increasingly complex ways. Most importantly, media convergence is not so much a shift in technology as it is a cultural shift in the minds of viewers, towards active consumerism. Instead of watching content dictated to them by television programmers, viewers are actively searching for content (2006). With thousands of options – running the gambit from homemade YouTube videos to expensive pay cable productions – viewers are forced to make choices. Viewers no longer watch television in the passive make a

sandwich-while watching *The Brady Bunch* sort of way, but instead are discriminating in what they watch. This very activity of choice, then, is leading viewers to pay more attention to the things that they choose (Johnson-Smith, 2005), which is an important evolution in viewing habits for the genre of SF TV, which requires an active, engaged audience for its success.

Cult Television

The transformation of mass television audiences to fragmented, niche audiences has opened the door to genres and types of programming that appeal to smaller subsets of viewers. As advertisers are now paying more for smaller audiences, the prospect of that smaller audience being intense, active, and loyal is very appealing. This type of ardent audiences is generally called a cult audience, although "cult" is a contested term in the academy. Despite the appeal of cult audiences, they have proven hard to cultivate as well as define, and doing so would prove beneficial to media producers as well as media scholars.

Most discussions of cult media start with Umberto Eco's article *Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage* (1985), in which he defines cult in terms of textual narrative elements. He lists three requirements of a cult text:

1. "It must provide a completely furnished world" so that fans can make that world "of their own" (p. 3)
2. A viewer/reader "must be able to unhinge it, to break it up or take it apart so that one may remember only parts of it" (p. 4)
3. A cult text must have "living textuality" (p. 4), meaning that a cult text is created as much by other texts as by authors

Each of Eco's three requirements focuses on the narrative structure of the text rather than on the audiences who watch the text. This, as I will show, has been a hotly contested claim in the years since the article was published.

Another element of Eco's argument is the relationship between cult and quality. Eco (1985) argues that, while cult literature can be both cult and good art, cult movies must have

imperfections (p. 4). Henry Jenkins (1992) agrees, saying that fans "insist on making meaning from materials others have characterized as trivial and worthless" (p. 3). Mark Janocvich and Nathan Hunt (2004) also argue that cult is defined in opposition to the mainstream. In exclaiming his surprise over the success of *Heroes*, Benji Wilson (2007) of *The Telegraph* says that he thought *Heroes* "was cult viewing for boys waving imaginary lightsabers, not quality drama," clearly placing quality and cult in opposition. This is a common argument in film theory, where cult texts such as SF B movies were mainly low-quality productions that appeal to audiences because of their campy and low-budget natures. In television theory, however, this is not the case. Due to the interest producers have taken in cult TV as a way to reach important niche audiences, cult television shows often have large budgets, good writers, and impressive special effects.

Similarly out-dated is Walter Benjamin's definition of cult based on the relationship between cult and authenticity, i.e. a cult text is one that is obscure and impossible to replicate (in Le Guern, 2004, p. 5). Benjamin's definition discounts all film and television texts, as they are mechanically produced and can, therefore, be reproduced. This definition is all-but obsolete in the Digital Age, when projects such as the Google Library make texts that were once rare easily accessible by anyone who wants to look.

In opposition to both Eco and Benjamin, Henry Jenkins (1992) and Matt Hills (2002) discuss cult texts in relation to audiences. Similarly, Reeves, Rodgers, and Epstein (1996) define cult shows in relation to avid fans who self-define themselves in relation to a text. In *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins (1992) argues that the most important element of a cult text is the active nature of media fandom, which upsets the hegemonic belief in media studies that audiences are always passive. He extends this line of thinking in *Convergence Culture* (2006), where he

argues that new media convergence in the 21st century is a more general cultural shift towards much broader audience participation and activity across the board of audience-media relationships. As Sue Short (2011) argues, "fans have become the ideal viewer-consumer" (p. 6) and producers have begun to create shows aimed at specific built-in audience markets (Jones, 2003; Willis, 2003).

I would like to move the discussion of cult TV away from a discussion of numbers of viewers. As Matt Hills (2004) argues, researchers should focus on "analyzing and defining cult TV as a part of broader patterns within changing TV industries" rather than simply "celebrating cult texts for their supposed uniqueness" (p. 522). It is hard to define cult in relation to just audiences or text, as the two must work in consort. Cult television is not cult television without an intense, active fan-base, but that fan-base is reacting to specific elements within a text that attract and cultivate this type of audience fervor. Specifically, cult TV is not niche *or* mainstream, as the very definition of audience success based on numbers is nearly out-dated. Often, advertisers are looking for, and therefore successful shows are defined by, smaller subcultures of viewers who are loyal and predictable in their viewing of a particular show. The point is, in the next few years, a hit show and a cult show may very well become the same thing and, therefore, I think that defining cult TV simply in terms of audience numbers is a mistake.

Rather than defining cult TV in terms of the existence, or lack, of a particular type of size of audience, cult TV should be defined as a genre. And, as genres change and adapt and evolve, defining cult TV in any static, fixed, or rigorous manner would, in fact, be unproductive. Instead, I will present a number of factors that can attract the kind of active audiences that Jenkins (1992; 2006) and Hills (2002) describe. Any cult text may have all or none of these factors, although cult texts tend to have a majority of them. Similarly, a text may have all of these factors and fail

to attract an audience of any kind, none-the-less a cult audience. These factors are, then, the nine characterizations that typically characterize the cult genre, but are by no means an absolute.

1. *Serialization.*

Serialization is a format almost unique to television. A series of novels or a movie trilogy (or more) can build a long narrative and an interesting world, but these stories cannot reach the level of textual density and narrative elasticity that can be reached by 202 episodes of *The X-Files* or 121 episodes of *Lost*. Serialized shows, however, are not conducive to casual viewership, as each episode builds on the one before it. The audience must watch every episode, and watch carefully, as the narrative tends to grow complex over 100+ hours of viewing. The viability of serialized programming has been aided by the explosion of the TV on DVD market, as well as the recent growth of iTunes and Amazon episode purchasing, Video On Demand, the DVR, and Internet streaming services. All of these technical advancements give viewers the tools to watch and re-watch episodes of serialized shows when and where they want to.

2. *Stakes.*

Stakes, here, refers to the fact that, in cult TV, what happens each episode matters. Characters can die; the narrative world can be forever altered. The status quo of the series is, always, at stake. Serialized shows tend to have stakes, i.e. what happens in episode four effects what happens in episodes five, twelve, and forty-six. In cult TV, especially, viewers care about what is at stake: viewers wonder about the mysteries presented, worry about what happens to the characters, and are anxious to see how the narrative develops. When the viewer no longer cares about what is at stake for a show's narrative and characters, a cult show has failed. Sue Short (2011) argues that *Lost* became less interesting when more mysteries were presented than were answered and, therefore, viewers stopped caring about what was at stake in the show's

mythology. Similarly, Hills (2002) argues that viewers stopped caring about *Twin Peaks* when the mystery 'Who killed Laura Palmer?' was solved as the show failed to present an equally compelling set of stakes for the second season.

    3. Internally Consistent Mythology

Well-built narrative worlds with internal logical consistency invite viewers to speculate and extrapolate about the narrative. This idea of internal logical consistency was termed "mythology" around the time of *The X-Files* to refer to the slow building of the program's on-going narrative world. There are two important aspects of this. The first is in world-building. The narrative world must have a level of detail and complexity that serves three purposes: first, the narrative world must feel realistic; second, the world must be complex enough that it can be debated and discussed; third, the viewer can immerse him/herself in the world. This is what Matt Hills (2002) terms "hyperdiegesis," which he defines as "the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text" (p. 137). This is similar to Angenot's (1979) absent paradigm, in which a narrative world is most believable when the viewer trusts as much in what is not explicitly shown as what is. The audience, therefore, is very active in the world-building process and, as Sara Gwenllian-Jones (2004) argues, "the reader must play an active part in creating and sustaining its integrity" (p. 84). The viewers' debates and discussions about the world, then, are an important element of cult world-building.

      The second, interrelated, issue is with characters and character development. The development of realistic characters is an invaluable aspect of viable world-building. If the narrative world is holistic and logical, characters' decisions should be rational, realistic, and in-character. Short (2011) argues that *Heroes* lost its viewers when its characters started to make

uncharacteristic decisions that fit neither the profile of the characters nor the internal logic of the *Heroes*-world.

4. *Narrative Depth and Flexibility*

Internally consistent mythology tends to lead to narrative depth and flexibility. A holistic and logical world leads to narratives that have coherence and consistency, which allows the narrative to grow and develop in layers. Just as a cult narrative world leaves space for the viewer to make his/her own decisions, sympathies, and stories, the narrative should be similarly deep and flexible to allow for audience interaction and creativity. This level of audience interaction is a symptom of a detailed and complex narrative that leaves room for debate, discussion, and audience engagement.

5. *Transmedia Storytelling*

Television shows are no longer simply television shows. Cult texts, particularly, take advantage of the 21st century trends toward transmedia storytelling, as it allows for world-building and narrative to unfold across multiple platforms. Transmedia storytelling also adds an element of interactivity into these processes, as many transmedia elements include a space for active participation as audiences upload videos or comment on message boards.

6. *Metatextuality, Intertextuality, and Self-Referentiality*

Another element of narrative complexity is metatextuality, intertextuality, and self-referentiality. These refer to the connections a text makes with other texts and with itself. Meta- and inter-textuality lead to privileged moments for the viewer - the feeling of being let in on a joke that others do not get – which creates the outsiders vs. insiders schism that Reeves, Rodgers, & Epstein (1996) see as an integral element of cult texts. Eco (1985) also noted the importance of meta- and inter-textuality when he argued that cult texts are created by other texts, not just by

authors. In this way, *Babylon 5* makes references to the Bible, Shakespeare, Isaac Asimov's novels, *Casablanca* itself, and General Schwarzkoph, just to name a few (Krupps, 2004, p. 52). Similarly, one of Joss Whedon's trademarks is his extensive use of popular culture references in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*.

Moments of self-referentiality are also privileged moments for consistent viewers of a show. *Babylon 5*, for instance, employs both flashforwards and flashbacks, creating little "ahhah" moments for dedicated viewers who can make connections between events on the *Babylon 5* timeline. Similarly, *Lost* is full of Easter Eggs. For example, intense *Lost* viewers would point out moments when certain characters appear in the flashbacks, flashforwards, and flash-sideways of other characters. Transmedia storytelling also plays an important role in a text's self-referentiality. Some of *Babylon 5's* flashbacks, for instance, were explained in comic books and *Lost's* Easter Eggers were scattered across the Internet as well as through the television show. Transmedia storytelling expands the boundaries of the text, opening up more space for narrative depth and flexibility and encouraging more complicated moment of self-referentiality, meta-textuality, and inter-textuality.

7. Auteurs

All the factors of a cult text that I have discussed so far can often be attributed to an auteur. In television, an auteur is generally a creator-writer-producer who maintains narrative consistency and logical character development and world-building. In fact, the work of an auteur is so important that auteur branding has become an essential element of cult TV success. Joss Whedon, for example, has been branded as a cult TV auteur and his fingerprint can be clearly seen on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly,* and *Dollhouse.* Similarly, Chris Carter has been credited for *The X-Files*, David Lynch for *Twin Peaks*, J. Michael Straczynski for *Babylon*

5, and Tim Kring for the failure of *Heroes*. The work of an auteur tends to be distinctive and the presence of a single creator behind a text builds a unique relationship between a cult auteur and his/her audience. As Patrick McGoohan (1993) describes it:

> these programmes were made by enthusiasts who believed passionately in their work, and the energy of their belief is transmitted to a select audience sympathetic to the theme and themselves hungry for an enthusiasm. (p. 7)

Sometimes, this enthusiasm transcends the screen and auteurs - such as Whedon and Straczynski - maintain an active relationship with viewers by participating on message boards and at fan conventions.

   8. Genre Promiscuity

Genre promiscuity – the combining of multiple genre expectations in one text and subsequent subversion of those expectations – is a technique that cult TV borrows from postmodernism. Eco (1985) argued that *Casablanca* "succeeded in becoming a cult movie because it is not *one* movie. It is 'the movies'" (p. 10). Similarly, Jones (2003) argues that "generic interconnections with wider subcultures" (p. 166) is an important element of building viewership for a cult text, as it attracts fans of these different subcultures. More important then shear numbers of viewers is the potential for subversion when genres are mixed and changed in unusual and innovative ways. More important than the attraction of viewers from different subcultures, however, is the subversive potential of a text in which genres are employed in unusual and unique ways.

   9. Counter-Hegemonic Possibilities

If genre is a contract between the creator and the audience that sets up narrative expectations a priori, the subversion of these generic expectations has the possibility of presenting material in a way that is different. Consider these generic subversions in relation to the active cult audience theories I have already discussed, namely the way in which viewers relate their own social and

political situation to the process of world-building and in discussions catalyzed by complex

narratives. Genre subversions similarly force the viewer to be active, as he/she can no longer

rely on a predetermined generic contract and, therefore, has to participate in unraveling the

narrative and its mysteries. Therefore, cult texts open a space between the narrative and the

viewer in which dominant ideologies can be questioned and reassessed.

Although these nine characteristics do not *make* cult TV, taken together they do form a pattern

close enough to a genre that television producers have attempted to produce cult audiences

simply by replicating these nine textual elements of cult shows. This relationship between cult

television and economics is unsettling for many critics and researchers. Jones (2003) calls it

"world-building for profit" (p. 166) and Le Guern (2004) forcefully differentiates between

authentic (a priori cult texts) and inauthentic (cult texts created to be cult texts) (p. 15). Similarly,

Eco (1985) implies that postmodernism is simply the creation of a cult text on purpose, and

suggests that a priori cult texts are hierarchically better than postmodern texts (p. 11).

It is naïve, however, to separate cult TV from the television industry that creates it. As I

will discuss in the next section, the SF genre has transformed into a cult TV text for the very

simple reason of economic survival. Audiences of cult texts are coveted by advertisers, so it is

only natural that SF TV, a genre perfectly predisposed to be cult TV, transformed into a genre

can *only* be successful as cult TV.

SF TV Matures

SF TV's maturation into a successful cult genre has been a slow evolution over the past 25 years,

starting with the premiere of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in 1987 and continuing today. In

the period between 1987 and 2005, Jan Johnson-Smith (2005) argues that the SF genre took over

from the Western as the relevant frontier genre. In his history of SF film and TV, Lincoln

Geraghty (2009) suggests that SF television has become more willing to address contemporary

social and political issues while SF film has become more nostalgic in tone and ideology. J. P.

Telotte (2008) argues that SF TV has matured to a point where it has its own identity separate

from SF film, fiction, or comics. I think that SF TV is all of those things.

The next section highlights a number of key programs and turning points in the genre's

history. This history is in no way meant to be an exhaustive list of every SF TV show, nor is it

meant to be a comprehensive exploration of each of these shows. Instead, it is meant to highlight

a few of the most important points in the genre's history with the goal of tracing the overall

transformation and maturation of the genre.

Star Trek: The Next Generation.

 When it premiered in 1987, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (hereafter "*ST: TNG*") (synd.,

1987-1994) started the revolution in the SF TV genre. Of course, *ST: TNG* is the successor to

Star Trek: The Original Series (hereafter "*ST: TOS*") (NBC, 1966-9), which had a short three-

season run in the 1960s, but gained a large and passionate cult following when airing in

syndication in the 1970s and 1980s. *ST: TOS* was an innovative series itself, as it dealt with

contemporary social issues and developed a formula that J. P. Telotte (2008) argues has

dominated the SF TV genre ever since (p. 15). *ST: TOS'* popularity explosion in syndication

generated incredible fan involvement that led to the short-lived *Star Trek: The Animated Series*

(NBC, 1973-4) and a series of films based on the original *ST: TOS* characters.

There are, however, a number of differences between *ST: TOS* and *ST: TNG*, mainly due

to the zeitgeist of the late 1980s and the changes in TV technologies that *ST: TNG* capitalized on.

The first major difference was that *ST: TNG* was made directly for syndication, partly because

syndication made the most sense for the small but dedicated niche fan base that the show would

attract (Telotte, 2008) and partly because the syndication deal gave Gene Roddenbury – the

auteur of the *Star Trek* franchise - more control over the series' direction than he would have had

at a Network (Booker, 2004).

The second difference between the series is more ideological in nature. Both *Star Trek*

series take place on the starship *Enterprise*, with a diverse cast of characters exploring and

mapping the universe. The *Star Trek* franchise has a very utopian view of Earth's future in

which capitalism is gone and no one wants for food, clothing, or shelter,[11] a utopian view that is

rarely replicated in subsequent SF TV series. In *ST: TOS*, however, Captain Kirk and the crew

of the *Enterprise* are on a five-year mission to chart never-before-seen parts of the galaxy.

Interactions with alien races are dealt with with the "cowboy diplomacy" typical of the 1960s,

while mild-mannered Captain Picard and his crew in *ST: TNG* address issues with a more

"delicate diplomacy" that better suits the thawing of Cold War mentality in the late 1980s

(Johnson-Smith, 2005, p. 118).

ST: TNG also has a greater emphasis on character and issues of identity and collectivism,

which leads Michèle Barrett and Duncan Barrett (2001) to argue that *ST: TNG* is less about a

search for new lands and more about a search for what it means to be human. The most

important antagonist introduced in *ST: TNG,* for example, is the Borg, a collective of humanoids

that have been captured and assimilated into homogeneous drones. As Geraghty (2009) argues,

the Borg are a manifestation of the cultural and identity wars of the early 1990s. In a way, then,

Johnson-Smith (2005) argues, the dominant issues in all of the *Star Trek* series are "ethnicity,

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[11] For more on the *Star Trek* franchise's problematic relationship with 19th century Utopian ideals, see
Katrina G. Boyd's chapter, "Cyborgs in Utopia," in *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on* Star Trek
(1996). For more on Utopia as a specific subset of science fiction, see Tom Moylan's *Demand the
Impossible* (1986) and *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000).

gender, and sexuality" (p. 80). The *Star Trek* series have always dealt with contemporary social and cultural issues, *ST: TOS* ahead of its time in the 1960s and *ST: TNG* beginning a new era of socially-relevant SF TV programming in the late 1980s.

Babylon 5.

The *Star Trek* franchise created an impressive universe and shared history across the five *Star Trek* series: *ST: TOS, ST: TNG, ST: Deep Space Nine* (synd., 1993-9), *Star Trek: Voyager* (UPN, 1995-2001), and *Star Trek: Enterprise* (UPN, 2001-5). Although the *Star Trek* universe is deep and flexible enough to encourage one of the most vocal and involved fanbases in media history, there is little narrative continuity across the series.[12] The *Star Trek* series are for the large part episodic, meaning that stories begin and end each episode and there are few over-arching storylines that continue over multiple episodes.

Premiering only a few years after *ST: TNG, Babylon 5* (PTEN/TNT, 1994-8) is a very different show. *Babylon 5* takes place on the space station of the same name, a sort of interstellar-UN run by humans but meant as a place for peace and cooperation among all races of the 23rd century. Although the show's faith in humanity's ability to cooperate and build communities is at time utopian, the show's depiction of a 23rd century fraught with social, political, and economic issues mirror the upheaval of the 1990s in which *Babylon 5* was created.

Creator J. Michael Straczynski had a five-year story arc in place before he wrote the pilot, forethought that gives the show the feel of a literary epic rather than a traditional television show. *Babylon 5* uses flashforwards, flashbacks, and other elements of postmodern storytelling that are

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[12] There are a number of limited exceptions to this strict rule. There are a small number of two-part episodes of *ST: TNG*, particularly in later seasons ("The Best of Both Worlds," "Redemption," "Time's Arrow," "Chain of Command," "Birthright," "Descent," "Gambit") and *ST: Voyager* ("Basics," "Future's End," "Scorpion," "Year of Hell," "The Killing Game," "Dark Frontier," "Equinox," "Unimatrix Zero," and "Workforce"). These two-parters are rare and simply wrap up the storyline in two episodes rather than one. *ST: DS9,* however, has season-long serialized narratives. The question of *ST: DS9's* success is controversial among *Star Trek* fans and critics.

impossible to execute well if the series' narrative is not determined before the series begins.

Johnson-Smith (2005) argues that *Babylon 5* is ambitiously complex (p. 185), while Booker

(2004) says that the show "still stands as the epitome of continuous-plot SF TV" (p. 130).

Building on that, Sherryl Vint (2008) likens the series to a contemporary heroic epic.

     Babylon 5 also subverts conventional genre tropes, which I have already discussed as an

element of both postmodernism and cult TV. Johnson-Smith (2005) writes that:

> the complicated narrative of *Babylon 5* is likely to be incomprehensible to the casual viewer precisely because its narrative avoids the redundant and arbitrary tendencies of traditional long-term television soap opera, while simultaneously exploiting its fundamental elements. (p. 234)

Vint (2008) makes a similar comment when she/he says that the show's strength: "comes from

its refusal to embrace epic convention without revision" (p. 262). *Babylon 5* exploits and

reverses a number of genre conventions – SF, soap opera, the epic, political drama – a theme that

becomes more prominent as SF TV fully embraces postmodernism.

     Postmodern SF TV: *Twin Peaks* and *The X-Files.*

In his chapter on postmodernism in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, Jim Collins (1992)

uses *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1) to exemplify the elements of a postmodern television text.

Collins sites a number of *Twin Peaks'* postmodern factors: advertising that manipulates the

discourse around the show and claims "Twin Peaks – the series that will change TV" (p. 343);

auteur David Lynch who brought his innovative and bizarre narrative and visual style to the

show; cultural literacy, i.e. that anyone who wanted to participate in cultural conversations had to

be conversant in *Twin Peaks*; and an eclectic generic style. In fact, it is almost impossible to

classify *Twin Peaks* generically, because it incorporates elements of horror, science fiction, soap

opera, and the police procedural, just to name a few. As with *Babylon 5* and so many cult SF

texts, eclectic style is an especially important aspect of *Twin Peak's* ideology, narrative

complexity, and aesthetic innovation.

For many viewers, *Twin Peaks'* narrative became too intricate, confusing, and complex

for the casual viewer. As Helen Wheatley argues, the

> niche audience was assumed to have a good deal of cultural capital and a high
> level of media literacy, in order to make sense of the program's dizzying network
> of allusions and complex plotting, a select, but lucrative, viewer group in the eyes
> of advertisers. (qtd. in Short, 2011, p. 51)

Twin Peaks' appeal to a small, media literate and advertiser-coveted audience makes it one of the

first big cult hits. However, *Twin Peaks* failed to keep its audience for long. By the second

season, the show's ratings had declined significantly and the show was cancelled.

A year later, *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002) premiered and adopted *Twin Peaks'*

postmodern style. *The X-Files*, however, maintained a level of narrative realism that allowed it

to last nine seasons (Hodges, 2008). The show premiered just seven years after the Fox Network

started broadcasting in 1986. Fox hoped to use *The X-Files'* cult status to sell ancillary products,

create buzz for the new Network, and, more importantly, to build a loyal audience that would

remain loyal to Fox even after *The X-Files* went off the air (Johnson, 2010). This model was

successful for Fox, and was later used with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to promote The WB, and

even with *Lost* to pull ABC out of a lengthy ratings slump in the early 2000s.

The X-Files was successful for a number of reasons. First, it successfully captured the

fear and paranoia of the 1990s. The show follows two FBI agents, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully,

who investigate unsolved cases involving paranormal phenomena. The show is a mix of stand-

alone episodes, so-called "monster of the week" episodes, and serialized episodes whose story

follows the efforts of aliens to invade Earth, perhaps with the aid of the US government.

Government conspiracy and cover-up was particularly relevant in the post-Cold War 1990s.

As with *Twin Peaks, The X-Files* has roots in a number of genres. The show draws on science fiction, horror, conspiracy theory narratives, and cop shows.[13] Creator Chris Carter sites both *Twin Peaks* and buddy cop shows *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-9) and *Moonlighting* (ABC, 1984-9) as inspirations (Hodges, 2008, p. 235). By combining these genres, the show "questions, undermines, and subverts conventional television codes" (Kellner qtd. in Hodges, 2008, p. 236), as *Twin Peaks* did before it.

The X-Files was a new kind of SF TV. Chris Carter has described the show's visual style as "lack" and as "dark, moody, mysterious, and sometimes claustrophobic" (qtd. in Johnson, 2005, p. 102) to mirror the show's themes of secrecy, conspiracy, and paranoia. This style is specifically suited for television and takes advantage of television's unique visual attributes. *The X-Files* is an important moment in the transformation of SF TV when SF TV began to develop as a unique genre separate from other SF media.

The Reimagined *Battlestar Galactica.*

If *The X-Files* caught the zeitgeist of the post-Cold War 1990s, Ronald D. Moore and David Eick's reimagining of *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci-Fi, 2004-9) captures the social and political implications of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centers and The War on Terror and the ensuing mistrust and isolation.

Battlestar Galactica tells the story of a group of human survivors after nuclear bombs destroy most of the human race. The Galactica and its civilian fleet are chased through the galaxy by the Cylons, a cybernetic race created by the humans who became self-aware and revolted against their masters. Against this backdrop, the show addresses issues of violence, torture, suicide bombings, occupation, justice, individual and collective identity, and asks

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[13] For more on *The X-Files'* roots see *'Deny All Knowledge': Reading* The X-Files (1996), edited by D. Lavery, A. Hague, and M. Cartwright.

questions about what it means to be human.[14] Throughout the show, both the Cylons and the Humans are developed as flawed and sympathetic characters, and thus *BSG* maintains a sense of moral ambiguity that is singular to the new SF TV genre.

In 2006, *Battlestar Galactica* won a Peabody Award for "pushing the limits of science fiction and making it accessible to all" (Anonymous, 2005). The show's social commentary was so prevalent and innovative that on March 17, 2009, right before the show ended its run, the United Nations organized a panel with *Battlestar Galactica*'s creators and high-ranking UN officials. At the event, UN under-Secretary-General for Public Information, Kiyo Akasaka, argued that the show exemplifies "how skillful storytelling can elevate the profile of critical humanitarian issues" (Anonymous, 2009). *Battlestar Galactica*, then, is an important moment in the history of SF TV when narrative complexity met the potential for socially relevant commentary and combined in a way that is unique to SF TV.

Lost and *Heroes.*

Although *Battlestar Galactica*, it attracted much critical and cultural praise, it did so without drawing large ratings. This is in large part because *Battlestar Galactica* aired on the Sci-Fi Channel, a niche cable channel with less reach and lower viewer expectations than the broadcast networks. It is also due to the show's narrative complexity, serialized structure, and social and political commentary. Either way, *BSG's* success was more critical in nature than it was with viewers, and the next step in SF TV's evolution was to gain ratings success. The two shows that did, at least temporarily, reach mass audience numbers were *Lost* (ABC, 2004-10) and *Heroes* (NBC, 2006-10).

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[14] For more on *Battlestar Galactica* see J. Steiff and T. D. Tamplin (2008), *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy*; J. T. Eberl (2008), *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy*; or R. Hatch (2006), *So Say We All*.

Lost was originally conceived by J. J. Abrams, although Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse are better known as the masterminds behind the series. No study of SF TV would be complete without a nod towards the auteurs J. J. Abrams and Joss Whedon[15]. However, as scholars have written extensively about these auteurs and their shows, I will only discuss *Lost* here, as it is the most relevant to this thesis.

When *Lost* was greenlit by ABC, it was the most expensive pilot ever made at $12 million, a number which has since been shattered but at the time factored into the firing of the head of ABC Television Entertainment, Lloyd Braun (Short, 2011). The Network and its parent company, Disney, were convinced that the show was going to be a disaster; instead, it gained a large, intense following and transformed the definition of both SF TV and cult TV irreversibly.

Lost follows a number of castaways who are stuck on an island after their plane crashes over the Pacific. The show flirts with supernatural elements and questions of fate and destiny, building mysteries in a *Twin Peaks*-esque manner, and in the end failing to provide sufficient resolutions. Like the other postmodern shows I have already discussed, *Lost* combined a number of genres, including SF, soap opera, and conspiracy theory. It was also narratively complex, employing flashbacks, flashforwards, and, eventually, flash-sideways.

Lost's mysteries and narrative complexities were also enhanced by the show's innovative use of transmedia storytelling. Clues were scattered across the *Lost* universe, including intense and complete websites and message-in-a-bottle advertisements that were found all along the East Coast before the show premiered. The Internet buzzed with Easter Egg hunts for metatextual and self-referential moments in every episode. *Lost* was, however, ultimately frustrating. It

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[15] Joss Whedon is the creator of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (WB/UPN, 1997-2003), *Angel* (WB, 1999-2004), *Firefly* (Fox, 2002), and *Dollhouse* (Fox, 2009-10). For more, see for example R. V. Wilcox and D. Lavery (2002) *Fighting the Forces*; S. Abbott (2005) *Reading Angel*; or J. Espenson (2010) *Inside Joss' Dollhouse*.

suffered from a lot of the mistakes *Twin Peaks* made by asking questions without providing satisfactory answers and although it started with 20 million viewers its first season, those numbers dropped significantly each season.

After the success of *Lost*, the networks sought to create similar shows that combine high ratings with high audience involvement. The most/least successful of these was NBC's *Heroes*. Created by Tim Kring, the show purposefully incorporated elements meant to appeal to intense fans: the style of the show clearly emulated comic book aesthetics, SF casting included George Takei and Nichelle Nichols (*Star Trek*), Christopher Eccleston (*Doctor Who*), and Seth Green (*Buffy The Vampire Slayer, Robot Chicken*), and a multi-media experience called *Heroes Evolutions* expanded the show's mythology (Short, 2011). However, the show never lived up to these expectations.

Heroes follows a series of ordinary people who discover that they have superpowers. In the first season, the characters struggle to maintain normal lives while developing and learning about their superpowers. In later seasons, however, a dense mythology and conspiracy developed and these ordinary people became decidedly less than ordinary. Fans revolted, complaining that the plot twists were made for the sake of sweeps months and not for the sake of the narrative and that characters were unbelievable and often made decisions out of character. Even original writer Bryan Fuller said that *Heroes* became "Sci-Fi ghetto storytelling" (qtd. in Short, 2011, p. 147). Although *Heroes* premiered with 15 million viewers, it averaged a mere 4 million in its last season (p. 138) and while *Lost's* ending was perhaps confusing and unsatisfactory, *Heroes* fizzled out on a cliffhanger that few viewers lamented.

Current SF TV Shows (2011-12).

In the years since the relative success of *Lost* and *Heroes*, both the broadcast networks and many cable channels have tried to create successful SF shows. These shows often have large budgets, expensive sets and promising pedigree, yet rarely last for longer than a season or two. On the Syfy Network[16], the latest incarnation of the long-running *Stargate* franchise, *Stargate: Universe* (Syfy, 2009-11), was cancelled after two seasons and the *Battlestar Galactica* prequel *Caprica* (Syfy, 2010) lasted only one. On the networks, a number of high-budget SF series were cancelled after a season or less: *Invasion* (ABC, 2005-6), *Threshold* (CBS, 2005-6), *Jericho* (CBS, 2006-8), *Defying Gravity* (ABC, 2009), *Virtuality* (Fox, 2009), *Flashforward* (ABC, 2009-10), *The Event* (NBC, 2010-11), and *No Ordinary Family* (ABC, 2010-11).

The shows that have been successful over the past few years fall into two categories. The first are very successful niche shows that air on cable networks that can support high-buzz shows with smaller audiences. Shows that fall into this category are the Zombie Apocalypse thriller *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-), Alan Ball's vampire soap *True Blood* (Showtime, 2008-), Ryan Murphy's horror-anthology-drama series *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011-), and HBO's extravagant fantasy-epic *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-). This category would also include a number of successful shows on the Syfy Channel, including *Being Human* (Syfy, 2011-) about a ghost, a werewolf, and a vampire, and the interrelated *Eureka* (Syfy, 2006-), *Warehouse 13* (2009-), and *Alphas* (2011-).[17] These shows all have small but loyal fan bases, critical acclaim, and awards buzz.

The second category air on the broadcast networks and, although they have lasted multiple seasons, have low ratings and are continually in danger of cancellation. These shows

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[16] The Sci Fi Channel rebranded to become the Syfy Channel in 2009.

[17] *Eureka, Warehouse 13,* and *Alphas* exist in the same universe, and share characters and cross-over episodes. *Eureka* is set in a fictional town of geniuses and scientists; *Warehouse 13* follows FBI agents who hunt down supernatural artifacts; *Alphas* is about a group of people with supernatural abilities who fight crimes committed by other alphas.

include the CW's supernatural series *Supernatural* (2005-) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-), NBC's fan favorite spy comedy *Chuck* (NBC, 2007-2012), and J. J. Abrams' *Fringe* (Fox, 2008-), which follows FBI agents who investigate fringe phenomena brought on by a breach between our universe and a parallel universe. While these shows attract desired niche audiences, they maintain small audiences, never become mainstream, and are only questionably successful.

Conclusion: SF TV is Cult TV

Since the late 1980s, SF TV has matured and transformed into a genre that attracts small but intense cult audiences. These audiences are attractive to advertisers and producers, as they tend to be active, loyal, and willing to purchase ancillary products. With its tendency towards narrative complexity and interactive world-building, SF TV not only tends towards cult TV, but cannot be successful without being cult TV. So, while other genres have been successful as cult and not-cult – for example, the cop genre simultaneously had *Hill St. Blues* (NBC, 1981-7) and *CHiPs* (NBC, 1977-83) on the air – the SF genre is no longer viable in its non-cult form.

When *Terra Nova* premiered on Fox in September 2011, it was trying to do something different. Fox wanted a mainstream hit of the kind that appeals to every demographic, while simultaneously maintaining its SF TV and, therefore, its cult TV qualities. For the rest of this thesis, I will be exploring the successes and failures of *Terra Nova* in an attempt to explore the viability of SF TV in its non-cult form.

Chapter Five: Methodology

Terra Nova is uniquely situated for a case study on the development of the SF TV genre. Although qualitative researchers have had a hard time *defining* case study research, they do agree on what a case study does (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) explains that case studies investigate a case holistically and within its real-life context, especially when the boundary between the phenomen(a/on) and the context is unclear (p. 18). As I began collecting data in spring 2011, not far after the upfront season when Fox announced *Terra Nova*'s inclusion in its fall lineup, I have been able to collect data from the show's inception. I continued to research and analyze the show through the summer's pre-promotional period up to the show's debut and throughout its premiere and first, and only, season. *Terra Nova* is an interesting case, as its producers were trying to create a show that was simultaneously cult and mainstream television. Thus, *Terra Nova* is conspicuously situated in time and genre for a case study.

Case studies have been used with much success in the social sciences in such varied fields as anthropology, medicine, and political science (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Case study research allows the researcher to develop a holistic and nuanced understanding of a complex phenomenon (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), which is important in the transmedia environment where television shows unfold across multiple media platforms (Jenkins, 2006). Case study research has two other important strengths: it focuses on social and political context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) and it allows the researcher to study contemporary events (Yin, 2003). As I am conducting a longitudinal study of *Terra Nova* before and after it premiers, these two elements of case study research make the method a perfect match.

Before I explain how I will be collecting and analyzing data on *Terra Nova*, I must address the loudest criticism against case study research, i.e. the debate over generalizability (Yin, 2003). Case study researchers argue the spectrum on this issue: Stake (1995) believes that the intrinsic case study should focus on the particular without worrying much about generalizability; Yin (2003) argues that the instrumental case study is generalizable to theory, if not to populations or universes. This thesis takes the second approach, of applying a set of theories to the example of *Terra Nova* and analyzing the results on the level of theory.

Case study research has also been the most important method in the study of SF television. In *American Science Fiction TV*, Jan Johnson-Smith (2006) undergoes case studies of the *Star Trek* franchise, *Space: Above and Beyond*, *Fascape*, and *Babylon 5*. Catherine Johnson (2005) looks at five cases in *Telefantasy* to explore her theories about the sociopolitical role of SF programs across both time – focusing on the 1960s and the 1990s – and space – specifically looking at programs in the US and the UK. Similarly, in *Cult Telefantasy Series* Sue Short (2011) analyzes seven examples of cult SF programs. While Johnson (2006)'s focus on international comparison is not relevant to this thesis, her attempt to make a case for the telefantasy genre is. Short (2011)'s attention to thematic connections across SF series is similar in method to what I have done in Chapter Four of this thesis. Johnson-Smith's (2006) attempts to contextualize SF TV in SF literary and film theory is, in the end, most similar to my approach. However, none of these works combines theories of business practices and aesthetic concerns as I am doing in this thesis in order to get a holistic view of *Terra Nova* and how the show is situated in relation to SF theory, television theory, the SF TV genre, and economic industry realities.

Data Gathering and Analysis

Sample.

Since I will be conducting a case study of *Terra Nova*, I will be looking at multiple data points.
As John Fiske (1992) argues, a cultural analysis of television requires the study of multiple levels
of textual meanings. The first is the content of the 13 episodes of *Terra Nova*. The episodes I
watched were recorded off the air from WSYT, Fox's local affiliate in Syracuse, NY. The
episodes, therefore, contain both national and local Syracuse commercials. I also watched the
episodes on-line from www.Hulu.com. In the fourth quarter of 2011, Nielsen reported that 165.9
million people watched on-line video (*State of the Media*, Q3-Q4 2011). When watching *Terra
Nova* on Hulu, the episodes included the national on-line Hulu commercials. It was important to
watch *Terra Nova* both off-the-air and on-line, so that I got a feel for as typical a viewer
experience as it is possible to recreate.

Fiske's second is the sublevel of texts, which are also produced by the culture industry. I
started to collect these texts after the show was announced at the Fox upfront in May.   I also did
a back search on ProQuest to gather relevant articles that were written about *Terra Nova's*
production processes prior to the show's official announcement. Throughout the summer of
2011, I continued to gather pre-promotional materials, e.g. promos, content on Fox.com, TCA
press tour articles, and video panels at events such as WonderCon and Comic-Con. Specifically,
I participated in the 11th Pilgrimage website that integrated social media with pre-promotional
marketing materials.   I also followed the pre-promotional Countdown to *Terra Nova* website, so
that I participated in *Terra Nova's* transmedia marketing experience as its creators expected
viewers to participate. After the show premiered, I downloaded the *Terra Nova* companion app.
I watched episodes twice, once without the companion app and once with, again to recreate the
experience of multiple types of *Terra Nova* viewers. Finally, As the show aired, I continued to

gather promotional material as well as at critical response to the show in popular trades such as *The NY Times, The LA Times, The Chicago Tribune, Variety, Entertainment Weekly,* and *TV Guide* online.

Analysis.

In case study research, each text should be analyzed continually and "with a sense of correspondence" with the larger case and with each specific data point (Stake, 1995, p. 78). Thus, my analysis took on the progressive focusing approach that Stake (1995) illustrates as a cyclical process from observation to renewed inquiry to explanation and back to observation. At each step, I triangulated my data points to maintain validity, analyzing the data as a whole for emergent themes that were both expected and those that I had not anticipated when I began this study (1995).

I watched each episode at least three times: first, to get a general overview of the episode, second while using the *Terra Nova* companion app to get the full transmedia experience, and third to make specific thematic and ideological connections. Each episode, then, was considered in relation to the series as a whole and was measured against the promotional materials, critical reviews, and comments from the cast, creators, and executives at Fox. At every point in the analysis, I worked to understand each specific element in relation to greater theoretical, generic, and industrial concerns.

Chapter Six: *Terra Nova*'s Innovations: The Text and Transcending the Text

Terra Nova aired from September 26 to December 19, 2011 before being permanently cancelled on March 5, 2012. While the show did not ultimately succeed, it was an interesting experiment on a number of levels. On one hand, *Terra Nova* attempted to transcend the traditional limitations of broadcast television by expanding its production schedule, increasing time and money spent on special effects, and cutting the 22-episode broadcast season to a cable-esque 13 episodes. *Terra Nova's* use of transmedia marketing and transmedia storytelling was also interesting and suggested that *Terra Nova* would be the next innovate cult SF television program.

On the other hand, *Terra Nova* did not live up to these innovations. In an attempt to reach both cult and mainstream audiences, *Terra Nova's* characters and storylines were uninspiring. For a SF TV audience that has been primed over the last twenty years to expect postmodern complexity and socio-political relevancy, *Terra Nova* was too simple and unrealistic. Chapter Six explores how *Terra Nova* attempted to become a cult SF TV show. Chapter Seven, then, explains how and why *Terra Nova* failed to do so.

Unique Production History and Problematic Auteurism

Terra Nova has a long, complex production history to go with its innovative and groundbreaking premise. The show was in development for over two years in development and production, longer than most. The story was created by British actor-turned-writer Kelly Marcel, whose original treatment was titled *Gondawana Highway* (Rose & Goldberg, 2011), based on an idea from her father, producer-director Terry Marcel (*Hawk the Slayer* (1981)), who told her about Gondwanaland – the giant land mass that covered Earth millennia ago. Marcel was also intrigued by Stephen Hawking's theory of time travel and Al Gore's environmental documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), whose influences can be seen in the *Terra Nova* pilot. She was

inspired to write a 15-page treatment and a 30-page bible that outlined the characters, the Gondawana world, and a five-season story arc that would eventually become the basis of *Terra Nova* (Gilbert, 2011).

The treatment caught the attention of former William Morris agent Aaron Kaplan, who was looking to step out of agency work and into television production. Marcel was already in talks with SyFy UK (Rose & Goldberg, 2011) and British production company Carnival Films (Gilbert, 2011), but Kaplan convinced Marcel that a project on the scale of *Gondawana Highway* could only be made with the money and technology of Hollywood. Marcel took the gamble and brought on Craig Silverstein (*Nikita, Bones*) to write the pilot script (Rose & Goldberg, 2011) and help pitch to American Networks (Gilbert, 2011). A bidding war ensued between Fox and CBS and they chose Fox because "[Fox scripted execs] Matt [Cherniss] and Terence [Carter] immediately got it" (Kaplan qtd. In Rose & Goldberg, 2011). Marcel, Kaplan, and Silverstein were attracted to Fox's track record with big, innovative shows such as *24, Glee*, and *Prison Break* (2011).

In February 2010, *Variety* (Anonymous, 2010c) and *The Chicago Tribune* (Anonymous, 2010b) announced that Fox was in talks with legendary producer-director Steven Spielberg and Peter Chernin to produce the project, now titled *Terra Nova*. Chernin, the former COO of News Corporation and Chairman and CEO of Fox Entertainment Group, currently runs Chernin Entertainment, a production company with a lucrative Fox deal that has produced a number of shows including *Breakout Kings* (A&E, 2011-), *New Girl* (Fox, 2011-), *Allen Gregory* (Fox, 2011-12), and *Touch* (Fox, 2012-). Dana Walden, the chairman of 20th Century Fox Television, advocated for the hiring of Chernin because "when he was at News Corp., Peter [Chernin] really talked a lot about this type of event programming and about taking risks and being bold" (qtd. In

Rose & Goldberg, 2011, p. 35). The head of the Fox Network, Peter Rice, promised Spielberg

and Chernin that, if they agreed to do the show, *Terra Nova* would skip the regular pilot process

and be greenlit straight to a 13-episode first season. Later, Rice explained that the start-up costs

for building *Terra Nova*'s intense new world would be prohibitive unless they were amortized

over 13 episodes (Masters, 2011).

When Spielberg and Chernin came aboard, Marcel and Silverstein left to work on other

projects. Marcel sold *Westbridge* to Showtime, a project about six Death Row prisoners that had

Thomas Schlamme (*The West Wing*) attached, yet was never produced (Gilbert, 2011).

Silverstein was already committed to *Nikita* (The CW, 2010-), so when The CW picked up that

show*,* he left *Terra Nova* (Masters, 2011). The show was left without a writer.

After an extensive search, Kaplan, Spielberg, and Chernin settled on hiring Brannon

Braga and David Fury as writers and showrunners. Kaplan explained: "Brannon [Braga] shared

our view that at the core, it was a family adventure show and not a dinosaur-of-the-week show"

(qtd. In Rose & Goldberg, 2011). Before joining *Terra Nova*, Brannon Braga was the executive

producer of ABC's short-lived SF show *Flashforward,* CBS' even shorter-lived *Threshold* (CBS,

2005-06), and later seasons of *24*. He is best known, however, for his twenty-plus years on a

number of *Star Trek* series. With his writing partner, Ronald D. Moore, Braga won a Hugo

Award for excellence in SF writing for the series finale of *Star Trek: The Next Generation,* "All

Good Things . . ." After, Moore and Braga produced the later seasons of *Star Trek: Voyager*

before Moore left, citing disenchantment with the franchise and problems with Braga. Moore

went on to great acclaim for creating the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica.* Braga, on the other

hand, went on to develop *Star Trek: Enterprise* with Rick Berman, the last and least-heralded

Star Trek series. Fans have often blamed Braga and Berman for killing the *Star Trek* franchise,

and while Braga admits "I'll take my share of the blame" (Staff, 2011), he also lays most of the blame on franchise fatigue. Either way, Braga's troubled relationship with SF TV fans made the choice to put him in charge of *Terra* Nova a controversial one among the hardcore SF TV fanbase that Fox was seeking to attract.

Even with the hiring of Braga and Fury, the personnel changes were not done. David Fury, who is best known for his work on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* but also worked on *Lost* and *24*, left *Terra Nova* after a few short months, sighting "creative differences" (Hibberd, 2010b). To replace him, Braga brought in René Echevarria (*Dark Angel* (Fox, 2000-02)*, The 4400* (USA, 2005-07)*, Medium* (NBC/CBS, 2005-11)*, Castle* (ABC, 2009-)), the veteran showrunner who Braga worked with previously on the *Star Trek* series. Echevarria took over as showrunner so that Braga could spend more time in the writer's room (Rose & Goldberg, 2011).

Auteurism has been an important element of SF TV as it has developed over the past twenty years. J. Michael Straczynski is credited with developing the five-year novel-esque narrative arc of *Babylon 5*, and wrote 92 of the 110 episodes. Joss Whedon wrote, directed, and executive produced a majority of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly,* and *Dollhouse* episodes. While J.J. Abrams' name is attached to early seasons of *Lost*, Carleton Cruse and Damon Lindelof were the real brains and decision makers behind the show's creative direction. Similarly, Ronald D. Moore and David Eick were the two people who reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* and made the decision to make the Cylons look and act like humans, which set the tone of the reimagined series. Therefore, as SF TV has developed into an important, independent genre, it owes its development to a handful of visionary auteurs. *Terra Nova,* on the other hand, had difficulty even settling on someone to run the writers' room, none-the-less finding a creative visionary to helm the project.

Even with the personnel issues behind the scenes, Fox began selling the show with an Upfront presentation in May 2010. During the May 2010 Upfronts, global advertising spending was up 15-25 percent over the year before. Most of this money was spent on shows that had a sense of nostalgia and comfort, which inspired the Networks to "spend heavily to reimagine shows that aired during the most prosperous periods when they set the national cultural agenda" (Li, 2010), shows such as *Hawaii Five-0* (CBS, 2010-). Fox pitched *Terra Nova* as "a very big bet" and promised that "this thing is going to be huge" (Reilly qtd. In Masters, 2010). While *Terra Nova* is both of those things – a big bet and huge programming – it is also nostalgic in story and tone. I will address this more in Chapter Seven.

At the time, *Terra Nova* was scheduled to premiere at midseason – January 2011. However, by the Summer Press Tour in August 2010, Fox Entertainment president Kevin Reilly announced that the show was pushed back to Fall 2011, with a special preview of the pilot in May 2011: "We're trying to find a prehistoric world . . . we've seen a lot of design work. We need the time. Hopefully, it will do the same thing as *Glee*" (qtd. in Hibberd, 2010a). Fox's teen hit *Glee* had become a cultural phenomenon when it premiered its pilot in May 2009 following the season finale of *American Idol* (Fox, 2002-). Not only did *American Idol* provide *Glee* with an enormous lead-in audience, but *Glee* managed to build buzz and critical claim throughout the summer of 2009 before the first season began in September 2009. Reilly and the Fox Network hoped to release *Terra Nova* in the same fashion.

At the Television Critics Association Winter Press Tour in January 2011, Fox touted its "big bet," focusing on its broad, family appeal rather than its dinosaurs and special effects. They showed three minutes of the series, minus special effects, and made the cast and crew available for questions. Alex Graves, who directed the pilot, said that *Terra Nova* was made for "a

massively broad audience" and argued that "more than anything I've done before in my life, this is for everybody. Everyone from my kids to a gamer to my dad will love this show" (qtd. in Pennington, 2011). Braga added that "at the core, it is a very emotional show" (qtd. in Anonymous, 2011a) and Echevarria argued that, above all, it was a show about second chances (Pennington, 2011).

Fox was also quick to downplay the cost of the series, as the press continually emphasized the large projected budget. Reilly acknowledged that "it's the most expensive first-year show we've ever had," but quickly added that "it's not the most expensive show we have on our air" (qtd. in de Moraes, 2011a). The pilot cost somewhere between $10-20 million dollars, the most expensive broadcast pilot to date. In contrast, the *Lost* pilot reportedly cost $10 million in 2004, which at that time was the most expensive pilot ever made (Masters, 2011). However, the bulk of *Terra Nova's* cost came from the size, scope, and permanency of the sets, a cost that was necessary and would be amortized over the 13-episode first season (Lehmann, 2011). On top of that, however, each episode of *Terra Nova* cost $4 million, significantly more than the $2-3 million per episode for most one-hour prime-time network dramas (Schechner, 2012). Because of the high cost and the disappointment of its big Fall 2010 premieres – the highly-promoted yet wildly underperforming *Lonestar* (Fox, 2010) and *Running Wilde* (Fox/FX, 2010-11) (Flint, 2011a) – Fox teased *Terra Nova*'s May premiere in its most coveted promotional spots, namely during the Super Bowl and *American Idol*.

The May premiere was ambitious. The production crew decided to film in the exotic Queensland, Australia, after discounting Hawaii as stale and familiar because both *Lost* and *Jurassic Park* (1993) were filmed there (Rose & Goldberg, 2011). A number of issues arose in Queensland. First, floods devastated the production. Then, when the production team did finish

filming and brought the footage to the editing teams in LA, there was not nearly enough material to fill the two-hour premiere. Therefore, the premiere was pushed back to September 2011 and Reilly blamed it on special effects, arguing that the show was "ambitious" and that the special effects were "essential," concluding that "we are pushing back the special early preview date to give the visual effects team the time needed for their groundbreaking work" (qtd. in Stelter, 2011). Gary Newman, who runs the 20th Century Fox studio arm, also argued that "we're striving to have the most impressive special effects that have been seen on television" (qtd. in Collins, 2011). In fact, each episode of *Terra Nova* took an extra six-weeks in editing, twice as long as a typical episodic drama (2011).

Others, however, blamed mismanagement, rather than special effects, for the delay. Alex Graves directed the pilot, an extremely important role in network television because the pilot's director sets the tone for the entire series run. Graves has directed the pilots of *The Nine* (ABC, 2006-7) and *Fringe,* as well as directing episodes of *The Practice* (ABC, 1997-2004)*, Ally McBeal* (Fox, 1997-2002)*,* and *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999-2006). Some, however, blamed Graves for the fact that there was not enough footage, saying that "creatively, he bumped heads with everybody" and that "he shot what he wanted to shoot" and nothing more (Masters, 2011). Fox representatives were more diplomatic, arguing that "Brannon [Braga] misjudged it at the script stage, and Alex [Graves] and his script supervisor misjudged it as it was being shot" (2011). Either way, Fox brought in editor Ken Horton (*The X-Files*) to pull the pilot together (2011) and Jon Cassar (*24*) to direct the rest of the series. Both Braga and Echevarria have credited Cassar with bringing the production under control (Anonymous, 2011b).

The number of powerful people with creative input was problematic, and many in the press argued that it was symptomatic of bigger issues. The *Terra Nova* pilot credits 13 executive

producers – Chernin, Spielberg, Echevarria, Braga, Cassar, Kaplan, Katherine Pope, Darryl

Frank, Justin Falvey, Graves, Fury, Silverstein, and Marcel – and seems unwieldy. While

television is often made by committee, in relation to the traditional film-auteur relationship, this

number of executive producers is problematic. Lisa de Moraes (2011b) at *The Washington Post*

described *Terra Nova* as a "long-awaited, much-delayed, highly hyped orgy of special-effects

excess from Steven Spielberg." Mary Choi (2011) at *Wired* wrote that "there's a whiff of

something cold and lazy-expensive about this setup" and argued that the use of dinosaurs and

advanced special effects for television is like "using a bazooka for a crutch" (p. 92). John Doyle

(2011) at Toronto's *The Globe and Mail* argued that Fox seemed "a teensy bit desperate" and

that *Terra Nova* looks like "a very, very expensive gamble." All of this led to *Terra Nova's*

nickname among media buyers – "Terra No-Va" – which is Spanish for "Terra no go" (Chozick,

2011).

There is also the problem of Steven Spielberg, himself. Spielberg is one of the most

heralded film directors of the 20th century, with titles such as *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982),

Jurassic Park (1993), and *Schindler's List* (1993) to his name. Spielberg's television career,

however, has been less heralded. *Amazing Stories* (NBC, 1985-7), a SF TV anthology series that

Spielberg created, was cancelled after its initial two-season order was over. *seaQuest DSV* (NBC,

1993-6) was a much-anticipated SF TV series that was riddled with producer disputes and

creative personnel changes, much like *Terra Nova*, and was cancelled after a mediocre three

seasons. Although Spielberg has had TV success in other genres – e.g. he was a producer on the

first season of *ER* (NBC, 1994-2009), he produced the World War II miniseries *Band of Brothers*

(HBO, 2001) with Tom Hanks, and he collaborated with Warner Brothers on the very successful

animated series *Tiny Toon Adventures* (CBS/synd./Fox, 1990-95) and *Animaniacs* (Fox/The WB, 19933-99) – his SF TV series have lacked both audience ratings and critical success.

Spielberg has always been a controversial producer for critics. On one hand, his vast commercial success suggests that he has a unique ability to tap into the zeitgeist of the time. On the other hand, his films are often criticized for being sentimental, emotionally manipulative, and nostalgic. Spielberg started making films at the most creatively prolific time for American filmmaking, when New Hollywood was producing innovative artistic films such as *Easy Rider* (1969). Eric Kohn (2011) at *Indiewire* argues that Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), on the other hand, "rejuvenat[ed] Saturday matinee appeal with a combination of shock, suspense and wild imagination" and "showed that classic Hollywood formula could still translate into box office dynamite" (Kohn, 2011), effectively killing the creative innovation of New Hollywood. Spielberg's films, unquestionably, appeal to a mass audience. As their narrators tend to be young people – e.g. *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* and *Jurassic Park* – Spielberg's films appeal to children and families. Similarly, themes of naiveté and a childlike sense of faith permeate his SF films from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) to *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001).

It makes sense, then, that Spielberg was chosen as the executive producer for *Terra Nova*. The show's emphasis on a special effects-driven sense of wonder is perfectly in his wheel-house, as is the show's push for an epic family drama with mass audience appeal. Internally, Fox called it "*Little House on the Prairie* with Dinosaurs" and Fox's head of scheduling, Preston Beckman, argued that "if we can get people to buy into this family, then we have a shot. If it's dinosaur of the week, we'll never have a shot" (qtd. in Flint, 2011b). Echevarria seconds that, referring to his years as executive producer on *24*:

> We didn't last eight years on *24* because we did really cool helicopter crashes and fantastic gunfights. We lasted because television is about people you want to see

> every week. It's about those people and how they interact with each other. (qtd.
> in Keveney, 2011)

In other words, *24* had a successful eight-season run because of the audience's relationship with

Jack Bauer, not their thirst for suspenseful drama. Walden, 20th Century Television's chairman,

similarly believes that *Terra Nova*'s lasting impact and economic success rests with its ability to

be family entertainment:

> I don't think there have been a lot of shows over the past five to ten years that
> could collect an entire family in the same room. I think the fact that they're
> [*Terra Nova's* creative team] telling traditional coming-of-age stories and family
> scenarios makes it very relatable and accessible. (qtd. in Keveney, 2011)

Joe Earley, the Fox Network's head of marketing, targeted families and children by teasing *Terra

Nova* before summer blockbusters such as *X-Men: Super Class, Super 8,* and *Harry Potter*.

Earley also promoted the show at family events such as museums, zoos, theme parks, and the

Major League Baseball All-Star Game (Flint, 2011b).

The argument was successful with advertisers. At the Upfronts in May 2011, Fox sold 80

percent of its inventory, up 10 percent over 2010, due to major buzz for Simon Cowell's new

singing competition show, *The X-Factor* (Fox, 2011-), the promising sitcom *New Girl* (Fox,

2011-), and *Terra Nova* (Atkinson, 2011).

While *Terra Nova's* family-friendly premise was appealing to advertisers, its behind-the-

scenes drama boded ill for its success. By merely looking at the providence of the project, it is

clear that *Terra Nova's* potential for achieving the cult success was mitigated from the very

beginning.   In cult TV, the cult of genius is imperative. These auteurs who serve two important

purposes: first, they control the creative process, as it is impossible to create cult TV by

committee; second, they serve a role as branded auteurs, people who viewers can research and

discuss and interrogate. When comparing the rotating door of *Terra Nova's* writers and directs

to the likes of Joss Whedon, J. M. Straczynski, David Kelly, or Aaron Sorkin, *Terra Nova's*

failure as a cult project seems preordained.

Multimedia Marketing and Transmedia World-Building

While *Terra Nova* was being advertised to families at zoos and summer Blockbusters, it was

simultaneously being advertised as a cult TV show at Comic-Con 2011 in San Diego. Comic-

Con began in San Diego in 1970 as a pop culture convention with an emphasis on comic books

that barely attracted a few thousand attendees. Quickly, however, the movie studios discovered

that Comic-Con was the perfect place to attract cult fanbases for movies such as *Star Wars*

(1977) and *Alien* (1979). With Hollywood's backing, Comic-Con entered the mainstream in the

1990s, and in the 2000s Comic-Con has been the site of the premiers of every big SF film,

television, and gaming project. Despite its Hollywood appeal, however, Comic-Con has

maintained its viability by continuing to appeal to its base and staying fan-centric (Newitz, 2009).

In July 2011, Fox premiered the first hour of *Terra Nova's* two-hour pilot to a full crowd

at Comic-Con. Following the screening, star Stephen Lang, executive producers Jose Molina,

Rene Echevarria, and Brannon Braga, and CGI-specialist Kevin Blank answered questions from

fans. The rest of the cast and crew also opened themselves up via twitter to answer questions all

day. While a number of these questions were about the CGI dinosaurs, many of the others were

plot-based questions: What are the influences of *24* on *Terra Nova*?, What past writers or shows

have influenced the show's creators?, Will there be other people or families transferred from the

future to the colony?. Comic-Con attendees are the type of enthusiastic SF fans that *Terra

Nova's* producers hoped to attract with flashy CGI. However, this demographic was just as, if

not more, interested in the show's narrative structure and metatextual influences than on the

special effects.

The *Terra Nova* producers also used Comic-Con to launch a multimedia marketing campaign that spanned television ads, an interactive website, social media integration, and an interactive experience. In recent years, a number of SF TV shows have used intensive multiplatform pre-promotional campaigns to create buzz and engage the pre-existing cult fanbase before shows premiere.

In 2008, HBO hired NY-based creative marketing agency Campfire to build buzz for the series premiere of its vampire drama, *True Blood*. To do so, they implemented a number of viral marketing techniques that culminated in an alternate reality game (ARG) that spanned mailers of synthetic blood samples, mockumentaries, fake newscasts, and fake messages smattered across the Internet. In doing so, Campfire "turned curious fans into evangelists" before the show even started (Campfire, 2008). Three years later, Campfire built on their *True Blood* success to create a marketing plan for HBO's fantasy epic *Game of Thrones* that both appealed to fans of the book series and was simple enough to be understood by people who had never before heard of Westeros. The result was that there was an "organized and well-established fan culture to shape the conversation and build momentum with each new episode" before the show premiered (Campfire, 2011). Campfire's campaigns for both *True Blood* and *Game of Thrones* were successful in amplifying excitement from targeted fans, i.e. horror and fantasy fans, and building awareness in a larger fanbase that might not otherwise be pre-disposed to watch these shows.

Similarly, in 2010, Showtime and creative communications agency Modernista! teemed together to create momentum for the fifth season premiere of *Dexter*. At San Diego Comic-Con in 2010, a staged, live murder scene launched attendees on an immersive summer-long transmedia storytelling experience. The *Dexter* ARG engaged viewers in crowd-sourced crime fighting, using video, websites, and social media to increase brand loyalty and to foster

community engagement among fans (Modernista!, 2010). Also in 2010, *Mad Men* recreated the

famous Beatles concert at Shea Stadium in 1965. In an episode of *Mad Men*, Don Draper gave

his daughter, Sally, tickets to the concert and, rather than playing out on screen, AMC staged a

live-tweeting of the concert on October 3, 2010 (Cotton, 2012).

There are important parallels to be drawn between these examples and *Terra Nova*.

While these shows – *True Blood, Game of Thrones, Dexter,* and *Mad Men* – are cable shows

with small ratings when compared to Broadcast ratings, they are all highly-rated for their

particular networks. This success is due, at least in part, to the transmedia marketing campaigns

that created buzz and engagement among both core and more mainstream audiences. *Terra*

Nova's marketers were similarly trying to reach multiple audiences by creating a transmedia pre-

promotional marketing campaign.

The campaign consisted primarily of three components. The first was a physical

interactive experience called "Journey to *Terra Nova*" that premiered at Comic-Con on July 21st

2011. The Journey to *Terra Nova* experience was a branded, solar-powered bus that traveled to

twenty major American cities in July, August, and September. Fans who visited the bus could

pose in front of an interactive greenscreen and then share those videos with other fans on

www.journeytoterranova.com. Fans also saw sneak previews of the show, participated in a

futuristic Oxygen Bar, and collected badges that unlocked on-line content and entered fans into a

National Geographic contest to win a trip to Australia, where the show was filmed.

Secondly, fans could enter the 11th Pilgrimage Lottery at www.liveterranova.com. The

Lottery interacted directly with Facebook. Fans were told that applicants must pass a pre-

selection process and were then asked a series of psychological questions, tested for dexterity

and survival skills, and chose which of their friends would accompany them to Terra Nova.

Elsewhere on the site, there were weather reports for various US cities, showing unseasonably cold weather and warnings about weather extremes. The extended forecast also showed weather icons that were unfamiliar to a 2011 audience, as *Terra Nova* was beginning to build a world in which the Earth is dying and the weather is unpredictable, dangerous, and alien.

The world-building in the 11th Pilgrimage Lottery site was continued in "Countdown to *Terra Nova*," an embeddable widget that released a new clue every day between July 21st and when the show premiered on September 26th. These clues consisted of posters that would appear on billboards and subway trains in 2149, videos of the Shannon family as they prepared for their pilgrimage to Terra Nova, and newscasts that began to build texturize the world of *Terra Nova*.

Recent research on transmedia storytelling suggests that world building is the most important aspect of transmedia storytelling. Jenkins (2006) writes that "more and more, storytelling has become the art of world building" (p. 116). In a *Wired* story on transmedia narratives, Alison Norrington (2009) argues that transmedia authors are focused less on specific characters or specific plot points, and are "increasingly 'curators,' 'story architects' or 'experience designers'" of whole-world experiences. Geoffrey Long (2007) is even clearer when he states that "many transmedia narratives aren't the story of one character at all, but the story of a world" (p. 48). In fact, as world-building is such an important part of SF TV and cult TV storytelling, transmedia marketing campaigns have become an interesting indicator of SF TV.

Countdown to *Terra Nova* develops the world of 2149 before the show premieres. First, it builds up the desperation and devastation of a world about to die. Posters read "A Family is Four" and "4 Our Future, 4 Our Country, 4 Our Children, A Family is 4," suggesting not only that there are population problems in 2149 but that American governmental power has increased considerably in the future. That suggestion is corroborated by newscasts about "A Family is

Love" – an activist group protesting the population control laws - and incentives are offered in

Italy to families who choose not to have children at all. Other government alerts announce that

New York has reached 36 million people and that North America will be uninhabitable by 2182,

only 33 years after the show opens.

Similar alerts announced that thousands have died in Asia due to a highly-resistant flu

strain and deny rumors of a cholera outbreak. Population, disease, and overcrowding are not the

only problems, as there is also a food shortage as alerts urge that "if you are not in dire need,

please do not take food" and report that thousands are "already subsisting on a cup of rice a

week." Advertisements sell breathing masks, indicating that the air in 2149 is un-breathable

without help. Other announcements point to the fact that US dominance has significantly

declined by 2149, as unemployment hits 70% and "thousands of American die every year

sneaking into India, looking for work." Although none of these elements actually show the

world of 2149, they point to the specific ways in which America's standard of living has

decreased and the posters and newscasts draw an imaginative world in which there are

population problems, limited food availability, rampant disease, and a government pushed to

dictatorial-like lawmaking.

On the other hand, some Countdown to *Terra Nova* elements provide hope for the

inhabitants of 2149. Advertisements for Terra Nova read "Be a part of the most exciting

adventure mankind has ever embarked on" and "New Land, New Life, New Hope." Also, Hope

Plaza, where the portal between 2149 and Terra Nova is, is named "Man of the Year" for 2149:

> It is that time of year again. The man of the year has been unveiled, but this year
> it's not a man at all. Editors defend their decision, saying Hope Plaza has done
> more to alleviate the misery of people around the world than anything since the
> invention of dome technology.

While an anchor reads this newscast, however, the following tickertape is scrolling across the screen:

> . . . travelers who will be transitioning to Terra Nova on the next pilgrimage. The lottery announcement brings jubilation for some and depression for others. Officials urge applicants to keep trying. Hope Plaza . . .

Thus, while the Terra Nova colony brings home to some, it brings bitter disappoint to the other billions of people who are not chosen for the Pilgrimage and are forced to stay in 2149, which has already been established as a world that will be uninhabitable in the next 33 years.

There are other hints that Hope Plaza and the Terra Nova experience are not as full of hope as first look might suggest. First, there are reminders to pilgrims to take their required shots and seek out counselors if they are having trouble, hinting that life in Terra Nova is hard, uncomfortable, and disease-ridden. Second, a number of posters warn that fraud will not be tolerated and that pilgrims must follow a strict set of laws about the baggage brought to Terra Nova and the people recruits take with them, again suggesting that the government has a strong hold on Terra Nova and the people sent to Terra Nova. Finally, a number of alerts warn against terrorism. The security level is raised to Orange early on, then raised to Red a few weeks later after a plan to blow up the portal by a group called "Judgment is Inescapable" is uncovered by the police. This plan begs a number of questions, most importantly about the religion of 2149. Historically, religious fervor is more popular during times of trouble, and the group name "Judgment is Inescapable" calls to mind questions of religious judgment and the rapture.[18]

Finally, Countdown to Terra Nova introduces viewers to the main characters of *Terra Nova*, most importantly the Shannon Family. Before any pilgrim leaves for Terra Nova, they go through a series of psychiatric evaluations. Elisabeth, her son Josh, her daughter Maddy, and her

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[18] This, unfortunately, is never picked up by the show as *Terra Nova*, itself, never deals with religion either in 2149 or on the Terra Nova colony.

imprisoned husband Jim, are asked about mental and physical preparedness for the move to

Terra Nova. As these are psychological evaluations, they are personal and intimate and,

therefore, are perfect ways in which viewers can get attached to these characters and their

backgrounds in a very quick, efficient manner.

Inching Towards Transmedia Storytelling

Terra Nova's multi-media promotional campaign inches towards transmedia storytelling and is

one of the most important ways in which *Terra Nova* positions itself as a cult text. Henry

Jenkins popularized the term "transmedia" in a 2003 article in *Technology Review*, but others

have called the phenomenon "screen bleed" (Hanson, 2003), "media mix" (Ito, 2005), and

"multimodality" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). There is even disagreement among the

transmedia scholars as to what transmedia storytelling refers to. Jenkins (2006) defines a

transmedia story as one that:

> unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive
> and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia
> storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be
> introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world
> might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park
> attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to
> have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice verse. (p. 97-8)

Transmedia scholar Christy Dena (2006) takes issue with this definition, arguing that transfiction

is a better term than transmedia, by which she:

> … refer[s] to stories that are distributed over more than one text, one medium.
> Each text, each story on each device or each website *is not* autonomous, unlike
> Henry Jenkins' transmedia storytelling. In transfiction (a term to counter Jenkins',
> though they should be the other way around!), the story is dependent on all the
> pieces on each medium, device or site to be read/experienced for it to be
> understood. Basically, no single segment will be sufficient. These will vary
> between being experienced simultaneously and sequentially.

Dena, then, believes that to understand a transmedia story a reader must read, watch, and participate in all elements of a transmedia story. Each element is not independent, as Jenkins argues, and may not be understandable without being read in relation to the whole. Similarly, Elizabeth Evans (2011) points to narrative coherence across all platforms as the most important element of transmedia storytelling. That distinction is not far from Long's (2007) assertion that the most important element of Jenkins' definition is that each element must be "distinctive and valuable." Long differentiates between a priori and a posteriori storytelling and makes an argument for a third type that he defines as "chewy":

> A co-ordinated transmedia expansion following the success of an initial form – a "second wave" of expansion done a posteriori, but crafted as a whole entity from that point forward in the same mode as an a priori project might have done from the beginning. (p. 21)

Most transmedia storytelling has been done in this third type. After a story has been successful in one medium, a transmedia narrative has been built around that first medium as if it was designed a priori, even though it was crafted after the success of the original.

This type of transmedia storytelling is incredibly difficult to do well. For example, Jason Mittell (2006) enumerates a number of problems that hindered the success "The *Lost* Experience" ARG that launched after season two of *Lost*. The *Lost* Experience sprinkled clues, mysteries, and puzzles throughout the Internet, newspaper ads, physical events, and novels in an attempt to capitalize on the feverish fan engagement the show garnered. It was hard, however, to put new, important information in The *Lost* Experience, because a lot more people watched the show than participated in the ARG. Similarly, international audiences watched episodes at different times, so it was impossible to coordinate the timing of the Experience. ARG players were also less accepting of advertisements in the ARG mediums than they were on television.

Mittell concludes that while The *Lost* Experience was fun and ambitious, it was not entirely successful.

Lost's successor, *Heroes*, had the blessing of NBC to wholly experiment with transmedia storytelling. *Heroes* creator, Tim Kring, said that "there was little precedent for what we are doing, and for a long time we were able to indulge whatever ideas we had" (qtd. in Cheshire & Burton, 2010). The *Heroes* universe expanded across weekly comic books, games, fake websites that reflected the reality of the *Heroes* world, and a *Heroes* world-tour with actors and creators. *Heroes: Evolutions* was an on-line portal that brought together fans to develop characters, watch web-only documentaries, and build a passionate *Heroes* community.

In the six years since *Heroes* premiered, transmedia storytelling has become a fixture for previously television-only shows. As I have already discussed, cult shows like *Dexter, True Blood,* and *Game of Thrones* made extensive use of transmedia storytelling to engage audiences and maintain active, loyal, and productive audiences. *Terra Nova's* transmedia elements work similarly.

In terms of Jenkins' (2006) "distinctive and valuable" (p. 97) qualification, the Countdown to Terra Nova elements are successful means of transmedia storytelling. Instead of being redundant, the information in the newscasts, psychiatric evaluations, and on the posters and alerts support what is seen in the *Terra Nova* pilot. For those viewers who watched the Countdown to Terra Nova videos, their experience of the pilot was richer, as they already had connections to the world and an established sympathy for the main characters. For viewers who only watched the pilot, however, they would not have been missing information that is imperative to the plot. This works against Dena's (2006) definition of a transfiction story as one that "is dependent on all the pieces on each medium." While a viewer's experience with the

Terra Nova television show is enhanced by its transmedia elements, these elements are not imperative to the enjoyment of the show.

On the other hand, the Journey to Terra Nova campaign and the 11th Pilgrimage Lottery are not distinctive or valuable in the way that Jenkins refers to them. Neither of these media adds to the Terra Nova story-world. They do, however, build viewer engagement and a community of fans who have shared their greenscreen videos or who have completed the lottery and have shared their results on Facebook. Therefore, while this is not transmedia storytelling in the strictest sense, it is successful transmedia branding.

A few short notes are of import. First, the Countdown to Terra Nova experience was developed a priori. Unlike the *Heroes* and *Lost* transmedia storytelling elements, *Terra Nova's* transmedia storytelling elements were developed with the show and were released prior to the show's premiere. Second, and related to the first, is that all elements of *Terra Nova's* storytelling were created by what Jenkins (2006) refers to as "collaborative authorship" (p. 110). The Internet-based *Terra Nova* stories are written in the same tone and filmed with the same look as are the parts of the pilot that take place in 2149. Therefore, all parts of the story are consistent, recognizable, and are not contradictory. Third, the *Terra Nova* pilot employs the Internet-based narrative in self-referential ways. For example, the first scene of the pilot opens with Jim wearing the re-breather that is advertised in the Countdown to Terra Nova posters and an early scene shows a billboard with the "A Family is Four" poster on it.

Finally, it has to be noted that the *Terra Nova* on-line experience is not a complete ARG. While the clips and posters are interesting, and they fulfill the "distinctive and valuable" qualification, they do not instigate the type of fan involvement that the *Lost, Heroes, True Blood,* and *Dexter* ARG experiences did. These other experiences rewarded fan involvement with

Easter eggs, rabbit holes, and ever-more-complicated puzzles to unravel. The *Terra Nova*

experience did not ask for any involvement beyond returning to a website every day to watch a

new video or see a new poster, or to connect their Facebook to the 11th Pilgrimage Lottery page.

While this is interesting and a level of involvement above non-transmedia stories, it does not

near the levels of complexity and involvement that ARG-based transmedia stories engender.

Therefore, while *Terra Nova*'s transmedia storytelling suggests the type of audience involvement

characterized by other cult shows such as *Lost* and *True Blood*, *Terra Nova* does not entirely

reward involvement of the type that is rewarded by intense viewers of these cult shows.

The question of *Terra Nova's* transmedia storytelling potential is even murkier when

considering the elements that continued once the show premiered. The Fox website contained all

the components that every Fox show site has: video, clips, photos, full episodes (that premiere

eight days after the episode aired on Fox), social network interaction with Twitter and Facebook,

and a QR Code that sends smartphone users directly to the mobile version of the site. More

important is the innovative smartphone/tablet companion app.

Companion apps are becoming a popular version of transmedia storytelling due to their

economic appeal. In January 2011, Yahoo! And Nielsen released The Mobile Shopping White

Paper, which explored consumers' use of mobile and PC technology. The study found that 85%

of mobile and PC users used their devices while watching TV. The two highest-ranked

categories of mobile and PC use while watching TV were texting (56%) and visiting social

networking sites (40%). While 37% of respondents browsed content unrelated to the show they

were watching, only 24% browsed related content. Twelve months later, Nielsen found similar

results in its *State of the Media: U.S. Digital Consumer Report* for Q3 and Q4 2011. While 57%

of tablet and smartphone users checked e-mail during the program and 44% visited social

networking sites, only 29% browsed information related to what they were watching. The most popular sites visited while watching TV were unrelated to the program, the top 5 being: Facebook, YouTube, Zynga, Google Search, and Yahoo! Mail. Therefore, while viewers and consumers are clearly using two-screen viewing - i.e. multi-tasking on their mobile phones, tablets, or PC computers while simultaneously watching television - they are not using these devices to tap further into the program they are watching. These numbers suggest that there is great untapped potential for creators of mobile and tablet content related to TV programs. Companion apps, then, are meant to fill this void.

The other goal of companion apps is to make live viewing a necessity again. In the years before the VCR, the DVR, and on-line streaming services, all viewing would take place at the network-scheduled date and time. Even through the 1980s and 1990s, event programming and watercooler programming were watched live because to be culturally literate, viewers had to be able to talk about last night's episode of *Moonlighting* (ABC, 1985-89), *M*A*S*H* (CBS, 1972-83), or even *Lost*. Fragmentation in the age of the Internet, however, has led to viewers watching programs a day, a week, or even a season after it airs live. This type of fragmentation is problematic, however, because live viewers are still more profitable for the broadcast networks and basic cable stations whose profits are based on advertising dollars. Vice President of Innovation and Social Media for Fox, Hardie Tankersley, has said that "anything we can do to make live viewing a little better, we'll do it" and the General Manager of MTV and VH1 Digital, Kristin Frank, says that her goal is to turn "every episode into an event" (qtd. in Vascellaro, 2011). Companion apps, then, hope to get viewers to watch live by creating interactive environments that reward timely engagement, support social sharing of content and opinions, and foster loyalty (2011).

The *Terra Nova* companion app incorporated a number of interactive and transmedia elements. Viewers started the app at the beginning of each episode, and at relevant points in the show elements were unlocked in the app. Unlike the ABC companion app for *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-), the *Terra Nova* app relied purely on having started the app and the show simultaneously rather than on audio cues. The extra content that was unlocked included behind the scenes photos and videos, polls that could be answered, extra facts about the dinosaurs that were shown or tips about how to survive in the water. The app also incorporated the *Terra Nova* Twitter and Facebook feeds, in an attempt to brand and control conversations that would otherwise occur on independent sites (Wallenstein, 2011).

It is hard to claim that the *Terra Nova* companion app was either interactive or an example of transmedia storytelling. While the app gave the appearance of interactivity, through polls and the incorporation of social networking feeds, there was little actual interaction. Other interactive apps give viewers virtual rewards for sharing information with other viewers, and others have content that needs to be unlocked through engaging activities such as trivia questions or solving mysteries. The *Terra Nova* app, on the other hand, simply handed information to the viewer as time went by, which does not force viewers to that extra level of engagement that tends to lead to the type of loyalty and forced live viewing that TV producers hope for.

The *Terra Nova* app was similarly close to, yet not completely, transmedia storytelling. The app kept its additional storytelling to little facts about how much food a Brachiosaurus can eat or explaining that a "click" is a military term for "kilometer." This information was interesting, but did little to advance the narrative. It did not build character and, while it explained the *Terra Nova* world, it did not expand it. This type of information is neither distinctive nor valuable. Contrast the *Terra Nova* app to *Lost's* version of the same thing. In the

later seasons of *Lost,* ABC would replay the last week's episode before the current week's. This repeat episode would include little facts and explanations that explored the metatextual and intertextual elements in the show, making connections between *Lost* and its literary, filmic, and televisual influences, as well as between the episode and things that happened episodes and seasons before. *Terra Nova's* app, in contrast, was simplistic and not engaging.

This brings me to the most important point I want to make in this section, and the point that I will be discussing for the rest of this thesis. In order to have transmedia storytelling work, the program itself must be complex, interesting, and engaging enough to encourage viewer interaction outside of the weekly television show. More importantly, SF cult texts have to have metatextual and intertextual elements in their texts in order to garner the types of fan enthusiasm, involvement, and loyalty that define cult texts. As one reviewer of the *Terra Nova* companion app writes, "why need an app for a lame show as it turns out?" (Cardboard_Bender, November 1, 2011). While this is a cruder sentiment than the one I would like to convey, the concept is the same. Without complex story, character development, and a holistic world, a SF cult text cannot be successful. Therefore, while *Terra Nova* positioned itself as a cult text through its emphasis on transmedia storytelling, inventive special effects, and its marketing strategies, the text's narrative did not support this innovative cult foundation.

Chapter Seven: *Terra Nova's* Simplistic Narrative Structure

At its foundation, *Terra Nova* was positioned as a cult text. It had a long and impressive

pedigree that included legendary producer-director Stephen Spielberg and a number of other

producers with credits ranging from *Star Trek* to *Lost* and *The West Wing*. The show was

promoted to a number of different demographics: families and children through marketing efforts

at theme parks and baseball games, and the cult TV SF fanbase by premiering the first episode at

San Diego Comic-Con in August 2011. The show's pre-promotional campaign also suggested

that *Terra Nova* would be a cult show, including its immersive Journey to Terra Nova experience,

the 11th Pilgrimage social media integration, and the Countdown to *Terra Nova* transmedia

storytelling experience. Although *Terra Nova* was positioned as a cult text, the text, itself,

lacked the qualities of a cult show. *Terra Nova's* misrepresentation as a dystopian narrative, its

emphasis on special effects over character development, and its nostalgic and simplistic moral

landscape were old-fashioned and, ultimately, unsatisfying to a complex and invested SF TV

audience.

 Terra Nova premiered on September 26th, 2011 to 9.2 million viewers and a 3.1 rating/8

share in the coveted adults 18-49 demographic (Collins, 2011). *Terra Nova* aired at 8:00 pm on

Monday nights, the lead-in for the long-term hit *House* (Fox, 2004-12), which is an enviable

position despite *House's* fatigue and the announcement that the 2011-12 season would be

House's last (the announcement was not made until February 2012, two and a half months after

Terra Nova went off the air). *Terra Nova* was up against ABC's powerhouse hit *Dancing with*

the Stars (ABC, 2005-), CBS' established sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS, 2005-) and

newcomer *2 Broke Girls* (CBS, 2011-), NBC's a cappella competition *The Sing-Off* (NBC, 2009-

), and The CW's teenage soap opera *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-). *Terra Nova* consistently

came in a disappointing third in its timeslot, behind ABC's *Dancing with the Stars* and CBS'

How I Met Your Mother/2 Broke Girls combo.

Although *Terra Nova* held its own on the first night, it failed to maintain its viewership in

subsequent weeks. Despite an increase in critical praise for later episodes that focused on the

show's mythology, by the time the finale aired on December 19 the show was averaging just 7

million total viewers (Carter, 2012) and 4.6 million viewers in that all-important adults 18-49

demographic (Schechner, 2012). This rating ranked *Terra Nova* #26 as of December in the A18-

49 demographic. Fox cancelled the series on March 6, 2012.

These ratings were not terrible, and a #26 ranking would not normally trigger guaranteed

cancellation, but *Terra Nova* was never a normal series. Fox had extremely high expectations

and the series' extravagant price tag meant that the ratings had to be equally spectacular for the

show to be cost effective. *Terra Nova* was also trying to do something that has not been done on

Network TV in years, i.e. to be event programming of the type of broad, mass appeal that leads

to huge numbers of viewers and water cooler discussions. *Terra Nova's* 7 million viewers were

far below this expectation. As I will suggest in this chapter, *Terra Nova's* failure to attract,

maintain, and/or grow an audience was a result of it failure to be the type of cult TV

programming that its marking and promotion suggested it would be.

Misrepresentation as a Dystopian Narrative

Before *Terra Nova*'s premiere, the creators continually emphasized that the show was meant for

everybody. Director Alex Graves set high expectations when he said that "this [*Terra Nova*] has

nothing to do with *Lost* for one major reason: It's so made for a massively broad audience" (qtd.

in Abrams, 2011). Executive producer and writer Braga adds that "it has very broad appeal . . . it

has a timeless and ageless premise" (qtd. in Rose and Goldberg, 2011). Despite their words, the

show's original premise suggests anything but broad, family fun.

Terra Nova's multimedia marketing campaign emphasized the dystopian world of 2149

that opens the show. The Journey to *Terra Nova* interactive van had templates of re-breathers

because the air in 2149 is unfit to breath, the 11th Pilgrimage website emphasized 2149's volatile

weather conditions, and the Countdown to *Terra Nova* videos and posters focused on 2149's

overpopulation, disease, and undemocratic government. The early promos for *Terra Nova* also

emphasized 2149 Earth, with voice-overs describing Earth's terrible conditions and showing

images of overcrowded cities and citizens wearing re-breathers.

This emphasis on the negative turn Earth has taken by 2149 suggested that *Terra Nova*

would be capitalizing on the sort of dystopian view of humanity's future that has grown

increasingly common in a 20th and 21st century marked by the violence of two world wars, the

ideological Cold War, and questions over our ecological, economic and scientific future. *Terra*

Nova's premise is distinctly dystopian. By the year 2149, overpopulation and the misuse of

natural resources have destroyed the Earth. The air is impossible to breath, so oxygen masks are

necessary. Fruits and vegetables are nearly extinct, and a simple orange is worth celebrating.

While the rich and famous live in expensive bio-domes on the distant horizon, most people live

in small, cramped apartments in crumbling high-rises. To keep population growth under control,

there is a strictly enforced "a family is four" law that keeps a family from having more than two

children. Earth is dying and, with mere years left before extinction, the only chance the human

race has is a fracture in time that leads 85 million years into the past. This focus on the

dystopian world of 2149 suggests that *Terra Nova* was the next in a long history of dystopian

literature, film, and television.

History of Dystopian Media.

With the rise of popular SF post-WWII[19] came a similar rise in what Kingsley Amis has called

the "new maps of hell" built from the wreckage and the fears of the War and its aftermath (as

quoted in Baccolini & Moylan, 2003, p. 1), as seen in the writings of George Orwell, Ray

Bradbury, and Philip K. Dick. Although the popularity of dystopian fiction suffered a lull in the

1960s and 1970s, it regained popularity in the 1980s as the Leftist movement was usurped by the

leadership of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Helmut Kohl. A decade later, the critical

dystopia was employed by the revolutionary literary movement as a way to confront the growing

commodification and globalization that has continued through the turn of the 21st century

(Moylan, 2000).

Over the past decade, critics such as Moylan and Baccolini have advocated for the

importance of the dystopian genre as a historical and cultural reflection of present society that

allows the audience to navigate "the conditions that mask the very causes of the harsh realities in

which they live" (Moylan, 2000, p. xii). Therefore, dystopian narratives are not only a critique

of society, but the critical dystopia suggests a roadmap for political social activism (p. xv). Peter

Fitting (1979) refers to it as "social speculation" (p. 70) and Lyman Tower Sergent (1994) calls it

"social dreaming" (p. 1). Suvin (1979) argues that Utopia is both the predecessor and the

"*sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction"* (p. 61, emphasis in original). Moylan (2000) adds

that Utopia "names the sociopolitical drive that moves the human project . . . beyond the limits of

the current system" (p. 65). The commonality in all these definitions is the Utopian dimension of

sociopolitical commentary made through the exploration of a society that is organized by norms

that are different than those in historical reality.

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[19] In the 1950s, there was an increase in SF readers due to the baby boom, changing attitudes towards popular culture, and the proliferation of the mass-market paperback. With this new audience, a new generation of SF was able to expand the genre's creativity (Moylan, 2000).

Critical Dystopia.

For the past thirty years, critical dystopias have shifted focus to address corporate tyranny and the increasing suspicion that the State is yielding power to the totalizing political-economic machinery of big business (Moylan, 2003).

The term critical eutopia was coined by Sargent (1994) and repurposed by Moylan (2000). Moylan (2000) argues that the critical dystopia is not actually a new type or form of dystopia, but a refunctioning of the critical potential that has always been inherent in the genre. Moylan's definition of critical dystopia is:

> A textual mutation that self-reflexively takes on the present system and offers not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of the oppositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration. (2000, p. xv)

In this definition are the three main dimensions of critical dystopia that differ from the traditional dystopia: a focus on the societal transformation to dystopia, the existence of a resistance movement within a dystopian society, and the maintenance of a hopeful eutopian element.

Terra Nova *as Critical Dystopia.*

By promoting *Terra Nova* as dystopian, the show's viewers were primed for a show that was complex, realistic, and socially and politically relevant. However, *Terra Nova* only explored the dystopian world of 2149 for one segment of the two-hour pilot before the Shannon family travels through the portal and the next twelve episodes take place in the Cretaceous period. The narrative only returns to 2149 in the two-hour series finale.

The show does open in 2149, with a focus on the Shannon family. Jim Shannon is a Chicago policeman and his wife, Elisabeth, is a world-renowned doctor and scientist. They are caught having broken the two-child rule – they have three children: Josh, Maddy, and Zoe – and Jim is sentenced to six years in jail. While Jim is serving his sentence, Elisabeth is recruited for

the Tenth Pilgrimage to Terra Nova, the colony 85 million years in the prehistoric past. Scientists have discovered a time fracture going back 85 million years, and colonists have been slowly building a civilization in the past. Colonists are carefully chosen based on occupation and skill, although there are implications that there are more powerful, corrupt forces at work that have the ability to game the lottery system.

When Elisabeth Shannon is recruited, she is told that she cannot bring Zoe - as her family cannot be rewarded for breaking the two-child rule - or Jim, who is still in jail. So, Elisabeth stages an elaborate break-out so that Jim and Zoe can join the family in Terra Nova. When they arrive in the colony, they merely receive a slap on the wrist for the breakout. The family settles into the colony, Elisabeth as the head doctor at the hospital and, after Jim proves his worth, his crimes are forgiven and he becomes the colony's chief of security.

Terra Nova consists of about 1000 settlers led by Commander Nathaniel Taylor[20]. The Terra Nova colony is composed of a number of buildings – single-family homes, science laboratories, a hospital, a marketplace, a bar – surrounded by an electric fence meant to keep out the Slashers and other species of dangerous dinosaurs. While no settler wants for food, water, or shelter, there is a marketplace that runs on barter. The local bar owner also runs a smuggling and gambling ring.

The citizens of Terra Nova also have to contend with the Sixers, a group of colonists who arrived on the Sixth Pilgrimage and have since broken away and developed a rival colony. Josh Shannon and his new friend, Skye, get wrapped up in the dealings of the Sixers. It is later revealed that the Sixers were paid to help the Phoenix Group - a powerful company in 2149 that wants to pillage Terra Nova for its natural resources - gain control of the colony. Commander Taylor's estranged son, Lucas, is a brilliant scientist who is working with the Sixers and the

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[20] Commander Taylor is played by Stephen Lang, best known for his militaristic role in *Avatar* (2009).

Phoenix Group to make the fracture in time two-way, so that people can pass freely between 2149 and the past.

While the first few episodes of *Terra Nova* focus on episodic stories that flesh out the characters and explore the world 85 million years in the past, the last few episodes of season one pick up the mystery of the Sixers and the Phoenix Group. Commander Taylor and Jim Shannon learn that the Phoenix Group is going to use the next scheduled Eleventh Pilgrimage to invade Terra Nova and pillage the land. Commander Taylor and Jim devise a plan to destroy the portal that allows people and supplies to get to Terra Nova, effectively closing off any means of connection with 2149. The plan is successful, although not before a number of Phoenix Group representatives make it through the portal. Cut off from the future, the Sixers and the Phoenix Group representatives evacuate the colony and take off for the Badlands, a mysterious and unknown territory on prehistoric Earth.

The last scene of the season finale shows Commander Taylor and Jim Shannon opening a container that the Sixers had found in the Badlands. When they open the container, they find the prow of an 18th century ship, suggesting that the scientists of 2149 were not the first to discover the fracture in time. These final scenes set up a season two based on the rebuilding of the Terra Nova colony and a mystery in the Badlands that spans the whole of human history. A mystery that, unfortunately, will never be solved.

The *Terra Nova* plot is much more simplistic than its dystopian premise would suggest. Specifically, the small amount of time spend in 2149 is deceptive. As Fitting (1987) argues, one of the most important aspects of a critical dystopia is the exploration of the causes and the processes of social change, not just the symptoms. In this way, critical dystopias actively explore the aspects of 2011 society that may or may not lead to the disastrous world depicted in

2149. Viewers are primed by the existence of this dystopian world to expect this level of social and political relevancy. *Terra Nova*, however, does not explore the transformation from the 21st century reality of its viewers to the 2149 of the show. The symptoms are clear - un-breathable air, overcrowded cities, disease – yet there is no discussion of *why* the Earth is in such peril.

Extrapolating from the symptoms, the problem can be assumed to be a carelessness about the environment, perhaps brought on by capitalistic greed. The later storyline of the Phoenix Group and their singular desire to exploit natural resources for economic gain suggests a commentary on Capitalism that is never quite successful. Although the citizens of Terra Nova continually talk about "a new chance" or "starting over," there is little evidence that lessons have been learned. Even if *Terra Nova*'s emphasis on environmental crises did not seem like a rehashing of James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), it would feel dry and derivative. While *Avatar's* story of economic exploitation of natural resources from a planet of caring, one-with-nature aliens may seem simplistic, it at least has a nice moral to fit its nice, simple political statement. *Terra Nova*, on the other hand, really makes no such statement.

While the citizens of Terra Nova, in the end, fight to the death in order to keep the colony out of the hands of the exploitive Phoenix Group, the colony itself is not very careful with the natural habitat they have invaded and colonized. In almost every episode, a dinosaur, or two or four, is killed. In episode two, "Instinct," the scientists discover that they have built the colony on a pterosaur breeding ground. Instead of evacuating the colony, the scientists develop a pheromone that leads the pterosaurs to a new breeding ground where they cannot harm Terra Nova. Thus, instead of respecting the Earth, the time period, and the natural inhabitants, the citizens of Terra Nova manipulate nature for their own gain.

The overemphasis on environmentalism is itself troubling. As Tom Moylan (2000) argues, critical dystopias explore the multi-faceted interconnected issues that lead to the downfall of humanity, and by focusing on one or two single issues *Terra Nova* feels naïve and unrealistic. Moylan (2003) also argues that critical dystopia developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s as an ideological criticism of big business. The Phoenix Group is a good example of this. The Phoenix Group had the ability to place a large number of their people on the sixth and eleventh pilgrimages, suggesting that the Group's power is larger than that of the government. However, *Terra Nova* does not offer a more liberal alternative. Commander Taylor rules Terra Nova as an, admittedly gentle-hearted, military dictator. Terra Nova is not a democracy, nor is it a socialist utopia. While, supposedly, no one wants for anything in the colony, there is a market that is based on both a barter economy and on the exchange of money. Similarly, the local bartender, Tom Boylan, runs both a gambling table and a blackmarket business. So, while *Terra Nova* is making a commentary on the problems of capitalistic society, it does not offer alternatives and, therefore, does not provide a space in which the viewers can explore and question their historical reality.

While *Terra Nova* attempts to comment on 21st century environmental and economic concerns, it ignores a number of other important social and political issues. Most blaringly is the issue of technological advancement, which is both a hot-button topic for its viewers and an important area for SF series to address. By nature of its premise, *Terra Nova* is in the position to explore the conclusions of the 20th and 21st centuries' rapid technological development. With the travel to 85 million years in the past, *Terra Nova* could also delve into the implications of sending an advanced people to a time of technological infancy. Instead, the citizens of Terra Nova have every amenity. They have weapons, transportation, electricity, an electric fence,

advanced medicine, and plexis - 22nd century tablets that provide information and entertainment for everyone. There is no discussion about the role that rapid technological change played in the destruction of Earth. While technology is just one example of the myriad of social and political issues *Terra Nova* fails to touch on, it is a blaring one.

Terra Nova is also uncritical of the Terra Nova society and its government. A critical dystopia is supposed to question both the hegemonic dystopian society and the counter-hegemonic resistance, maintaining the presence of difference and imperfection even in the new eutopian society. Most of the problem here is that the Shannon Family is the center of the narrative, and they do not struggle with their choice to join Commander Taylor or the Sixers in the final battle. Jim follows Commander Taylor from the moment he gets to Terra Nova, and that faith rarely waivers. In "Vs.," Jim discovers a body that Taylor buried under a tree and starts an investigation into the murder. Taylor eventually explains that the original leader of Terra Nova was working for the Phoenix Group and Taylor had to kill him in self-defense while defending the colony. By the end of the episode, Jim's faith in Taylor has been completely restored.

The spies on the show are similarly unambiguous. Josh Shannon makes a deal with the Sixers in order to get his girlfriend on the next pilgrimage. However, his focus is on his girlfriend and not the ideological battle between dystopia and eutopia. Skye, Josh's friend and the Sixers main spy in Terra Nova, only works for the Sixers because they are keeping her mother alive with medicine that is not available on Terra Nova. In episode ten, "Within," Skye is confronted by Taylor and promises that she never betrayed the colony or gave vital information to Mira and the Sixers, only enough small information to keep her mother alive.

The Sixers, on the other hand, are the most interesting political commentary the show makes. The Sixers were sent to Terra Nova by the Phoenix Group to be the eyes and ears of the Group on Terra Nova. They are also there to find a way to make the portal two-way so that the Phoenix Group can plunder Terra Nova's natural resources and bring them back to 2149. The Sixers live much differently than the Terra Nova colony does: they live in the trees, moving often, with no electricity, although they do have weapons and more advanced medicine than even Terra Nova has. On the other hand, the Sixers are mercenaries. Their leader, Mira, has a daughter back in 2149 that she needs to support and she is doing the Phoenix Group's bidding only to save her daughter.

All of these, however, are life-or-death circumstances: if Skye's mother does not get her medicine her fever will kill her; if Josh does not get his girlfriend to Terra Nova she will die in 2149 with the rest of humanity, as will Mira's daughter. These questions, then, are hardly morally ambiguous. Ambiguity is imperative for the social and political radicalism of critical dystopias, as ambiguity opens up spaces in which the viewer is actively engaged. Without this space for questioning, the viewer will be unmotivated to make the important connections between his/her world and the *Terra Nova* world. Thus, *Terra Nova's* socio-political commentary is kept at an uninteresting and unimportant minimum.

Dinosaurs vs. Character Development

Terra Nova's failure to accurately address social and political issues comes from the show's preoccupation with being cinematic SF television. By hiring acclaimed film producer Steven Spielberg, expanding the special effects budget to near-cinematic levels, and employing a longer production schedule, *Terra Nova* was attempted to make cinematic SF for television. As I discussed in Chapter Four, however, SF TV has evolved into a genre with its own codes and

expectations separate from those of SF cinema or SF literature. In some ways, SF TV's limitations, i.e. its smaller budgets and shorter production schedules, have been an advantage. Forced to be cheaper and quicker, SF TV has often been scrappy and innovative, relying on the longer serialized structure of TV narrative and subsequent complex character development to develop shows that are relevant, postmodern, innovative. These elements have become SF TV's greatest strengths, and the reasons why it appeals so strongly to cult TV audiences. Strip SF TV of the reasons for its scrappiness, and risk stripping SF TV of the very things that have made it successful.

J. P. Telotte (2008) warns specifically against an overemphasis on special effects in SF television. As special effects technologies are getting cheaper, quicker, and easier to do, and as HD television penetration grows, viewers are beginning to expect the types of special effects that are seen in cinema. Which, on one hand, is doable. On the other hand, however, in SF films an emphasis on special effects has begun to beat out all other aesthetic factors. Telotte (2008) quotes film theorist Albert La Valley, who likened the current state of SF film to the Cold War, bemoaning that SF films "'aim to demonstrate the current state of the art' in special effects technology by employing 'greater and greater budgets to overpower their predecessors'" (qtd. p. 6). As SF TV begins to adapt the special effects model, it risks losing the mature identity that the genre has developed over the past twenty years. As Telotte (2008) ultimately warns, special effects:

> threaten not only to dominate but also to completely formularize their [SF TV programs'] narratives, turning them essentially into showcases of wonder and, in the process, rendering the instances of wonder all too predictable. (p. 6)

A focus on special effects at the expense of character, story, and social and political commentary would be detrimental to the development of the SF TV genre and, in fact, would be antithetical to the definition of the genre, itself.

Terra Nova is a good example of a show that fell into the special effects trap. Although *Terra Nova's* producers claimed that the show was more about character than dinosaurs, the show itself did not live up to that. Preston Beckman, Fox's head of scheduling, said that "if we can get people to buy into this family, then we have a shot" (qtd. in Flint, 2011b) and executive producer Rene Echevarria argued that the show had to be "about those people and how they interact with each other" in order to survive (qtd. in Keveney, 2011). It is easy to say that a show is about character, it is harder to create a show that is about character.

In the end, *Terra Nova* was in large part a dinosaur-of-the-week show. The two hour pilot, "Genesis Part I and II," is fast-paced, active, and dinosaur-heavy. Once the narrative moves to Terra Nova from 2149, the series becomes more action-focused than world-building focused, as I discussed above. One of the main scenes that Steven Spielberg is credited for adding is a scene between Zoe, the Shannon's youngest daughter, and a herbivore that stretches its neck across the electric fence of the colony and eats a branch from Zoe's hand. The scene is sweet, and it is a nice juxtaposition to the Slasher chase scenes that occupy most of the episode. However, the scene does more to push the character development of the herbivore than it does the character of Zoe.

The next few episodes are similarly centered around the dinosaurs to the detriment of the human characters. Episode three, "Instinct," is about a species of flying dinosaurs that return to their breeding ground, which so happens to be the same land Terra Nova was built on. Therefore, before the show has had the opportunity to build strong connections between the viewers and the

colony, that colony is being threatened by a species that, arguably, has more right to the land than the colonists do. It is hard, then, to really root for the survival of a colony that is in the wrong. Although characters on the show tell viewers that Terra Nova was hard to build, that it was a rough road and that it would be more than difficult to pick up and move elsewhere, these has been no proof of that and the viewer may be left wondering why it would not be easier and morally advisable to move the colony rather than defend it. Especially in relation to *Terra Nova's* supposed pro-environmentalism themes.

Episode four, "What Remains," is similarly problematic. This episode opens on a scientific outpost effected by a virus that slowly degrades a person's memory until he or she reverts back to a previous point in his/her past. Commander Taylor, Jim, Elisabeth, and Elisabeth's old flame and world-renowned chemist Malcolm, are affected by the virus. So, again, before the viewers know who the characters are, the characters themselves forget who they are. The episode, then, becomes less about character development, more about a metaphorical fight against the clock to find a cure, and even more about a physical fight against Slashers who are trying to get into the science outpost to eat them.

The next few episodes continue to focus on dinosaurs and monster-of-the-week storylines rather than actual character development. Episode six, "Bylaw," opens on a security operative that is killed by a nykoraptor. Although Howard Milner admits to the murder, Jim begins to doubt the confession as he suspects that Milner confessed in order to protect his wife. While this episode nicely explores Milner's character, it does little to develop Jim, the show's supposed hero.

Episode seven, "Proof," follows a very similar structure to that of "Bylaw." Maddy, the Shannon's eldest daughter, starts an internship with famed scientist Dr. Ken Horton. As she

spends time with Dr. Horton, Maddy starts to suspect that he is not who he says he is. In the end, she uncovers the fact that Dr. Horton is actually his assistant, Andrew Fickett, who has assumed Dr. Horton's identity. Again, while this is interesting character development for Andrew Fickett, it does little to advance Maddy's storyline.

Other episodes are even more focused on the dinosaurs themselves. Episode six, "Nightfall," is specifically focused on the special effects dinosaurs. When an electromagnetic pulse renders the colony's technology useless, the colonists have to fend off different species of dangerous dinosaurs after nightfall. Episode nine, "Vs.," opens on a prehistoric dragonfly, the camera following the insect as it brings information from Terra Nova to Mira and the Sixers. The episode then focuses on how the colony uses the dragonfly to seek out the Sixers' spy in Terra Nova. Finally, episode ten, "Now You See Me," follows Commander Taylor and Mira as they have to work together to survive in the forest as they are stalked by Slashers.

This lack of character development was not ignored by critics. While a few critics found *Terra Nova's* cinematic qualities to be impressive enough – such as *The Wall Street Journal's* Nancy Smith (2011) who exclaims that "*Terra Nova* leaves ye olde cheap-set series in the dust with production values that make each episode look cinematic" – others are less impressed. Robert Bianco (2011) at *USA Today* says that *Terra Nova* has great potential to fill the gap in family programming if it can "make its human characters seem as lifelike as its dinosaurs." *The Washington Post* similarly finds the special effects "dazzling" but the "characters seem to be factory-direct" (Stuever, 2011).

Before the show even premiered, Mary Choi (2008) at *Wired* worried about *Terra Nova's* emphasis on special effects: "Without the frugality that's both the plague of and a boon to sci-fi programming, writers tend to stop relying on thrifty tricks like plot twists and character

development." While Telotte (2008) worries that SF TV may become lazy and special effects focused because special effects have now allowed SF TV "to compete successfully with films" (p. 6), what he does not take into account is that SF TV has matured into a mature, independent genre. SF TV and SF film are not competing for the best special effects. When viewers see a SF film in a movie theatre, they are primed by previous SF films to expect spectacular special effects and big action sequences. When viewers sit down to watch a SF TV program, they are primed by previous SF TV programs to expect character development, complex world-building, and plot twists. Different media garner different expectations, and therefore do not compete directly. As Choi (2008) concludes in her review of *Terra Nova*, "fact is, I like my small-screen sci-fi scrappy." Expectations, then, are different for SF TV than they are for SF film, and *Terra Nova's* attempt to make SF TV more cinematic is a stop backwards in the maturation of the SF TV genre.

Simplistic Narrative Structure

The main reason why *Terra Nova* failed as a cult text was, at heart, the show's simplistic narrative structure. As I discussed in Chapter Four, there are a number of important narrative factors of a cult text, including serialization, stakes, internally consistent mythology, narrative depth and flexibility, and metatextuality, intertextuality, and self-referentiality. Every one of these factors is reliant on an inherently complex, layered, and interesting narrative that can support morally ambiguous characters, a world mythology that is as interesting off-screen as on, and can reward intense viewer engagement and interaction.

Terra Nova has none of these important narrative elements. The decision to make *Terra Nova* a collection of unserialized, self-contained episodes was mainly an economic one. If a series is entirely serialized, it is hard for viewers to watch a later episode without getting lost.

However, by keeping *Terra Nova* mainly episodic, character development and the chance for layered and complex long-term narrative was stunted. It is contradictory for characters to develop when episodes have to be completely self-contained and are meant to end, narratively, at the same place where they started. When *Terra Nova* did become serialized towards the end of its run, as storylines developed about The Phoenix Group and a Sixer spy in the Terra Nova colony, the stories did become more compelling.

Similarly, the show's stakes were not realized until the final episode, when Commander Taylor's second-in-command, Wash, was killed, signaling that there were lives at stake in the colony. This added an important element of realism to the narrative that came too late. Other textual factors of cult texts - metatextuality, intertextuality, and self-referentiality - are built on an assumption that viewers are active, engaged, and loyal to a program. It takes a level of viewer awareness to catch connections between a program and another text and it takes an active memory for a viewer to similarly make connections with the current episode and past episode of a show. As *Terra Nova* was attempting to be a mainstream, family hit, the producers assumed that their viewers were not active, loyal, or involved in the narrative in this way.

The contradiction between *Terra Nova's* mainstream and cult TV influences is most clearly seen in the failure of the show's narrative structure. Mary McNamara (2011) at the *Los Angeles Times* heaped praise on the show for its appeal to "sci-fi fans, fantasy fans, 5-year-olds, 50-year-olds, Al Gore" and for its "whole-family friendly" story that is "exquisitely American." The idea that a SF TV program can appeal to all those people – SF fans, young children, grandmothers, Al Gore, George Bush – is naïve, unrealistic, and shows a lack of understanding of the role that SF TV plays in 21st Century American culture.

SF TV has, as J.P. Telotte (2008) argues, "simply become a text of choice for a postmodern world" (p. 4). SF TV calls for viewers to be engaged and interactive, which is why it is suited to 21st century media fragmentation and interactive transmedia storytelling. Also, SF TV combines the benefits of televisual storytelling – long-term narrative and serialized characterization – with the benefits of SF storytelling – an ability to interrogate the historical situation. Telotte (2008) describes it as an ability for SF TV to explore the very construction of society and human nature:

> Because of its generic emphasis on the constructed nature of all things, including human nature, and an increasing willingness to explore new narrative shapes, or as Brian McHale more allusively puts it, because it is a "self-consciously 'world-building' fiction, laying bare the process of fictional world-making" at every level (p. 12), science fiction invariably evokes postmodernism's reflexive and rather ahistorical sensibility. (p. 4)

SF TV, then, plays an important cultural role as it incorporates the viewer into the world-building process. This relationship is intimate, important, and personal. As an intimate medium, SF TV plays this role in a way that is different from that of other SF media. The nature of SF TV means that it is best suited to address issues of internal construction, i.e. the construction of human nature and modern society.

It is only natural, then, that the most successful SF TV shows over the last twenty years have focused on issues of personal identity and human relationships. *Babylon 5* explored the ways in which humans work together to form a culture and a society. The reimagined *Battlestar Galactica's* portrayal of the fear and paranoia of 9/11 and its aftermath focused specifically on what it means to be human and how this very personal identity relates to war, terror, and the enemy. Even though *Lost* was set on an abandoned island, it was less about questions of physical survival and more about issues of redemption and human nature. The successful first

season of *Heroes* similarly focused on individual reactions to gaining superpowers, and how these powers affected individualized personal identity.

Terra Nova, on the other hand, did not address these issues. Rather than using the Terra Nova colony as a means of exploring interactions between individuals, the *Terra Nova* characters were stock characters. Rather than exploring the construction of a new, utopian society, Terra Nova was run by a military dictatorship, the effects of which were unexplored. Rather than questioning the role of individualism and collectivism in a new frontier society, *Terra Nova* relied on the out-dated myths of the Western such as the hero myth, the colonization myth, and structuralist questions of inside society/outside society and wilderness/civilization.

In 1948, cultural theorist Robert Warshow argued that the Gangster film had surpassed the Western as the most relevant film genre in American culture. "The Western film," Warshow argues, "though it seems never to diminish in popularity, is for most of us no more than the folklore of the past, familiar and understandable only because it has been repeated so often" (p. 578). Therefore, while impressively-cinematic action sequences of Slashers chasing down Jim Shannon are fulfilling on the level of excitement and entertainment, these sequences do not satisfy the relevant and contemporary role that SF TV has adopted. *Terra Nova*, then, feels closer to *Bonanza* (NBC, 1959-73) or *Gunsmoke* (CBS, 1955-75) than it does to *Twin Peaks, Battlestar Galactica,* or *Lost*.

I am not arguing that Western myths have no place in American media in the 21st century. As Warshow argued sixty years ago, the Western has such a long connection to the American story that viewers will always be drawn to it as a popular art form. As SF TV has matured, however, it has defined itself as a historically relevant genre that capitalizes on the ambiguity, complexity, and reflexism of the postmodern age. *Terra Nova's* simplistic moralistic landscape

and old-fashioned ideology, then, feel stale and out-of-step with the fragmented world of the 21st century.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion: *Terra Nova* as an Experiment in Cult TV for a Mass Audience

Fox cancelled *Terra Nova* on March 5, 2012. With a finale that was watched by 7 million viewers (Staff, December 2011), what began as one of the most hotly anticipated shows of 2011 faded away with little-to-no ceremony. Although reports surfaced immediately after the cancellation that *Terra Nova's* producers where shopping it to other networks – including newly-minted original content provider Netflix – nothing came of them. *Terra Nova* became one of many network SF programs that suffered through lower-than-anticipated ratings to then be cancelled after one season. *Terra Nova*, however, was not just one of many failed SF projects. It was an experiment in creating a program in the cult TV genre that was designed from the start to appeal to a mass audience in the broadest sense. *Terra Nova*, then, is as interesting in failure as it would have been in success.

In his last press conference on the subject, Fox President of Entertainment Kevin Reilly explained his decision:

> The show was hunting for itself creatively through the season. I love the cast. I love some of the episodes. I love some of the ideas that were there, and, again, I thought it looked fantastic. Creatively, it was hunting. (qtd. In Steinberg, 2012)

Reilly's last comment, "creatively, it was hunting," is most telling. At its heart, *Terra Nova* had two diametrically-opposed mandates and, therefore, was floundering. While Fox attempted to create a program that embodied all of the characteristics of cult TV while still maintaining its appeal to a mass audience, *Terra Nova* struggled to find an identity from one episode to the next. Sometimes, *Terra Nova* was cult TV, at other times it was least-common-denominator TV, and, in the end, it was orphaned by both audiences. Therefore, despite its big budget and pedigree of creators, directors, and writers, *Terra Nova*'s chance of success was handicapped at the level of conception.

I do not say all of this to minimize the importance of *Terra Nova*. It was an ambitious program, and there is a reason why Fox put so much faith in a SF pilot from a little-known British short-story writer. *Terra Nova* was an attempt to appeal to an enticing mix of demographics, combining the intensity of a cult audience with the sheer numbers of a mass audience. Fox's attempt to bring a sophisticated cult TV genre to a mass audience was not unprecedented. *St. Elsewhere* begat *ER* and *Hill Street Blues* sired *Law & Order* in a way that produced major changes in audience numbers with minimal changes in content. It only seems natural, then, that the cult genre could similarly develop from *Twin Peaks* or *Battlestar Galactica* into a cult program with mass audience appeal.

In fact, the cult genre has had relative success with this in the past. *Lost* and *Heroes* suggested that complex cult shows could appeal to a larger audience, however the swift collapse of both shows suggested that even this limited success has a short half-life. While *ER* ran 15 seasons and *Law & Order* ran 20, the popularity of both *Lost* and *Heroes* dwindled after a mere season or two. With *Terra Nova*, Fox hoped for more. Before the pilot aired, director Alex Graves promised that *Terra Nova* "has nothing to do with *Lost* for one major reason: It's so made for a massively broad audience" (qtd. in Abrams, 2011). *Terra Nova* was designed to be long lasting and to appeal to many more than the 18 million or so viewers that watched *Lost's* first season (Anonymous, 2010a).

As an experiment, *Terra Nova* failed. In this thesis, I have hypothesized that this failure was due to *Terra Nova's* attempts to maintain the sophistication of the cult genre while appealing to a broad audience. I have to, then, address the Occam's razor hypothesis, i.e. that *Terra Nova's* failure could be attributed to the simple fact that it was just not a very good show. The problem with that solution, however, is that good and bad are judgments based on a program's objectives.

In the case of *Terra Nova*, its dual objectives mean that it has dual criteria. In terms of the cult genre, *Terra Nova's* flat characterizations, simplistic narrative, and nostalgic moral certainty made it bad cult television. On the other hand, its transmedia approach to marketing and storytelling, its advanced special effects, and its dystopian SF premise made it unappealing to a mass audience. Therefore, by trying to fulfill the two separate program objectives, *Terra Nova* failed on both accounts.

This brings me to the culmination of this thesis, because the failure of one experiment does not mean that network executives and television producers should stop trying to create complex, sophisticated, good cult programs that are economically viable. The question remains, then: can a cult television show aimed at a mass audience ever work? The answer to this question is changing as the definition of a mass audience is changing.

When cult programming is defined by the existence of a cult audience, then the answer would, unequivocally, be no. Cult audiences are, by definition, small, niche groups of loyal, dedicated, and engaged viewers. These audiences watch episodes multiple times, create fan blogs, attend conventions, and endlessly debate author intent. This type of engagement is difficult to achieve on a large scale, and has proven to be unappealing to mass audiences. Similarly, programs lose their cult cache when they become mainstream. In large part, what is appealing to cult audiences is the element of exclusivity, i.e. an "I get it and you don't" quality. Exclusivity is cool, and the moment that a program becomes commercialized or mainstream it loses any credibility it has with a cult audience.

In this thesis, however, I have argued that cult TV should be defined as a genre classification rather than in terms of the existence, or lack of, a certain type of audience. Even in this sense, it is hard to imagine a cult show that would appeal to a broad audience. As I

mentioned above, the characteristics that are valued by the cult genre and by mass audiences are diametrically opposed. The cult genre values such characteristics as serialization, narrative depth and flexibility, transmedia storytelling, and metatextuality, which require an unusual amount of engagement and attention on behalf of the audience in order to be understood and enjoyed. To appeal to a mass audience, on the other hand, a program must appeal to a large number of demographics, and, therefore, must be conservative and passively enjoyable. *Terra Nova* failed, then, because, in order to appeal to a mass audience, it was cinematically special effects driven and offered old-fashioned ideologies, which completely contradicted the core qualities of cult television.

Genres, however, evolve and adapt to changes in culture, dominant ideologies, and audience practices. In 1969, network executives would never have guessed that *The Flying Nun* (ABC, 1967-70) and *Bewitched* (ABC, 1964-72) were about to be surpassed by *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-77) and *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971-79). Changes in television technologies and audience expectations led to the popularity of the socially-relevant *All in the Family* in 1971 and the sophisticated style of *Hill Street Blues* in 1981. In 2012, the proliferation of cable networks, the popularity of Internet streaming video, and the development of long-form Internet-based original programming are catalyzing further changes in audience composition.

Audience erosion has become a yearly challenge for broadcast network executives. While a successful program garnered 30 or more million viewers in the 1970s, the highest-rated original program in the 2011 - 2012 television season – *American Idol* – averaged fewer than 20 million viewers (Kubicek, 2012). The networks no longer have any hope of attracting 30 or 40 million viewers with a weekly, scripted, original series. Thus, programmers have to accept that the opportunity to attract a mass audience has disappeared, or, alternatively, the definition of

what constitutes a mass audience has to be adjusted. Inevitably, in the near future, any

distinction between mass and fragmented audiences will be moot. The cult audience will be

synonymous with the mass audience.

In light of these changes, the broadcast networks no longer have the luxury of acting like

broadcast networks. Thirty years ago, the networks consistently cancelled shows with ratings in

the low 20 millions. In Spring 2012, Fox renewed *Fringe* – which hovers around three million

viewers weekly (Anonymous, 2012) – for a sixth season. That three million rating is

disturbingly close to the 2.1 million viewers that watched the premiere of *Newsroom* (HBO,

2012), which, on premium cable, was enough to trigger an ecstatic early second season pick-up.

Pretty soon, the ratings standard for cable will also become the standard for network television.

On a daily basis, the networks will have to be happy with five or six million viewers.

Commercial television will no longer be a medium of mass culture in the way that it has

previously been conceived. Rather than affecting culture by sheer numbers, network influence

will come in the form of the buzz and advertising dollars that cult television elicits, i.e. the shows

that everyone is talking about regardless of broad demographic appeal.

So, while *Terra Nova* was a noble experiment, it was also a naïve one. It was an attempt

to recapture a mass audience that simply does not watch TV the way it used to. Thought about in

another way, though, *Terra Nova* was also a prescient attempt, perhaps unconsciously, to

forcibly close the gap between the cult TV audience and the mass audience. That gap is closing

anyway, and *Terra Nova* was an effort to force relevancy at the end of the mass television era.

In the end, Fox had the right idea; they just went about it the wrong way. Rather than clinging to

the old-fashioned idea that a mass audience can be 40 million viewers strong, the networks need

to adapt to the new conceptualization of an audience that is both fragmented *and* mass

simultaneously. All indications point to the fact that, soon, five or six million viewers may be

the largest audience any television network – broadcast or cable – will attract, outside of the

Superbowl and major disaster coverage. Therefore, rather than taking inspiration from their own

historical accomplishments, the networks should be studying the recent successes of AMC,

Showtime, and TNT. In short, the broadcast networks need to start acting like cable networks.

Appendix A. List of Episodes

Episode Number	Title	Air Date	Writer	Director
1	Genesis (Part I)	9.26.2011	Craig Silberstein, Kelly Marcel, Brannon Braga, and David Fury	Alex Graves
2	Genesis (Part II)	9.26.2011	Brannon Braga and David Fury	Alex Graves
3	Instinct	10.03.2011	Rene Echevarria and Brannon Braga	Jon Cassar
4	What Remains	10.10.2011	Brynn Malone	Nelson McCormick
5	The Runaway	10.17.2011	Barbara Marshall	Jon Cassar
6	Bylaw	10.31.2011	Paul Grellong	Nelson McCormick
7	Nightfall	11.07.2011	Terry Matalas and Travis Fickett	Jon Cassar
8	Proof	11.14.10211	David Graziano and Brynn Malone	Bryan Spicer
9	Vs.	11.21.011	Jose Molina	Bryan Spicer
10	Now You See Me	11.28.2011	Paul Grellong	Karen Gaviola
11	Within	12.12.2011	Barbara Marshall	Karen Gaviola
12	Occupation	12.19.2011	Brynn Malone and Barbara Marshall	Jon Cassar
13	Resistance	12.19.2011	Terry Matalas and Travis Fickett	Jon Cassar

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EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	**Syracuse University**	Syracuse, NY
	S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications	Expected May 2015
	Mass Communications	

M.A.	**Syracuse University**	Syracuse, NY
	S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications	August 2012

Media Studies
Thesis: *Terra Nova*, An Experiment in Creating Cult Television for a Mass Audience
Advisor: Professor Robert Thompson
GPA: 4.00/4.00

B.A.	**University of Chicago**	Chicago, IL

Bachelor of Arts with Honors in English and Creative Writing   June 2007
Creative Honors Thesis: "With Respect to the Man from Detroit," *Sports Night* spec script
Advisor: Professor Ed Ferrara
GPA: 3.65/4.00, Dean's List 2004 – 2007

RESEARCH INTERESTS:

My research interests are in entertainment television and popular culture, with specific attention to how television and culture both reflect and influence social and political situations. Within this, I am particularly interested in how science fiction television is socio-historically relevant. I have experience in humanistic research as well as both qualitative and quantitative methods of social science research.

RESEARCH:

Conference Papers

Osur, L. (2012). *All This Has Happened Before:* Battlestar Galactica *as a Dialogue on the War on Terror.* Presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Conference. Chicago, IL.

Osur, L. (2012). *Aliens in the Closet: Representations of LGBT Characters in American Science Fiction Television Programs.* Presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Conference. Chicago, IL.

Dolan, E. & Osur, L. (2012). *Real of Fiction? Perceived Realism, Presence, and Attitude Change in Reality Programming.* Presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Conference. Chicago, IL.

Osur, L. (2012). *Following the 1996 Telecommunications Act: Media Mergers and the Public Interest Standard.* Presented at the 2012 International Communication Association Conference. Phoenix, AZ.

Osur, L. & Parotte, J. (2011). *The Face of the Joke: Identification and Enjoyment in Popular Television Comedies.* Presented at the 2012 Popular Culture Association Conference. Boston, MA.

Osur, L. & Parotte, J. (2011). *The Face of the Joke: Identification and Enjoyment in Popular Television Comedies.* Presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Mid-Winter Conference. Norman, OK.

Under Preparation

Osur, L. (2011). *While You Stroll in New Orleans: A Cultural Geography Approach to David Simon's* Treme. (will be submitted to the 2013 Society for Cinema & Media Studies Conference, Chicago, IL)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University   Syracuse, NY
Instructional Associate   Fall 2010 – present
Television-Radio-Film Department
TRF 235: Principles & Practices
TRF 300/600: TV in the Age of the Internet
TRF 400/600: Origins of American Entertainment, 1830-1939
TRF 510: Content 360: Seminar in Multiplatform Business
TRF 549: Television Business
TRF592: Film Business
TRF 635: Industry Forces
TRF 636: Critical and Historical Perspectives on Film and Television
TRF 637: Telecommunications Law & Policy
TRF 683: Communication Industry Frontiers
- Lecture and meet with students individually
- Run discussion sections with 15-25 students
- Write and administer exams, quizzes, and assignments
- Grade exams and papers
- Provide necessary support for professors

Guest Lectures

Television Business
S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University
August 31, 2010
> Lectured class of 20 graduate students on the current state of the television industry

Telecommunications Law & Policy
S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University
November 11, 2010
> Lectured class of 40 graduate students on US legal issues related to advertisements on broadcast television

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Weigel Broadcasting, WCIU/WWME   Chicago, IL
Program Director   June 2007 – May 2010
Me-TV and Me TOO Chicago, Me-TV Milwaukee, WMYS-69 Southbend
- Developed and maintained programming initiatives and directives.
- Analyzed current market conditions and reacted with creative programming strategies.
- Predicted future programming trends and negotiated with syndicators to clear programming that fits the needs of the stations.
- Coordinated with Sales and Promotions Managers to create and execute programming stunts.
- Oversaw the development, launch and maintenance of the Me-TV Chicago website.
- Consistently monitored the program outputs of all stations for overall transition effectiveness related to programming, on-air promotions, and spot placement.
- Ensured compliance with all FCC regulations, including E/I and public affairs requirements.

Rochester Research Group   Rochester, NY
Intern/Projects Assistant   June – August 2006
- Assisted clients at qualitative and quantitative market research group.
- Wrote and implemented surveys, analyzed data, and created reports for focus groups and internet, mail, and telephone-based surveys.
- Managed accounts locally, nationally, and internationally, including CooperVision, Bank of New York, Monroe Community College, and Nalgene-Nunc.

LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC SERVICE:

Blind Peer Review   2011
Communication, Culture and Critique

Graduate Student Representative, Graduate Program Committee   2010 - 2011
S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University

Graduate Student Representative, Teaching Standards Committee   2010 - 2011
S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University

Media Studies Open House Panel Participant   2011
S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University

Producer and Head of Writing Staff   2007 – 2010
Geek by Night, www.geekshow.us

Founder and Editor   2004 – 2007
Otium Magazine, an on-line prose magazine for longer works and new media pieces
University of Chicago

Goaltender, Rochester Youth Hockey & The University of Chicago   1997 – 2007

SPECIAL SKILLS:

Graphic & Presentation Software: Photoshop, Keynote, Powerpoint, and Prezi
Professional Research & Programming Software: Peter Storer/SIMS, Arianna, Galaxy
        Navigator, Wide Orbit
Research Software: Biopac, MediaLab, SurveyGizmo, and SurveyMonkey
Statistical Analysis Software: SPSS
Language: Moderate French

Travel: Austria, Cambodia, Canada, Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, Hungary,
        Ireland, Japan, Poland, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Vietnam, Wales