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Extraordinary television time travel and the wonderful end to the working day

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Abstract

In this article I will present two arguments. First, the argument that the time travel television series historically provided viewers with a spectacular temporal and spatial alternative to the routine of everyday life, the regulation of television scheduling, and the small-world confines of domestic subjectivity. Taking the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, predominantly in a UK viewing environment, I will suggest that the special effect rendering of the time travel sequence expanded the viewer's material universe, and affectively wrenched the television set free from the strictures of scheduling and realist programming. Further, the time travel series readily and regularly took the domestic space, the ordinary day and the everyman/person into awesome environments and situations that suggested alternative lifestyles and behaviours, with a different existential tempo and rhythm. At a narrative, thematic, meta-textual, and aesthetically spectacular level, television time travel saw to the wonderful end of the working day. Case studies include *Sapphire and Steal*, *Dr Who*, and *Quantum Leap*. Second, the article will argue that rather than the contemporary time travel television series being an extraordinary alternative to ordinary life, they instead articulate convergence culture, deregulation, multiple channel viewing, and time-shift culture where there is no such thing as an ordinary working day or domestic viewing context.

Keywords

The box, heterotopia of special effects, liquid modernity, sensation, time travel

Feeling boxed-in

I have always been enchanted by the very words *special effects*. Seen written on the credit sequence, poster, or in a critical review, or sounded out in trailers and adverts, they are emotive

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letters to something extraordinary, something wonderful and deeply affecting. As a child in particular, they were a calling card for me to go to see that movie, or to tune in to the box, where, given scheduling patterns in the UK in the 1980s, it would for me mean a TV dinner set in intergalactic contexts. Special effects allowed me to encounter incredible creatures, planets, and civilizations beyond the metaphorical and small-world confines of the little cathode ray, black and white box on which I would avidly watch science fiction programmes. In addition, the infinitely variable journeying of special effects allowed me to travel away from, and free of, the small-room, domestic context in which I found myself viewing. Special effects poured out of the box, threw unearthly light shadows and sound across the room, and lifted me upwards and outwards into and through spaces, places and times once unimaginable.

Homes are very particular social and cultural environments; familiar and familial, lived in and encountered in the most ordinary but intimate of ways. They are a type of body, of skin, an emotional and belonging environment that allows or enables one to call them home (Bourdieu, 1990 [1980]). From the middle of the last century, with the mass production of similarly designed and built houses, on parcelled up plots of land, many homes were themselves box-shaped and placed on box-shaped grids with regulated and regular lines, roads, pathways, and uniform green spaces (Harris and Larkham, 2003). In an experiential, closed-in sense, this was particularly true of high density, low socio-economic level housing in the UK, where conformity in design and planning was (and still is) the norm for cost factors and where perhaps – in the context of the post-Second World War period – modernist utopian imaginings hoped that mass-built, faceless homes would free society ('the masses') from property hierarchies (Rowe, 1993).

These were boxes, then, which framed one's viewing experience and contained one's everyday life. If one was to extend this concept of the boxed frame, the actual institutional and commercial imperatives that operated in UK broadcasting in the 1970s and 1980s produced a scheduling that was also boxed-in, with rules for their timing, patterning, and directed flow. One knew what was on the box without really having to check the TV guide since, in approximate terms, soap opera was followed by situation comedy was followed by drama was followed by the nightly news. This concept of television flow (Williams, 1992 [1974]), or repeated and causal segmentation (Fiske, 1987), or of flow and seamless segmentation (Feuer, 1983), created a framed viewing context in which elements, patterns, forms, segues and links were held together in an arresting chain-like gestalt.

These were thus boxes of perception, space and time, mirrored by and connected with the strictures of capitalist work and school time, and with the regulated patterning of the everyday and the everywhere. Routine existence, 'disciplinary society' to use Foucault's (1975) terms, was experienced from morning to night, in and through an articulating range of discursive practices and processes. For the most part, television was free of and from special effects unless countenanced in occasional, spectacle-driven ritual, such as the Royal Variety Show, or big events such as a Royal Wedding, or 'escapist' 'flights of fancy' genres such as science fiction. I would like to suggest that what television special effects gave life to during this time was a feeling of what it might be like to exist outside the box while still being inside it. While American soap operas such as *Dallas* (CBS, 1978–91) showed viewers glamorous, freer, less regulated lifestyles (Ang, 2013), it was science fiction and the wonder of the time travel scenario in particular that provided a seemingly limitless temporal-spatial alternative to life outside the in-box.

In the *Sapphire and Steel* (ATV, 1979–82) episode, 'Assignment 1: Escape through a Crack in Time' (1979), Time has invaded an old country house and stolen the parents of two children. As Sapphire (Joanna Lumley) informs the children:

> There is a corridor and the corridor is time, it surrounds all things and it passes through all things ... Time can enter into the present, break in, burst through and take things, take people ... It can become weakened, like worn fabric, and then time can reach in and take things that it wants.

In this episode, at a metaphoric level, time represents science fiction's capacity to transcend and recast the regulatory rules of everyday life: it can weaken, then bend and move the walls of the lived-in box; and it can take the viewer to and through any number of different time coordinates.

At a narrative level, the moment time invades the present, all the clocks in the house stop as if regulatory life can itself be arrested and escaped. In effect, this is the onto-logical and existential power of science fiction being demonstrated. The sound of the ticking of numerous time pieces (the Father of the house is an avid clock collector), and the silence that punctuates the arrival of Time, provide the acoustic key for the sublime wonderment that follows. The children, cut free of real-world time, witness its wayward spatial and temporal capabilities – time is no longer regular, linear or regulatory.

At the level of spectacle and special effects, walls, doorways, staircases and furniture become porous and dynamic. Ghosts, objects, memories made concrete, pour through them. For example, the wall in the girl's bedroom becomes a portal through which the ghosts of time can enter the present and steal people. This illusion of spatial movement is achieved through the use of the in-camera effect, the crash zoom, which distorts per-spective, creating the impression that the background is getting closer. Film images of space, phantom people, and objects from the past are also projected onto the bedroom wall to create the sense that two worlds are blending together. The boxed-in life is liquefied through the way special effects affect the construction of time and space.

One might term this a special type of 'heterotopia of time' or, better still, a *heterotopia of special effects*, outside or beyond the ordinary through which a synthesis of 'special' irregular moments of time and space, conjoined with the wonder of special effects, recasts the places in which one largely exists. The ordinary becomes extraordinary, and Other. In one scene, the four walls of the bedroom extend out and deepen, and a cloaked figure emerges in, between and through the space created, moving toward the children as they sit watching, like TV viewers. The wall then becomes a screen, hit by cluster-like particles and atoms, as a nursery rhyme incantation is heard. Time and space is on the move in this scene and its linear and logical order has been broken: they stop, expand, and contract even if by episode end they are again routinized, a point to which I will return below.

The grim and grey political contexts of the late 1970s and '80s are important here. Margaret Thatcher's far-right UK government (1979–87) initiated a period of vast economic change and transformation where greater home ownership became a marker of individualized success and family centredness, as wave after wave of new box-shaped suburbs sprouted in former greenfield sites. At the same time, there was a reduction in the number of council houses and flats as they were sold off to tenants, a

corresponding rise in homelessness, and of more expensive private rentals. The boxed home and the neatly packaged life became a battleground, at the ideological and economic centre of a society of haves and have-nots (Balchin and Rhoden, 2002).

It is not surprising, then, that the blue police phone box in *Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963–) comes to embody and translate this battleground over the box. It is itself a neatly drawn boxed-in home that carries the tools of surveillance and the machinery of governance, and also a time-and-space machine, bigger on the inside, which can access any point in time as it travels the cosmos. This is a box that can be opened, and that is in (special) effect a limitless environment.

A blue box across the cosmos

Doctor Who's blue police phone box encapsulated a rich sense of this culturally inscripted, life lived-in a box, feeling of the 1970s and 1980s, and yet also transcended it. The phone box is the Doctor's mobile home, but one in which he spends very little screen time, leaving for new and old world adventuring in almost every episode. Often positioned at the control centre, viewers perceive space as expanded, both inside and outside the box, as it hurtles through space.

There are multiple mostly unseen rooms in the box and hence a sense of it as both unknown and expandable. This is not, then, a realist box, a boxed home or neighbourhood, but a multi-dimensional environment that travels through, within and across layers of time and space. This is not a box but a living Tardis, a magical home, with a heart, soul and cosmic energy that seems able to transcend all scientific rules, regulatory norms and timecodes. The Tardis is a time and space machine operated by a Time Lord, which resists the very notion of the box and the metronome of capitalist life, since it/he/the viewer travels free of such impulses and constraints. If this limitless environment was conveyed through realist codes and conventions, then the transitory power of the phone box wouldn't be as affecting, as powerful. What is essential to its limitless potentiality is the alchemy and wonder of special effects that hurtle it through time and space, and which subsequently introduce the viewer to alternative possible worlds, peoples and civilizations.

In the episode 'The Robots of Death' (BBC, 1977), Leela (Louise Jameson) asks the Doctor (Tom Baker) to explain why the Tardis is bigger on the inside, to which he responds 'because insides and outsides are not in the same dimension'. He demonstrates this to be possible by showing how a big box can be fitted inside a small one if there is enough dimensional distance between them. The Doctor places different size boxes at a distance from one another, allowing visual illusion to stand-in for dimensionality. This scene is captured in a deep focus, long-shot, the Doctor holding the smaller box close to the camera, the bigger box remaining on the Tardis console, at a distance, thus allowing the viewer to see, through this perceptual trick, that big and small can be reversed.

In the previous scene we witness the Tardis spinning in deep space, set against a cluster of stars, while the cut to this sequence has Leela spinning a yo-yo. Not only is a metaphoric relationship implied between expansion and contraction, the reversibility of big and small and in and out, but also space and time are given literal string-like qualities. Importantly, special effects are central to the affecting power of the bend in reason in these scenes: they provide the miniatures and the optical technology to allow the Tardis

to appear life-size and as if it is hurtling through space (small becomes big); and they are self-reflexively referred to, not only through the Doctor's visual illusion trick, but also in his reference to multi-dimensionality as a feat accomplished by 'trans dimensional engineering', an allusion to the special effects team. The Doctor articulates why and how the box can no longer be hermetically sealed and special effects give the viewer the wondrous material to see it evidenced.

Episodes set on contemporary Earth suggest that behind the illusion of the (viewer's) boxed-in life is another, more exciting, riskier reality. Ordinary city and home environments are invaded, borders infiltrated, and regulation itself threatened. For example, in 'The City of Death' (BBC, 1979), the Doctor and Romana (Lalla Ward) are enjoying a holiday in Paris, 1979, when they become aware of a fracture in time. During a visit to the Louvre to see da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa', the Doctor purloins from a stranger, Countess Scarlioni, a bracelet that is actually an alien scanner device' (*Doctor Who The Classic Series*). The episode, the first to be shot on location, uses Parisian monuments and iconic settings to offer the limited sense of an exotic destination/location, outside of the UK lived-in box, but then expands its 'far away' sentiment through alien intervention and a doomsday scenario, where if Scaroth, last of the Jagaroth, re-writes time and saves his ship from exploding, life on Earth will not have gone through its evolutionary trajectory, thus leaving humanity in a state of primitive existence. People are not what they seem in this episode and spaces, interiors and doorways are shown to be dark portals to somewhere else not safe at all. The paranoia that surrounds and swells up suggests that the box is always under threat and never secure. It can be read, then, as an a escapist fantasy for those bored with living in the box, but it also shows the necessary bend in reason to enable the box both to be transgressed and to have transgressive potential.

Jonathan Bignell has argued that through time travel 'time travellers and cinema spectators are displaced from the reality of their own present and their own real location in order to be transported to an imaginary elsewhere and an imaginary elsewhen' (2004: 137). The same can be said of television time travel in this period, only more so, since the temporal and spatial location to be transcended is the tightly aligned series of boxed frames I referred to previously: the box in the corner of the room, the scheduling box that fixes programmes in viewing slots, the boxed room from which it is watched, the boxed neighbourhood one lives in, and the life-is-a-box that discursively defines modern existence. This transcendence of the box in all its forms occurs in and through what I would like to call the television of special attractions.

Television of special attractions

The time travel scenario often provides not only the futuristic narrative dynamic essential for the expanded universe of science fiction, but also the diegetic space for the deployment of the astonishing special effects used to capture this extraordinary temporal and spatial shifting. Time travel can be forward thrusting, as in space-bound ships leaving Earth for far, far, away destinations, or can point in all directions, with time criss-crossed, this way and that. The special effect rendering of the time travelling sequence is often sublime. Liquid lights and pulsating strange shapes and

vectors wrinkle the screen, and distorted faces, lost objects, and shimmering, revolving spacecraft emerge, smothered in the heat of travel, to engulf the screen and viewer in turn. To appropriate Tom Gunning's thesis on early cinema, this is as much about 'supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle' (1994: 230) as it is about narrative development. This special television of attractions offers the viewer a domesticated show-and-tell, viewed from the living room, which synaesthetically conjures up the power and sublime beauty of moving in, within, and through the four walls of time and space.

In the opening title sequence to *Quantum Leap* (NBC, 1989–93), Dr. Sam Beckett (Scott Bakula) steps into the Quantum Leap Accelerator and vanishes. In a high tech laboratory, the viewer watches his naked body become electrically charged, lightning rods enter his skin, and smoke or cloud rise up and around him, as the exterior space takes on the appearance of liquid, atomized space. His body then begins to melt, or dissolve, blending with the deep space transposed around him. Both his body, penetrated by light-like radiation, and the irradiated space that surrounds him move and mix, until Sam wakes up in an alternate past as someone else entirely. This is a spectacular reincarnation, rendering body, time and space mobile and interchangeable.

Viewing from a grey box in a political landscape that created a deep sense of boxed-in living, these examples of fluid becoming have ideological consequences or implications. Andrew Gordon argues that many more time travel science fiction films have been made since 1979 because there is 'a pervasive uneasiness about our present and uncertainty about our future, along with a concurrent nostalgia about our past' (2004: 116). What Gordon suggests is that there is a close correspondence between the political and economic crises that shaped this decade and the flight or evacuation mentality that characterized its science fiction films. Again, this can also be said of television time travel, but rather than it being necessarily an indicator of flight or escape, one can see these texts as embodying the desire to transform the material existence of boxed-in living. Given that the home is central to the 1980s political crisis in the UK, the ability to transcend the home is crucial to the way spectacle recasts the domestic into something infinitely variable and potentially subversive (outside the regulated rules of time and space).

Nonetheless, time travel has another, distinct ideological function, since it provides the necessary distancing effect science fiction employs to be able to address metaphorically the most pressing issues and themes that concern people in the present. If the modern world is one where the individual feels alienated and powerless in the face of bureaucratic structures and regulatory practices and processes, then time travel suggests that Everyman and Everybody is important in shaping history, making a real and quantifiable difference to the way the world turns out. In effect, time travel allows the individual to bring a new order to the regulatory streams of the universe – to make it in their own image. In *Quantum Leap*, Sam enters the past always as someone else, to 'put right what once went wrong'. He becomes 'ordinary people', but in historically important contexts and settings, always facing hurdles and obstacles he eventually overcomes, to right that wrong, and to put history back on course. History can, then, be re-written, wrongs can be put right, and one can leave one's box and take part in the big decisions. Sam is the embodiment of the heroic monomyth.

Nonetheless, I would like to return to an inherent tension in the way the science fiction television of this period recasts the experience of boxed-in living. This tension is manifested in two distinct ways. First, by episode end, irregular time has been defeated and ordinary life returned to, as in *Sapphire and Steele's* 'Escape through a Crack in Time' episode. In *Quantum Leap*, Sam always fixes the faultlines in the family home so that the social order is ultimately restored. Second, the ongoing battle to secure time, to fill in its cracks, and to bring order back to existence, works against the freedom and possibility time initially opened up. At the wonderful end to a science fiction television episode, the working day will still resume tomorrow, and life in-the-box will still go on. In *Doctor Who,* the Doctor's ultimate aim is to preserve human life as he knows it, in effect preserving the boxed-in way of life he seems to work against. One can therefore read television's science fiction function as bardic, cathartic and, ultimately, ideologically conservative.

There is, however, always a weight of surplus value in these spectacularly rendered narratives that cannot be contained by the force of episode closure. The box has been opened, its contents poured out, which offers the viewer a way out of the box, and a greater understanding of its ideological and political limitations. This surplus value is also experiential, sensorial based, a body-centred phenomenon, where:

> We are able to be touched by the substance of images, to feel a visual atmosphere envelop us, to experience weight and suffocation and the need for air, to take flight in kinetic exhilaration and freedom even as we are relatively bound to our seats, to be knocked backwards by a sound, to taste and smell the world on the screen. (Sobchack 2000)

The deployment of time-travel special effects is, then, a sensationally arresting encounter. One experiences a different type of life, through a heightened set of feelings, the value of which lives on and on and on. Life in the ordinary box is thus defamiliarized and the viewer left with the profound feeling that things, objects, time and space are limitless in potential. This is a sublime encounter, irreducible to ideology, to discourse, language and power, but rather initiated beyond it, in a sea of impressions and affects that cannot be boxed-in. Ultimately, in the context of SFX time travel, the ordinary becomes endowed with sublime properties and intensities that cast one free in a universe that has been chaotically re-ordered.

One might have expected that, as a result of the advances in special effects entailed by the digital revolution, this process of recasting the box would have even more potential today. But does it?

The box overflows

The contemporary television landscape is arguably marked by overflow and sustained convergence in which:

> Changes in communications, storytelling and information technologies are reshaping almost every aspect of contemporary life – including how we create, consume, learn, and interact with each other. A whole range of new technologies enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content and in the process, these technologies have altered the ways that consumers interact with core institutions of government, education, and commerce. (Jenkins, 2001)

Overflow emerges when 'the text of the TV show is no longer limited to the television medium' (Brooker, 2004: 569), while convergence involves a number of related technological, economic, cultural and 'social and organic' articulations (Jenkins, 2001) through which viewing takes place in shifting time and place contexts, interactivity and mobility, and the searching and securing of content through platforms and web interfaces from all corners of the world. Television is no longer simply or singularly viewed on a box in the corner of the room in a constructed flow schedule but rather downloaded, streamed, recorded and re-mixed, and watched on three-dimensional plasma screens, mobile devices, computer screens, tablets and laptops. In this context, television is multi-channel and involves synergetic links and off-shoots to other media content and platforms. The contemporary television landscape is thus seemingly not at all box-like, not limited in its production and reception contexts, but infinitely expandable and found in and on a series of screens of different shapes and sizes, transported to and from global places and networks, so that far-and-near exist in the same liquid slipstream. It seems that the time travel experience is now embedded in the rhythm and pace of (post)modern life.

Digital special effects have helped to foster the sense that one exists in an expandable and easily navigated universe, since its rendering processes and capabilities have meant that what can be filmed or captured is now almost infinitely variable (Wood, 2007). Digital special effects are increasingly found, as costs depreciate, in all forms of television, and in everyday event-based spectacles such as weddings and school balls. It can be argued that they have increased the level of wonder one experiences because they are essentially boundless in their effects/affects.

While television special effects of the 1980s can be seen as crude and rudimentary, plastic and analogue, the digital age has created sheets and layers so intricate and complex that everything within the diegetic world now seems possible. In *Sliders* (Fox, Sci-Fi Channel, 1995–9), for example, the time-window through which they jump, and which takes them from one alternate universe to another, is rendered porous through digital special effects that allow the window to flex, and stretch, to be simultaneously concave and convex. The impression is that time and space are fluid in their innate constitution.

This is exactly the quality of digital special effects today. Their capacity to endow the fiction with the presence of limitlessness and their seemingly limitless power is in part dependent on their ability to capture and create things not present in the production process. Consequently:

> Digital imaging in its dual modes of image processing and CGI challenges indexical based notions of photographic realism. As Bill Nichols has noted, a digitally designed or created image can be subject to infinite manipulation. Its reality is a function of complex algorithms stored in computer memory rather than a necessary mechanical resemblance to a referent ... no profilmic referent (needs to) exist to ground the indexicality of its image. (Prince, 1996: 31)

Digital special effects' capacity to create things that have not been filmed, to render images, landscapes, portals and creatures without need for an index sign to be present, or

for a profilmic event to have taken place, not only destroys and rebirths the parameters of the box, but also reconstitutes (its/our) existence as infinitely variable.

The rebooted *Doctor Who* best expresses this expansion in and of the overflow, media convergence, and the digital recasting of time travel and the seemingly limitless potential of the box. *Who* exists simultaneously on different screens, is connected to games, merchandising and official blogs, is the subject of fanfilm and fanzines, tweets, updates and behind the scenes expose. *Who* is a franchise, a commodity intertext, with numerous spin-offs such as *Torchwood* (BBC, 2006–11) and *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (BBC, 2007–11). Its content, then, pours across various platforms, can be accessed/streamed/downloaded almost anywhere in the world, and it asks its fans to interact and engage with all this material. *Who* exists as the epitome of time-shift, convergence culture, and makes nonsense of the boxed-in life, since its fantasies and imaginings ripple across the mediated world.

This process is underwritten by its use of digital special effects and narrative arcs where the phone box is constantly opened, time extended and amplified, and place and space mutate and shape-shift. A good example is in the episode 'The Big Bang' (BBC, 2010) when the Tardis explodes, captured in wonderful cosmos-blast imagery, indicative of the motif that no box is containable in the contemporary age. A similar reading could be made of the Pandorica, a spectacular prison built to hold the Doctor, where it is only in the living present, with contemporary special effects, that a prison that cannot be escaped is in fact opened and time set free.

There are also episodes where rooms and spaces are constantly breached, where hidden doorways exist, or where everyday entrances are portals to alternate spaces. Hospitals can be taken to the moon (Smith and Jones, 2007). Hotels can change their rooming configuration ('The God Complex', 2011). Council flats can devour people ('Night Terrors', 2011). Libraries can exist in the mind of the child and the eye of the television screen ('Forest of the Dead', 2008). 'Blink' (2007) and a stone statue can move so quickly it can kill you before you open your eyes. Many of these scenes are made manifest through digital processing and imaging, so that narrative and digital special effects converge and embrace each other, ending the age of the boxed-in life through the spectacular re-rendering of the real. But is this really so?

Nostalgia for the ordinary wonderful

One might argue that time travel has become so very ordinary, everyday, and the special effects employed to render them more often than not banal and superficial. They are no longer an embodiment of a special heterotopia but normality itself (Pierson, 2002). It can be argued that life is so awash with special effects that these can no longer create the moment of unfamiliarity in the ordinary, or the sublime wonder at the shifting streets and sheets of time, since they are now the actual oxygen of the everyday and the everywhere. Special effects have become the cornerstone of the society of spectacle 'where all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles' (Debord, 1999: 95).

While new media technologies have afforded people the opportunity to time and space shift, and engage with media texts through a range of mobile platforms and interfaces, one can ultimately view these as new super boxes still in consort with regulatory practices and processes. In fact, the level of surveillance and monitoring that

occurs through internet providers, search engines and the social media suggests a new containment and monitoring wall far greater than anything that preceded it.

The box hasn't vanished, then, but expanded to ensure that social control is managed across these new global terrains and interfaces. Of course, people still live in boxes, and the recent global financial crisis created a new wave of house-holding haves and have-nots. While contemporary television science fiction does all it can to discount and reconfigure the parameters of the box, what might nonetheless be in play is a deeply conservative ideological tick or trick to maintain the new hyper-rhythm of the status quo and assuage guilt over the inequalities in home living. It is telling that all four of the Doctor's most recent companions come from different forms of boxed/broken homes: Rose Tyler (Billie Piper) is from a flat in a run-down council estate; Martha Jones (Freema Agyeman) is from a line of back-to-back terraced houses; Donna Noble (Catherine Tate) from quaint if plastic suburbia; Amy Pond (Karen Gillan) from a deserted country house; and Clara Oswald (Jenna Coleman) is disembedded, living multiple lives, never really able to settle in her apartment. In an age where one is supposedly free to travel, they are trapped within an ordinary life they want to escape, and only the Doctor grants them this escape.

That said, there is a new tempo and rhythm to (post)modern life: the box feels open 24/7 and one finds oneself constantly available to communication, nearly always tuned into one electronic portal or another. Time has accelerated, is counted in tiny bits, and one is given the impression of being constantly on the move in spaces constantly on the move. This is in effect the 'logic' of the age of liquid modernity, where one appears to be free of regulation and control, and where one is asked or compelled to live lightly and instantly (Bauman, 2000: 123–9).

We might argue that this living lightly and freely produces an existential terror, as relationship security and situational stability are lost to free-networking and constant movement. I would like to suggest, then, that this living instantly and lightly produces a nostalgia for the past, for the certainty of the boxed-in life, and for the analogue, optical and mechanical special effects that take us back to the age where security and stability was imagined to be in place. *Life on Mars* (BBC, 2006–7) and *Ashes to Ashes* (BBC, 2008–10) can both be read as time travel texts the architecture of which is built upon this longing for a fixed point in time, where time, space, human relations, the working day, schooling, rest and leisure were all fixed and regular, like a precision time piece. Of course, this nostalgia for a past long gone, and which holds it own repressive demons, does nothing to hold time travel at bay. It becomes merely a slip in time, a heterotopia indebted to memory and nostalgia, which will ultimately in turn be swept away in the great multi-dimensional corridors of time and space.

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