Dreams of a Subversive Future
Dreams of a Subversive Future
Sexuality, (Hetero)normativity, and
Queer Potential in Science Fiction
Film and Television

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I’ll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling: like that singular organic jewel of our seas, which grows brighter as one woman wears it and, worn by another, dulls and goes to dust. Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are. But both are sensitive.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*
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This book is dedicated to Lo, who taught me to slow down and play in the moment – I hope the future holds endless possibilities.

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to explore depictions of sexuality in popular science fiction film and television through a focus on storytelling, narrative, characters and genre. The thesis analyses science fiction as a film and television genre with a focus on the conventions, interpretations, and definitions of genre as part of larger contexts. Central to the argumentation is films and television series from Star Wars and Star Trek to Firefly and Torchwood. The approach allows a consideration of how the storytelling conventions of science fiction are, and have been, affected by its contexts. Through a consideration of a historical de-emphasis on narrative complexity and character formation in science fiction, the thesis displays and analyses a salient tendency towards juvenile and heteronormative narratives. This tendency is represented by a concept that I call the Star’ver’ses, through which this dominant idea of science fiction as a juvenile, techno-centred, masculine, and heteronormative genre became firmly established. This generic cluster has remained a dominant influence on science fiction film and television since the 1980s. However, as argued, a major discursive shift took place in science fiction at the turn of the millennium. This adult turn in science fiction film, and television in particular, is attributed to contextual changes, but also to the influence of television dramaturgy. It explains why science fiction in the 21st century is not as unfamiliar with depictions of sexuality as its predecessors were. This turn does not signal a total abandonment of what the Star’ver’ses represent; it instead contributes to a change to this dominant idea of the generic identity of science fiction.

While sexuality has been disassociated from much science fiction, it is also argued that the science fiction narrative has extensive queer potential. Generic conventions, such as aliens and time travel, invite both queer readings and queer storytelling; the latter however is seldom used, especially in science fiction film. A majority of the examples of science fiction narrative that use this queer potential can be found in television. In cinema, however, this progression is remarkably slow. Therefore, the thesis analyses whether the storytelling techniques of Hollywood cinema, to which science fiction film owes much of its dramaturgy, could be considered heteronormative. A comparison is made to television dramaturgy in order to display the possibilities for the serialised, character-focused science fiction narrative. Ultimately, the thesis investigate the possibility for subversive storytelling and
whether a normative use of dramaturgy needs to be overthrown in order to
tell a subversive story.

**Keywords:**
Science fiction, film, television, genre, sexuality, queer, storytelling, gender,
subversive, intelligibility, *Torchwood, Firefly, Star Wars, Star Trek*, adult
Introduction

The topic for this dissertation – sexuality in science fiction - originated from my dual position as a former student of cinema studies with a feminist and queer theoretical approach and a fan of science fiction. The combination of these two positions resulted in disappointment with the unfulfilled possibilities of science fiction narratives in film and television. While science fiction narratives gave the impression of endless fictional possibilities, the absence of certain stories and characters was apparent. Though these narratives focused on the future, on different times, places, societies and even species, the construction and depiction of these were often extremely normative in terms of gender, and even more prominently - sexuality. Thus, despite what can be called a queer potential of the science fiction narrative it is seldom used in popular science fiction film and television. These heteronormative depictions upheld heterosexuality as something everlasting and unchangeable in narratives about both human and alien societies, and imagined futures. Furthermore, issues of sexuality were not only peripheral to narrative concerns but also to the critical study of science fiction. While, for example, the unsatisfactory portrayal of women is a subject well researched and critiqued, the limited amount of research into sexuality, and queer sexuality in particular, in science fiction made clear the necessity of this study.

As I encountered some examples of films and television series that actually made use of this queer potential of science fiction, they illustrated how generic conventions, such as depictions of aliens and the future or time travel, could be used productively to question normativity. In addition, these examples underlined changes across time and the normative construction of genre. I began to contemplate to what extent popular science fiction depicted not only homosexuality, but sexuality in general, and by extension, how it dealt with issues of relationships and characters. The idea of science fiction as a genre, and the multiple sources of its definition, seemed to allude to concepts relating primarily to extrapolation and fictional representations of science and technology. In other words, the science, in science fiction, appeared to take precedence over its fiction. For this reason, I will begin this study with a short background and briefly discuss some features of science fiction history, content and ways of understanding the genre. The focus is the relationship between science fiction and science/technology as part in a de-emphasis on sexuality.
Background

Film and literature sharing form and content with what was later named science fiction, have a longer history prior to its naming. For example, science fiction literature is often accredited as beginning with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Filmmaker and magician George Méliès’s depiction of mankind’s trip to the moon in *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) is likewise considered to be the first ever science fiction film. Méliès has been named “one of the founding fathers of cinematic science fiction” and *Le Voyage dans la Lune* established many themes and narrative concerns that have remained central to science fiction such as aliens, spaceships and special effects (Telotte, *Science Fiction* 79-80).

The term science fiction was coined in the late 1920s and has its roots in the pulp magazines. It was first used in Hugo Gernsback’s magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1929, subsequent to the term “scientification” (Attebery, “The magazine era” 33). Both terms highlights the connection between the narratives and science/technology and have for many been considered an important definition and part of the answer to the question of what science fiction is and how to define it (see e.g. Johnston 39-40; Telotte, *Science Fiction* 28).¹

For science fiction film and television the connection to science and technology is not only thematically or narratively expressed but a foundation for the ability to tell a story. The production, distribution and content of science fiction film relies greatly on the technology of the medium itself (see e.g. Johnston 40). Thus, for science fiction cinema, the focus on technology is not only on-screen but also off-screen and relates to the technology of the audiovisual medium. Science fiction film can be seen as dealing with technology in relation to its medium and to “reflect the technology that makes them possible” (Telotte, *Science Fiction* 25). It has been suggested that “[m]ovies about the future tend to be about the future of movies” (Stewart 159). Starting with Méliès this technological foundation of science fiction cinema became an integral part of the genre. Many of his films were concerned with technology both on-screen in the form of content and plot, and off-screen with innovative special effects made possible by the new technology of cinema. Méliès used the technological potential in the new medium “to create a whole new sense of time and space” (Telotte, *Science Fiction* 79). Science fiction film scholar J.P. Telotte argues that the technological foundation of the genre helps form its identity (*Science Fiction* 28).

¹ This is also true for the content that Gernsback included in the magazine, which was not only dedicated to fiction but also “scientific journalism” (Attebery, “The magazine era” 34).
A certain type of self-awareness or meta-perspective is described in science fiction in relation to the technology of its medium. Genre theorist Steve Neale states that it is not only the effect on the audience as a result of the special effects that are fundamental to the genre, but also the films’ own awareness of this. “In fact, [...] the effect and the awareness are interdependent” (“You’ve Got to Be” 11). Television, like cinema, can also be said to be occupied with its own technological existence or as media theorist John Ellis puts it: “TV’s reflexivity is extraordinary” (“Television Production” 275) and science fiction television is no exception. In his historical survey of science fiction television M. Keith Booker argues that television, as a highly technological medium, makes it suitable for a genre such as science fiction (2). However, the use of special effects in television has traditionally been limited by budget and the small screen (cf. Booker 89).

The technology of special effects have been an important component for science fiction film in particular. Telotte calls it “a most significant component of the science fiction genre, [...]. More so than any other film genre, science fiction relies heavily on what we might most broadly term special effects” (Science Fiction 24). Special effects and spectacle are also described by film and science fiction scholar Mark Bould to be important to science fiction as a film genre: “The special position afforded to spectacle within narrative sf cinema is evident in the feature-length sf movies which began to appear around 1915” (80). This has proven to be consistently important throughout the history of science fiction film, and remains so today.

This techno-centred approach to science fiction and science fiction film’s intimate relationship to special effects has brought to light issues concerned with the relationship between the spectacle, of for example special effects, and narrative. The focus on special effects and the techno-centred understanding of science fiction serve as a background to understanding the perceived relationship between science fiction and its characters. The potential danger with this focus on technology if it is favoured at the expense of characters and narrative has been underlined (see e.g. La Valley 157-8). Bould notes in relation to the 1924 film *Paris qui dort*: “Although the special effects are few, they nonetheless demonstrate the typical unwillingness of the sf movie to subjugate effects and spectacle to narrative logic” (81; my emphasis).

For science fiction scholar Susan Sontag, visual destruction is the focus of the science fiction film, and she considers it “one of the purest forms of spectacle” in her influential essay from 1965 “The Imagination of Disaster” (43). She argues that the audience is rarely subjected to the feelings of the characters and this is what makes it a pure form of spectacle. It is not the characters’
emotional response to that disaster but rather the image and “the aesthetics of destruction” that is the core of science fiction film (41). Sontag writes:

Science fiction films are not about science. They are about disaster, [...]. Thus, the science fiction film [...] is concerned with the aesthetics of destruction, with the particular beauties to be found in wreaking havoc, making a mess. And it is in the imagery of destruction that the core of a good science fiction film lies. (41)

That does not mean that Sontag denies science fiction its connections to technology. It is still a crucial part of science fiction film, since it is “a technological view” of the destruction defined as an aesthetic and dispassionate view of violence and destruction (43). Though Sontag’s essay is written in 1965 it illustrates well the imagined relationship between the genre and its technology at the time of early academic interest in science fiction film.

This continued emphasis on spectacle remains as science fiction becomes associated with the blockbuster film. Bould notes:

Blockbuster cinema, in which sf has played a large part since the 1970s, is often criticized for the way in which it permits the production of spectacle to override more traditional concerns with character development, narrative coherence and thematic elaboration, [...]. (94)

However, simply dividing and separating narrative/characters and spectacle/special effects is somewhat arbitrary. For example, science fiction scholar Warren Buckland argues “that special effects in the digital image have a function to perform beyond the creation of spectacle” (“Between” 24). He argues against idea that action sequences and special effects in Hollywood cinema are used without narrative motivation. He discusses the impact of the digital era, and computer animated effects, on special effects and the technology of cinema in relation to Jurassic Park (1993) and The Lost World: Jurassic Park (1997) and examines “the unique way special effects in the post-photographic (that is, digital) image articulate possible worlds” (24). His point is that in the films the special effects and action sequences are motivated by the representation of a possible world (25). He goes on to conclude that the “interactions created between the digital dinosaurs and live action/real backgrounds within a single shot help to create a new realism in the digital image, for the effects create the illusion of spatial and diegetic unity” (31). In his two examples he sees the special effects used in order to “attempt to make the possible believable” (32). This suggests that the spectacle can be used in productive ways for the narrative, for example by creating believable narratives.
While I agree that the separation between spectacle/narrative is not a dichotomous relationship, the issue is instead the idea it fosters about what science fiction is and what this suggests about its relationship to its characters. If handled in a productive way the factors spectacle and special effects can be used in the name of narrative and character, but in Hollywood science fiction that is not always the case.² Even though spectacle does not necessarily exclude narrative I would not contest that at least a large part of Hollywood science fiction film lays its emphasis on spectacle rather than narrative and hence, does not leave much room for narrative or characters. But this is no surprise since the generic identity, especially of the science fiction film but also of science fiction television, is governed by the notion that science fiction is primarily about science and technology. From that point of view it might be no wonder that science fiction’s dealings with its characters and their stories are often limited.

This however does not mean that science fiction does not deal with narrative or characters, in fact I would argue that all Hollywood science fiction films actually use both. So the issue is twofold, both taking into consideration what these actual characters are and do in science fiction and criticising the dominant idea that science fiction primarily is and should focus on depictions of science and technology. I instead propose that the inherent possibilities of science fiction narratives are more effective considering and contending the norms of our society, and this happens through the use of narratives and characters.

In this dissertation I focus on the narratives and the characters of science fiction in order to investigate depictions of sexuality. By considering how they relate to the generic identity of science fiction I pose questions about not only genre, but also about (hetero)normativity. The disassociation of characters, and by extension, relationships and sexuality not only dictates what is seen as science fiction and what is not, it also presupposes a type of narrative that highlights certain aspects and certain identities and values that will thrive in the future. By changing the perspective and making characters, their relationships, and sexuality the centre of attention it might be possible to make visible the normative assumptions perpetuated in the name of genre.

² See McClean, Digital Storytelling. The Narrative Power of Visual Effects in Film for an insightful discussion about the relationship between storytelling and visual effects and how the dichotomised relationship between them is arbitrary.
Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the thesis is to explore depictions of sexuality in science fiction film and television through a focus on storytelling, narrative, characters and genre. Through a consideration of the de-emphasis on narrative and characters I display and analyse a salient tendency towards juvenile narratives and argue that sexuality has been disassociated from much science fiction. Furthermore, I argue that the predominant depiction of sexuality in science fiction is of heterosexuality. What I call the Star’verses represent this normative and juvenile discourse of science fiction film and television. Though named after Star Wars and Star Trek the concept is neither limited solely to these narratives nor describes the entirety of them, but serves as an analytical tool for visualising this tendency. I will return to this concept in Chapter 1.

However, while I argue that this tendency is prominent in the conceptualisation of science fiction film and television, I also argue that the science fiction narrative has extensive queer potential. Generic conventions, such as aliens and time-travel, invite both queer readings and queer storytelling, the latter however is seldom used, especially in science fiction film. I consider whether the storytelling techniques of Hollywood cinema, to which science fiction film owes much of its dramaturgy, could be considered heteronormative. I also compare it to television dramaturgy in order to display the possibilities for the serialised, character-focused science fiction narrative. I investigate the possibility for subversive storytelling and whether a normative use of dramaturgy needs to be overthrown in order to tell a subversive story.

In the final parts of the dissertation I argue that a major discursive shift took place in science fiction at the turn of the millennium. I argue that this shift in the generic identity of science fiction film and television, the influence of television dramaturgy and other contextual changes explain why science fiction in the 21st century is not as unfamiliar with depictions of sexuality as were its predecessors.

The primary research questions are:

- Science fiction is considered as a genre that emphasises technology and science over its characters, how can the genre be understood through turning the attention to narrative, characters and specifically depictions of sexuality?

- Why do science fiction film and television so rarely depict sexual relationships and sexuality?
• Why are there so few depictions of non-heterosexual relationships and characters despite the genre’s queer potential?

• How can genre-specific traits and expectations be related to issues of heteronormativity?

• How do specific contexts and storytelling techniques of film and television affect these depictions?

Method, Material, Scope, and Relevance

Even though science fiction film and television both have a legacy from, and relationship to, science fiction literature as well as other media, the focus for this dissertation is science fiction as a film and television genre. While certain aspects of genre remain similar between the forms of science fiction, science fiction film has built its own canon and developed into a major Hollywood genre and science fiction television has likewise become a major genre of television drama. Henceforth when I refer to science fiction or the science fiction genre I mean science fiction film and television. The choice to include both film and television is due to their similar use of audiovisual storytelling and, as will be made clear in the study, their significant differences. However interesting it would be to compare these issues to science fiction literature that research has to be left for another time and place. This strict limitation applies only in the corpus, I will primarily draw theoretical support from scholars of science fiction cinema and television but in certain issues I will also include scholars engaged in science fiction literature. In many aspects the theoretical foundations remain relevant for science fiction regardless of medium, however not always.

The dissertation has its primary focus on the North American and Hollywood science fiction canon and in particular a tendency represented by what I call the Star’verses. The concept includes both science fiction film and television and is based on common tonalities and dominance of Star Wars episodes IV-VI (1977-1983) and Star Trek: The Original Series (1966-1968) and Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-1994). However, the concept is not limited to these narratives but instead represents a salient tendency in science fiction film and television dominating the 1980s-1990s. As the filmography at the end of the book indicates, the study is also taking into account several other films.

3 From now on I will refer to the Star Wars films using their episode number (e.g. Episode I-VII) and the two Star Trek series as Star Trek: TOS and Star Trek: TNG or for practical purposes, simply TOS and TNG.
and television series as further references to an imagined science fiction canon. The tendency, as I will describe in Chapter 1, is characterised by a juvenile, male-centred, heteronormative, conservative, and spectacle-heavy tonality and has roots back into the early years of the genre. I base my selection of films and television series in this discussion on several criteria: an idea of the science fiction canon (as suggested by scholars, critics, fans, books etc.), the classification of films (on DVD/Blu-ray covers, by creators, on Vod services (such as Netflix), websites (such as Internet Movie Database) etc.). This allows for a flexibility in genre, as I do not see any of these creating genre solely by themselves, but in negotiation with each other.

In addition to this specific tendency of the science fiction canon I analyse films and television series that in different ways make use of the queer potential of science fiction. These are all texts (to use the term in a wide sense including for example film and television) that contradict the heteronormativity and conservative Star’vereses as suggested in the thesis. This includes the films Videodrome (1983) and Serenity (2005) and television series Firefly (2002-2003) and Torchwood (2006-2011). While all of them are, among other things, science fiction, they are either created or considered to disrupt and question issues of genre in different ways. These texts are chosen as examples because they use this queer potential, display the possibility of science fiction narratives in terms of queerness, and provide a contrast to the normative. I will be examining the possibilities through case studies seen in a larger context of genre, storytelling and the film historical context. Through these texts I investigate how dramaturgy and the specific media format of film and television could allow for subversive storytelling. By investigating their relationship to the science fiction canon and likewise the idea of genre it is possible to not only gain more knowledge of these works but also of science fiction.

Though most of these primary texts are part of transmedial narratives (cf. Jenkins, Convergence 293) I will only focus on the films and the television series. While certain issues of narrative are only made available through the combination of films, television series, comic books, novels, games etc. no further sources will be included since the purpose of this dissertation is to investigate specifically film and television.

The central issue for investigation in this thesis is the depiction of sexuality. In line with the theoretical basis of the dissertation I consider sexuality and

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4 The use of the term text in this context suggests a wider understanding of text that can include film and television. I use it primarily as a rhetoric device that enables to write about my material in a more condensed form.
gender as categories which are historically, socially and culturally produced. This however does not assist in the practical analysis. Sexual content could be exemplified with the categories used by quantitative analyst Heather M. Porter in her investigation of *Firefly* and *Dollhouse* (2009-2010). She separates between visual and verbal sexual content, and instances of nudity or explicit depiction of sex.\(^5\) Although I will not use these in a quantitative manner, they highlight the different ways of depicting sexuality.\(^6\) I consider sexuality in these terms as depictions in which issues of sexual identity, desire or similar are activated in characters. This might be through sexual acts, or narratives which deal with sexual identity. To be more precise what I am considering is those derived from an adult concern about sexuality either in their consideration of sexuality or in the depiction of sex.

While I focus on specific structures of storytelling and dramaturgy, one has to consider that the structure is inseparable from what it means and what it does (cf. Mittell, *Complex TV* 5). Narrative film and television are in that sense seen as possible parts in upholding or subverting normativity. This makes popular culture, the Hollywood film and popular genres such as science fiction, analytical objects that can be considered as tools in the co-creative forces of normativity. This also suggests that it is important to consider the ways in which these texts deal with (or ignore) such issues as heteronormativity.

This also explains my primary focus not on alternative, experimental, art film but on the Hollywood film and the science fiction canon. Popular culture reaches a large part of society and the Hollywood film, though the national cinema of USA, is not specific to North America. In the case of science fiction the abundance of American film and its dominance of cinema in most western countries makes it a powerful tool. This is not to suggest that it necessarily has to be an actively used tool for cultural propaganda, but more importantly, a bearer of norms. The normative, as I will discuss below, engenders the unseen and unspoken. In other words, the focus is the texts as part of larger discourses; both as possible bearers and (re)producers of heteronormativity and as possible subversive expressions.

While both the genre and the dramaturgical analysis are governed by a norm critical perspective, the main methodological approach in the thesis is also

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\(^5\) She uses the categories: “Visual non-sex content is defined as sexual visuals with no sexual contact or behaviors. [...] Visual sexual content is onscreen depictions of sexual contact. [...] Verbal Sexual Content [is] Verbal discussions of a sexual nature” (92-4). These incorporate both explicit and implicit depictions of sexuality such as discussions of sexuality, flirtation, undressing, implied sex, depicted onscreen sex, sexual jokes and sexual offers.

\(^6\) For an in-depth study of sexuality and representations see Richardson et al. *Studying Sexualities. Theories, Representations, Cultures.*
combined with other film and television analytical approaches. It combines specific analysis of the texts with issues of context; production, distribution, and exhibition as well as a film/television historical point of view. This leads to a methodology that differs somewhat from chapter to chapter depending on the inquiry. I will strive towards flexibility in the method, trying to bring together the interdisciplinary nature of the project. As I argued elsewhere (see Wälivaara) I view the relationship between method, material and theory as being in constant need of reflexivity. When attempting to describe or analyse something regarding gender or sexuality on the screen the use of concepts available to build the analysis on, such as women, men, homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality are often necessary. I also think it is important to consider the ramifications of the method of analysis and how this relates to the theoretical approach. On the one hand, it is necessary to convey the power relations embedded in the material. On the other hand, it is important to consider the tools for analysis and whether they (re)produce fixed categories or binary oppositions that might fulfil an analytical purpose but at the same time risk contradicting the theoretical approach. This might risk limiting the analysis of a film or television series, especially if it is situated within a different discourse than the actual world. I argue that the material has to be as involved in the methodological process of research as theory is. This is what I aim to do in this thesis.

I draw inspiration from television scholar Jason Mittell’s methodological use of poetics in *Complex TV* where he is “[engaged] with television’s formal dimensions in concert with a broader approach to television as a cultural phenomenon, where form is always in dialogue with cultural contexts, historical formations, and modes of practice” (4). He aimed to “offer a model of formal analysis that is not divorced from issues of content, context, and culture but rather is a vital component of those concerns” (4). Mittell’s methodological use of poetics allows for an analysis that is influenced by a model of cultural circulation, in which practices of television industry, audiences, critics, and creators all work to shape storytelling practices, and thus questions about form are not restricted to the realm of the text but deeply connected to contexts. (*Complex TV* 5)

Though Mittel’s object of study is television, the methodological approach can likewise apply to other types of texts such as film (cf. *Complex TV* 7). This approach allows to consider the many aspects of storytelling practices.

An additional aspect in need of addressing in a thesis about television is the methodological challenge associated with working with television series or indeed any long narrative. The television series format promotes the use of
long narratives and invites the possibility for serial and on-going story arcs, which often results in a large amount of material to analyse. Just to get a firm analytical grip of the story arcs, the characters and their development, the motifs of the series, in separate episodes, seasons or overall presents an analytical challenge. Even the time consumption associated with watching a television series and finding a way into the material poses certain problems for the researcher that is not associated with, for example, film. Take for instance Torchwood’s four seasons, a total of 41 episodes which equates to approximately 35 hours of material. In addition, the large and flexible crews working with television series possibly force the continuity and voice of the series to shift over time, drawing attention to the production of the series. Returning to Torchwood as an example, the 41 episodes had a total of 15 directors; these issues call into question where the creative locus lies and to what extent certain creators of texts are able to maintain creative power.

A possible way to commit to the analysis of television could be to borrow from cinema studies and the methodological challenges that a large number of films pose. Cinema scholar Kristin Thompson presents a methodology for investigating Hollywood storytelling in order to make possible a plausible instrument for analysis that does not have to presuppose an act structure and instead is able to reveal what type of format the specific film in fact has. She writes:

If we can account for plot structure by means of these [the protagonist’s] goals, we have a schema that has some initial plausibility. Further, we can analyze a large body of films to see how these goals are formulated, developed, altered, replaced, furthered, blocked, delayed, and eventually achieved (or not). (Storytelling in the New Hollywood 27)

This way of approaching the long narrative of television might prove productive as well. Although I attempt to, in part, question certain dominant storytelling conventions I realise that I cannot step outside of these. The analysis I will perform focuses on the protagonist as a goal-driven centre of the narrative which in itself is part of this construction. I will however, in my dramaturgical analyses, use this perspective as a methodological guide because it gives directions for that type of analysis, but some of the challenges still remain.

A similar and related issue is the study of such a large topic as science fiction and the fact that it is practically impossible to have seen everything and to relate to everything. I instead consider the specific texts analysed within this study as examples, and many of them as representatives of tendencies within the genre. The possibility to counter these (and any claim towards such an
abundance of material) with specific examples that do not move in that same direction is not a legitimate way to disqualify the arguments. While I do make some claims of genre these are in regards to certain texts and contexts which I do not see as homogenous. Not even an analysis of a single film can present a complete and homogenous way of understanding it. Likewise, an analysis of an entire genre is bound to ambiguity, especially if genre is considered flexible and subject to contextual change.

Before continuing with a discussion about the use of queer readings, it is necessary to return to my position as researcher. As indicated at the very beginning of this book I, in addition to being a researcher of science fiction, am a science fiction fan. Although the position as fan and researcher calls for a certain sensibility in terms of the ways in which research is conducted I consider this position as a mainly productive fusion. It is the combination of the two that brought forth this study and I believe that the fan position can enrich the analyses and also help handle the methodological challenges concerning long narratives as described above. In such ways the fan and the researcher positions have combined their best abilities and made possible the large size of the material that, even though not everything is included directly in the thesis, creates the foundation of this research. This dual position can be considered as problematic in terms of research and the personal involvement in the material can induce the risk of analyses that are too compliant to the text. I have thus attempted to be aware of the potential negative effect that this position can induce.

**Queer and Queer Readings**

One central methodological approach for this study is queer readings. The term queer itself defies definition and is used in different ways in different contexts. For the purpose of this dissertation I will sketch a description of the word in order to make visible my understanding of it and its meaning. Since its launch as a theoretical concept by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991 a massive amount of research has been conducted via queer theory. Though it is a possible definition, I for the purpose of this book do not see queer as either synonymous to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or as the umbrella term that could cover them all (cf. Doty, *Making Things* xvii). I instead, agree with queer theorist and media scholar Alexander Doty when he writes that “[u]ltimately, queerness should challenge and confuse our understanding and uses of sexual and gender categories” (*Making Things* xvii). Film scholar

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7 Compare for example with the discussion about this position in Tulloch and Jenkins (20-4).
8 See e.g. the journals *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and gay Studies; lambda nordica; Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*; and for a more historical overview see Jagose 127-9. A search for the keyword queer theory in *Libris* (the search engine of the National Library of Sweden) resulted in over 400 titles in a variety of subject areas.
Michele Aaron also writes that “[q]ueer represents the resistance to, primarily, the normative codes of sexual expressions” (5). Thus, I consider queer as that which has the possibility to disrupt, or even subvert, normative issues of sexuality and gender.

While the wider aspects of queer theory will be more central in readings of specific narratives, the more practical use of the concept in the field of cinema studies or similar disciplines which work with depiction, representations, and readings of narratives is pivotal to this study. Queer readings of texts, according to Doty,

aren’t ‘alternative’ readings, wishful or willful misreadings, or ‘reading too much into things’ readings. They result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has been in popular culture texts and their audiences all along. (Making Things 16)

In this way, a queer reading proposes a relationship between the text and its receptors that emphasises an active audience. This perspective gives the audience or reader agency to interpret the text and is based on the assumption that meaning is multilayered and contextual.

My aim is not to categorise once and for all what type of queerness is available in a specific film or in the genre. The interpretation of what is queer remains a site for constant negotiation and contextualisation, since it is impossible to suggest that one action, object or person at any point in time regardless of context always is or is not queer. To suggest once and for all that science fiction as a genre is queer or not queer, or to determine whether a single film is queer is not of any interest in this project, but rather to display this fluidity and multilayered understanding of queer interpretations. I do not want to write a categorisation of queer science fiction or suggest which film or series is queer or not, that would defeat the purpose of the theoretical approach. Instead I want to use examples that can display a variety of available queer readings and the queer potential of science fiction. My research is governed by the post structural notion that there is no metanarrative available to produce, the knowledge I contribute in this thesis is but a part of multiple understandings of the phenomenon depending on where and what type of questions one asks. This common interest in questioning metanarratives is, according to science fiction and queer scholar Wendy Pearson, also a similarity between queer theory and science fiction narratives (“Alien Cryptographies” 18).

Pearson asserts that a queer reading does not require a queer text and a queer text does not require homosexual characters or issues (“Alien Cryptographies” 16). By drawing inspiration from previous research outside the field of science
fiction she states that the presence of a homosexual character does not equal a queer text. For example, to introduce a homosexual character in *Star Trek* would not by default make the series queer. I agree on this view, both that one can perform queer readings on non-queer texts and that a text or a narrative can be queer without the inclusion of non-heterosexual characters since queer can develop in other areas as well. Doty for example suggests that “new queer spaces open up (or are revealed) whenever someone moves away from using only one specific sexual identity category - gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight - to understand and to describe mass culture” (*Making things* xviii-xix). As I interpret Doty the question is not only about the move away from identity categories but also of different methodologies for understanding queer in narratives.

**Terminology and Theoretical Perspectives**

In order to present the theoretical basis of the thesis I will start by introducing some concepts that will be frequently used and define how I use them in the remainder of the dissertation. The major part of the theory however will be located in the appropriate chapter since I do not want to produce a bulk of theory separated from analysis. So in what follows I will describe some basic concepts and a theoretical context for the thesis in a more general way, with the main purpose of creating a common epistemological ground before the analyses. In addition to the discussion above on queer and queer readings, I will briefly present the central issues: *gender, sexuality, heteronormativity* and *subversion*.

**Gender and Sexuality**

I consider gender and sexuality as socially, historically and culturally produced categories. I also see these as intertwined and follow the theoretical concept of “the heterosexual matrix” as developed by queer philosopher Judith Butler in the early 1990s. In the highly influential book *Gender Trouble* Butler traced the political operations that create and hide the feminist subject through a feminist genealogy in relation to the category of women. Butler criticised the starting-point in feminist theory, the category of ‘women,’ and argued the need to question the idea that it exists an identity sprung from this category. Butler called for an investigation of the feminist subject: “Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of ‘women,’ the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (*Gender Trouble* 5).

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9 Though written in the 1990s Butler’s academic works has had a major impact on several fields of research (see e.g. Salih with Butler 90).
In addition, Butler criticised the division between sex and gender. In feminist theory prior to this time, this divide aimed to show how sex is biologically stable and gender culturally constructed, but Butler instead argued that “gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (*Gender Trouble* 9-10). Butler continues by drawing the conclusion that “[i]f gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way” (*Gender Trouble* 10). She argues that if we assume for a moment

the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of ‘men’ will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that ‘women’ will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. (*Gender Trouble* 10)

Hence, when gender as a cultural construction is “theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (*Gender Trouble* 10). Butler shows that if we can contest the immutability of sex then maybe the construction of sex “is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (*Gender Trouble* 11). According to Butler the view on gender ought not to be that it is “the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex [...] gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established” (*Gender Trouble* 11). The assumption of a binary gender system serves to uphold the belief that gender is reflected or restricted by sex. The production of a prediscursice sex is to be “understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by gender” (*Gender Trouble* 11).

Through this critique she argued that gender and sexuality are intrinsically connected and poses the question: “To what extent does the category of women achieve stability and coherence only in the context of the heterosexual matrix?” (*Gender Trouble* 9). Butler describes a model of gender intelligibility that is dependent on normalising heterosexuality and the interconnections between gender and sexuality. Butler suggests that “the term heterosexual matrix [...] designates that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized” (*Gender Trouble* 194). By drawing on
Monique Wittig’s term “heterosexual contract” and Adrianne Rich’s “compulsory heterosexuality”, she argues that it is meant to characterize a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. 

(Gender Trouble 194)

That is, a stable sex (for instance ‘female’) needs to be expressed through a stable gender (femininity) and is defined through another stable sex (‘male’) that in turn is expressed by a stable gender (masculinity). These two are then put in both oppositional and hierarchical relation to each other through compulsory heterosexuality. The heterosexual matrix dictates who is intelligible and what is at stake, is being understood as a person. One only becomes intelligible through compliance to “recognizable standards of gender intelligibility” (Gender Trouble 22).

In terms of science fiction, Butler’s early statements even today offers an opportunity to consider some of the implications of gender intelligibility through the non-human subject and especially through constructed characters such as robots. Intelligible genders to Butler “are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire” (Gender Trouble 23). Butler argues that the body cannot be seen as a passive receiver of cultural meanings. “[T]he body’ is itself a construction, [...]. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender” (Gender Trouble 13). The body is not a tabula rasa onto which meaning is inscribed, personhood and gender are intrinsically connected. “Inasmuch as ‘identity’ is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of ‘the person’ is called into question by the cultural emergence of those ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gender beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined” (Gender Trouble 23). That is, those who do not follow the heterosexual matrix are not “intelligible genders”, and thereby their personhood or even humanity can be called into question. What I am even more interested in examining is how Butler’s notion of “intelligible genders” could be applied as an analytical tool in understanding characters in science fiction narratives. The figure of the robot actually accentuates the performative creation of gender and its connections to the consideration of it as a person or its relationship to humanity. As I will display in Chapter 2,
gendering becomes key and pronouns (it or s/he) are central in establishing personhood or humanity.

**Heteronormativity and Subversion**

The thesis is governed by the idea that cultural products, whether art or popular culture, are part of a larger discourse, or certain types of “truth” that are always connected to power. As such when I use the word discourse I draw inspiration from philosopher Michel Foucault who writes that “[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (101). Cultural theorist John Storey writes that from this perspective “[p]ower produces reality; through discourses it produces the ‘truths’ we live by” (130). It has also been argued that Foucault has been important to Butler, and that he is “a consistent presence in Butler’s work, and his historically contextualized analyses of the discursive production of sex and sexuality inform her own theorization of identity categories as unfixed, constructed entities” (Salih with Butler 5). Film or television are, from this perspective, not isolated from larger issues of society.

The dissertation deals not only with issues of genre, but a combination of media, contexts, and genre. I suggest that these combined (re)create cemented values and norms for science fiction as a genre and for our idea of the future and the Other. The question of the unused queer potential of science fiction history is thus not only limited to whether, or in what way, science fiction deals with sexuality and gender, but more importantly if it endorses the concept of sexuality and gender as based in essentialism or constructivism. These narratives constantly reaffirm gender and sexuality as something “natural” or “normal” and socially, culturally and historically predetermined. Science fiction scholar Veronica Hollinger argues about science fiction literature:

> Although sf has often been called ‘the literature of change’, for the most part it has been slow to recognize the historical contingency and cultural conventionality of many of our ideas about sexual identity and desire, about gendered behavior and about the ‘natural’ roles of women and men. [...] It assumes that the social roles played by women and men as women and men are ahistorical, that they will remain largely unchanged even in the distant future. ("Feminist theory" 126)

Hollinger displays the implications of these questions, as they suggest that certain traits of humanity are constant and even natural. What is at stake here is how we imagine and portray development, human futures, and possible aliens. The exclusion of, for example, homosexuality in the imagination of the future suggests things about the present. These narratives uphold
heteronormativity by not even admitting the possibility of considering changes through time and space as regards (human) sexuality and gender or at least acknowledging a presence of homosexuality in the imagined future. I wish to oppose the idea of the imagined future which is colonised by a certain type of subject and a development where human relationships and desire are lost in exchange for rational, emotionless, techno-centred human beings and the conquest of time and space. In not being able to imagine a less heteronormative future, science fiction films can function as upholders of heteronormativity by depicting sexuality and gender as forever lasting, natural, and in no way an idea, hence indirectly or subtextually writing off queer considerations as mere fiction.

From this perspective, stories and depictions can be considered as discursive parts in upholding or possibly subverting heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is considered as one possible part in the understanding of sexual or gendered categories – it is part in governing a certain notion of these categories. I use heteronormativity in this book in line with how Swedish queer theorist Tiina Rosenberg describes the concept. Heteronormativity then is the normative assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that this way of living is what is normal (100). This norm is upheld by not only institutions in society, but actions, relationships etc. that uphold heterosexuality as something unified, total and natural. Heteronormativity is the power system which upholds heterosexuality as a norm and everyone else as deviants who become oppressed and even punished within that normative system (100-3). Rosenberg points to two principles of heteronormativity which upholds it as a normative system: the exclusion of deviants from the norm through the us/them divide and the inclusion of the deviants through assimilation to the norm (102).

However, and import to note is that not all types of heterosexuality are deemed desirable within heteronormativity. For example, Swedish queer scholar Fanny Ambjörnsson uses Gayle Rubin to describe how, for example, monogamous, married, and reproductive heterosexuality is deemed desirable within heteronormativity (85-99). Heteronormativity as a normative system emphasizes a certain type of heterosexual relationships. From this perspective, which I connect to queer theorist J. Halberstam’s notion of queer time and place (1-21) heteronormativity is also about time, of a correct and normative way of organising one’s life. For the purpose of this dissertation and its theme I will analyse for example heterosexual aliens or robots as possible queer interruptions into heteronormativity.

The title of this book suggests subversion of science fiction at several different levels; possible subversions of heteronormativity, of storytelling and genre
conventions and norms. Subvert literally means “to try to destroy or damage something, especially an established political system” (*Cambridge Dictionary Online*). In this case I wish to emphasise the first part of that statement, “to try to” instead of plainly suggesting that subversion is to destroy, a fact that is quite hard to evaluate, especially in a short time span. While a storyteller can subvert normative storytelling techniques, it does not mean that s/he has subverted heteronormativity for example. Subversion, or attempts to destroy or damage something, can thus appear at several levels.

What can be deemed as subversive is also subject to its contexts. Butler for examples argues that she has no interest in distinguishing between what is subversive and what is not. “Not only do I believe that such judgments cannot be made out of context, but that they cannot be made in ways that endure through time”, writes Butler (*Gender Trouble* xxii). I to consider the subversive to be sensitive to both context and time. I do however, believe that no matter which norm or system one analyses it is not possible to step outside it, instead things can be subject to change, disruptions or even subversion by shifting the discourse from within (cf. J. Butler, *Gender Trouble* 40-4). With this view follows a postmodern understanding of power relations and the possibility for change (cf. Foucault). Change can occur when we act subversively, unexpectedly and in unacceptable ways within the system. I would suggest that that holds true for science fiction as well. The inclusion or exclusion of films to a science fiction canon in fact serves as a power dimension as well, dictating what is and what is not classified as science fiction.

### Science Fiction as Field of Study

**Genre Definition: The Performativity of Genre**

Genre, a term meaning type or kind, “has occupied an important place in the study of the cinema for over thirty years” (Neale, *Genre* 9). As a study of film, genre theory developed as a counter analytical perspective to the dominance of auteur theory and a way to seriously engage in the study of popular cinema (10). In science fiction studies the question of genre determination remains a contested area due to the difficulty to pin down the genre, thus leading to lively debates on genre determination in the field (see e.g. Kuhn, *Alien* 1; Johnston 7-25; Telotte, *Science Fiction* 16-24). It is suggested that “science fiction is ‘so

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10 Butler writes that “If sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is ‘before’, ‘outside’, or ‘beyond’ power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the term of power itself. [...] It offers the possibility of a repetition of the law which is not its consolidation, but its displacement” (*Gender Trouble* 40).
diverse’ in its forms and subjects that it defies any simple definition (Telotte, *Science Fiction* 4). While some contend that science fiction is about science as discussed above, Sontag argued that science fiction film was about disaster. Others say that science fiction is “a discussion or a mode, and not a genre” (Mendlesohn 2), and certain critics argue that it is this indefinability that defines the genre (cf. Johnston 1). The difficulty of distinguishing between science fiction and other genres, especially horror, is also a reoccurring discussion (see e.g. Cornea 7; Sobchack, *Screening Space* 26-63; Johnston 9; Telotte, *Science Fiction* 9).

Early genre criticism focused on categorization and classification. I am, however, not as concerned with genre as a classification of texts as I am with genre as an idea. I will not attempt to make a definition of science fiction but rather focus on different ways it has been considered as a genre or mode. From my point of view a static definition is not particularly useful for the dissertation more than as a working assumption about what science fiction is conceived to be. It is these ideas and concepts of genre that I aim to criticise, from that perspective any attempt for me to define science fiction would in fact be counterproductive. There is nothing to gain for the purpose of this thesis to decide that all science fiction I analyse must deal with the future, or have aliens, or technology, or time-travel. Instead I agree with those suggesting that genre is in constant negotiation, not only from academics, critics, and fans but also from creators, distributors and other types of classification activities (cf. Johnston 12).

From this perspective genre could be considered as performative, as a historically flexible concept. This means that there is no essence in genre, no true core of science fiction. It is indeed easy for us to know whether we are watching science fiction or not, but it still remains difficult to distinguish what is science fiction and what is not (Telotte, *Science Fiction* 17). By stating that the genre is performative I mean to suggest that what creates “science fiction” involves similar mechanics to those described by philosopher of language, J.L. Austin as *performative utterances*, later developed by Judith Butler to apply to gender. Butler states that

> gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing subject who might be said to preexist the deed. [...] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results. (*Gender Trouble* 33)
A constant repetition of acts neutralises gender. “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (J. Butler, *Gender Trouble* 43-4). In the case of science fiction and genre, I mean to say that it is the act of naming and classifying something as science fiction that makes it science fiction and these constant negotiations of genre determinism should not be seen as expressive but rather performative.

In *Genre and Television* Mittell argues that genres are cultural categories and that genres could be viewed in terms of “discursive formations” drawing theoretical support from Foucault. Mittell convincingly displays how genre, like with Foucault’s sexuality, can be analysed productively as generic discourse. He even asks “[d]on’t other categorical axes – like racial identity, gender, class, or age – matter more […]?” (xii) , a question that empahsises the commonality between genre and other cultural categories. Mittell argues that

[r]ather than emerging from texts as has traditionally been argued, genres work to categorize texts and link them into clusters of cultural assumptions through discourses of definition, interpretation, and evaluation. These discursive utterances may seem to reflect on an already established genre, but they are themselves constitutive of that genre; *(Genre and Television* xiv)

In fact, Mittell displays that “texts should be viewed as sites of discursive practice in which genre categories may be articulated”, as he considers a decentralisation of the text and the incorporation of a variety of discursive sites (*Genre and Television* 14-5). He continues to argue that the central components for genre analysis from this perspective should be “[c]ultural practices of definition, interpretation, and evaluation”, because these are the discursive utterances that “define genres, delimit their meanings, and posit their cultural value” (*Genre and Television* 16). I will follow this example by exploring these different cultural practices in regards to science fiction.

**Previous Research**

On the following pages I will describe and situate the thesis in relation to previous research relevant to the aim and scope of the dissertation. There has been much research on science fiction including bodies of work focusing on science fiction literature, film, television, and other media such as computer-games. The areas of interest within science fiction studies are plentiful and range from genre determinations to those addressing issues of technology, the postmodern and gender. Telotte summarises the main body of theoretical
approaches to science fiction film and underlines “humanist, ideological, feminist, psychoanalytic, and postmodern critical vantages as the key – although by no means the only – approaches to the genre” (Science Fiction 33-4). Science fiction cinema established itself as a field of research in part as a result of the new-found attention and legitimacy of academic research on popular culture and genre theory in the 1970s (see e.g. Neale, Genre 10) and research into science fiction television has become increasingly popular. The focus in what follows will be previous research on the topic of sexuality and the use of queer theory in the field.

Critical attention to and analysis of sexuality and science fiction has but a brief history up to this date. In the 1980s sexuality started to be the focus of critical attention in science fiction studies. In an early overview of this field Pearson presents the only anthologies she had located on science fiction and sexuality: Eros in the Mind’s Eye, Erotic Universe, and Uranian Worlds, all published in 1986 (“Science fiction” 151). While the anthology Erotic Universe focus on literature and Eros in the Mind’s Eye includes film and art, Uranian Worlds is instead “an annotated bibliography of variant sexuality in science-fiction, fantasy, and horror literature and film from A.D. 200 through 1989” (Garber and Paleo vii). In the 1980s, there was also a “related argument about the depiction of alternative sexuality in sf” (Pearson, “Science Fiction” 150). In line with feminist and gay and lesbian research from that era, the absence of positive depictions of “alternative” sexuality in science fiction was questioned.

Research focusing on sexuality and science fiction has been rare since the middle of the 1980s, and according to Pearson et al. by 2008 there had not yet been “any truly significant efflorescence of research into sexuality in sf” (7).11 Science fiction scholar Sherry Ginn also writes in 2012 that “few [books], in recent years, have examined sex in science fiction” (“Conclusion” 238). Pearson states:

If attitudes towards sexuality in sf are ambivalent, critical attention to the issue has been close to non-existent. The one exception is the extent of criticism on the sub-genre of lesbian feminist utopia, but even there the focus has often not been primarily on sexuality per se. (“Science Fiction” 151)

The intersection of queer theory and science fiction did not occur until the late 1990s. A special issue on queer theory in the academic journal Science Fiction Studies was published in 1999.12 It consisted of four articles, Pearson’s “Alien

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11 I have likewise focused this review of previous research on major works on sexuality and science fiction.

12 The journal later on had another special issue on sexuality and science fiction also mainly
Cryptographies: The View from Queer”, and “Identifying the Alien: Science Fiction Meets Its Other”, Hollinger’s “(Re)reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender” and Ann Weinstone’s “Science Fiction as a Young Person’s First Queer Theory”. All the articles deal with science fiction literature and are more or less concerned with arguing the usefulness of queer theory in the field of science fiction studies as well as introducing queer theory to those readers. Pearson’s award-winning essay “Alien Cryptographies: The View from Queer”, still remains one of the key texts in the introduction of queer theory and science fiction. Pearson later on states that: “There are thus a number of important questions that can be asked, using queer theory as a guide, about representations of sexuality and especially of alternative sexuality in sf” (“Science Fiction” 151).

In the essay “Alien Cryptographies” Pearson explores the combination of science fiction and queer theory by using two different strategies; queer readings and identification of queer texts. For example, Pearson investigates science fiction narratives of four different types when trying to identify queer texts in science fiction literature:

first, the sf narrative that is not overtly queer, but that can be read analogically within a specific historical context and sensibility; second, what one might call the ‘proto-queer’ text that, although not queer itself, effects a kind of discursive challenge to the naturalized understanding of sexuality and its concomitant sociocultural surround; third, the text that is coded as queer, but in such a way as to hide in plain sight [...] and finally, the overt queer text, the text which questions the ‘naturalist fiction’ that sex and gender and sexuality are matters of ‘human senses and common sense’. (“Alien Cryptographies” 18-9)

The anthology Queer Universes. Sexuality in Science Fiction from 2008 remains one of the few more detailed works on queer theory and science fiction. The main concern of the anthology is science fiction literature, from novels such as The Female Man (Joanna Russ, 1975) and The Left Hand of Darkness (Ursula K. Le Guin, 1969) to queer science fiction erotica. In the introduction editors Pearson, et al. further elaborate the usefulness of queer theory in the study of science fiction. The anthology is an expansion and a continuation of the special issue on queer in the journal Science Fiction Studies from 1999 (5). The anthology The Sex is Out of This World: Essays on the Carnal Side of Science Fiction from 2012 collects a number of essays on sexuality in literature, film and television. Lewis Call’s BDSM in American focusing on science fiction literature. Science Fiction Studies Vol. 36, No. 3, November 2009.

13 The essay won the Science Fiction Research Association’s Pioneer Award 2000 (“The Pioneer Award is given to the writer or writers of the best critical essay-length work of the year”).
Science Fiction and Fantasy from 2013 contributes to a discussion about “alternative” sexuality in science fiction and includes analyses of several television series.

There is up to this date and to my knowledge not any major work dedicated exclusively to audiovisual science fiction and queer theory. Jackie Stacey’s 2010 study The Cinematic Life of the Gene is a work in film studies that deals with audiovisual science fiction in combination with among other things, queer theory to investigate the cloning phenomenon related to our ideas of body, gender, sexuality and difference, or rather sameness. Alexis Lothian’s dissertation Deviant Futures: Queer Temporality and the Cultural Politics of Science Fiction from 2012 combines examples from literature, film, television and digital media with a focus on “deviant futures” created by people of colour, queers and feminists (cf. 1-3). While dealing directly with queer theory and science fiction it is not a study of genre, instead it focus on queer temporalities and futurity. Likewise, the examples of queer analyses of specific television series or films such as Star Trek, Torchwood, Firefly, Alien (1979), and 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), are mainly focused of the specific narrative and not primarily related to science fiction as a genre.14

As this review of previous research has demonstrated, scholarly work on visual media science fiction and sexuality is limited, and research into queer theory and science fiction even more scarce. Furthermore, the main body of work on genre, sexuality and queer theory has science fiction literature as its focal point and specific research into science fiction film or television, sexuality and queer theory is close to non-existent. This thesis thus aims to contribute to this field by building upon previous research and continuing to develop an understanding of sexuality and science fiction in general and science fiction and queer theory in particular. Due to limited availability of previous research, and in particular research on science fiction film the thesis will use these earlier works even though some of them are dated, in order to further develop and update a broader understanding of sexuality and science fiction.

As indicated by previous research, sexuality is a topic seldom highlighted in science fiction narratives. In *Eros in the Mind’s Eye* three of the essays on science fiction film and television discuss the de-emphasis of sexuality. Jim Holte argues that “[t]he tendency [...] to exploit popular mythology and replicate its elements explains why American science fiction [film] has often – and even characteristically – been a macho genre that ignores women and represses or sublimates sexuality” (181-2). Sam Umland argues that many films either depict the “freakish sexuality of alien beings” or “ridicule heterosexual relationships” either way, there are no middle ground, no depiction of “healthy” sexuality (225). Andrew Gordon argues more generally that *Star Wars* episodes IV-VI “is remarkably chaste, even old fashioned in its sexual restraint” (193). A similar approach to the de-emphasis on sexuality in science fiction is presented by science fiction scholar Vivian Sobchack who in “The Virginity of Astronauts: Sex and The Science Fiction Film” from 1990 takes a psychoanalytical approach to investigate a genre that, according to her, “[m]ore than any other American film genre, [...] denies human eroticism and libido a traditional narrative representation and expression” (103). In Sobchack’s account the question of gender, sexuality, humanity and rationality in science fiction film demands the de-emphasis of female sexuality if not linked to the alien. Though *Uranian Worlds* lists about 1000 titles that include homosexuality from CE 200-1989 less than 100 of these are films. In addition, the guide covers three genres, science fiction, fantasy and horror and only about 30 of the film titles can be considered science fiction.

While this previous research must be placed in relation to the time it was written, it shows a tendency in science fiction from that time. The few more contemporary studies of science fiction and sexuality also confirm this de-emphasis in both science fiction narratives and in science fiction criticism (cf. Pearson et al. 2; Pearson, “Science Fiction” 151; Cornelius 5; Lothian 20). However, this does not mean that it does not exist, as all of these studies show.

15 For a historical overview of gay and lesbian representation in science fiction literature see Garber and Paleo (viii-xiii) and for further reading on fantastic literature and sexuality see Palumbo, *Erotic Universe*; Nicholls; and Call 19-26 (who also presents a history of BDSM in science fiction and fantasy).

16 Even if one removes all literature pre-cinema (pre-1900s) there are still notable dominance of literary works. The list of films are added as an appendix which suggests, as does the preface, that the main focus of the guide is literature.

17 A majority of the films are horror films that include lesbian vampires.
Disposition of the Thesis

In the dissertation I will not give a full account of the plots of the films and television series, when the plot is not a necessity for the analysis. I will however, at the introduction of particularly important films or series present a short synopsis of it. I will limit descriptions if possible and make more elaborate descriptions of particularly important scenes or narrative developments when necessary, as the act of description can never be free of analysis. The dissertation, excluding this introduction, consists of four chapters and a concluding chapter.

The first chapter (A)sexuality and Science Fiction considers the relationship between sexuality and science fiction. In the chapter I argue that there is a salient tendency to disassociate science fiction from sexuality and that this is connected to a dominant discursive force within the genre that I collectively call the Star'verses. I propose that the source for this disassociation lies in generic formations of science fiction as a juvenile, heteronormative, masculine, techno-centric, and spectacle-heavy genre. The chapter ends with an analysis of a debate in the British press about Torchwood and the depiction of (queer) sexuality as well as an analysis of the unlikely science fiction hero Captain Jack Harkness.

The second chapter Heteronormativity and Science Fiction investigate some generic traits that I consider to give science fiction extensive queer potential. However, few actually use these in a queer way. While I consider the reasons behind this as connected to the de-emphasis on characters and relationships as described in Chapter 1, there are additional aspects that will be in focus. I will argue that it is actually partly due to these same generic frameworks that science fiction has rarely depicted non-heterosexual or queer characters and/or societies.

The third chapter Storytelling in Science Fiction Film focuses on science fiction as a cinematic genre that developed in a quite specific context – as the Hollywood film. I will suggest that the connection between science fiction film and classical Hollywood storytelling is key to the type of depictions and narratives common to science fiction by arguing that the classical Hollywood style is heteronormative. I suggest that the dramaturgy of Hollywood film has been embedded with heteronormativity as a default setting and an unquestioned way to tell stories and to create dramatic effects. I argue that the normativity of the use of these techniques and the constant reaffirming of a way to tell a story are such that it becomes an uncontested truth. Furthermore, I consider whether subversive storytelling is dependent on a subversive form and end the chapter with an analysis of Videodrome from that perspective.
In the fourth chapter Stay Tuned for the Future of Science Fiction I argue that, in terms of depictions of sexuality and disruptions of heteronormativity, science fiction television has been far more progressive than its film counterparts. A majority of the examples of science fiction that I consider to make use of this queer potential can be found in television, in cinema however, the progression is remarkably slow. Therefore in this chapter I will compare television and film to consider the specific storytelling techniques of television drama in relation to the Hollywood film. In addition, I examine how television differs from cinema in aspects such as viewing practices, production, exhibition, and financial conditions and how these affect storytelling. On the basis of this comparison I argue that science fiction television has a greater potential for subversive storytelling than science fiction film and that this has to do with both storytelling conventions and the production and technology of the two media.

In Conclusions: An Adult Turn and Towards New Possibilities I argue for what I call an adult turn in science fiction from the turn of the millennium. Although I have argued that science fiction film and television have been dominated by a disassociation from sexuality and other adult concerns represented by the Star’verses, this generic identity is subject to change. By the turn of the 21st century the dominant discourse of the Star’verses and the juvenile as described in Chapter 1 was countered. As illustrated by contemporary science fiction television series in particular, more adult science fiction has become increasingly common.
In this chapter I argue that there is a salient tendency to disassociate science fiction from sexuality and that this is connected to a dominant discursive force within the genre that I collectively call the Star’verses. I propose that the source for this disassociation lies in generic formations of science fiction as a juvenile, heteronormative, masculine, techno-centric, and spectacle-heavy genre. I argue that these ideas have made depictions of sexuality stand in conflict with the generic identity of science fiction. However, though this tendency is part of a dominant discourse of science fiction as a film and television genre it by no means includes all science fiction but is derived from a particular type of science fiction that became highly influential in the 1980s-1990s. It is represented by what I call the Star’verses, in relation to which I analyse this tendency. By applying a gender and queer perspective on characters, and in particular the heroes, from the Star’verses I aim to display and problematise issues of sexuality in relation to generic expectation and identity. In addition, I consider an alternative to this proposed desexualisation of science fiction represented by the Star’verses. I use Torchwood as an example that presents a science fiction narrative which is highly concerned with issues of sexuality and analyses a debate in the British press about (queer) sexuality in the series and by extension its status as science fiction. I relate the generic uncertainty produced by the series due to its explicit depictions of sexuality to the dominant tendency of the genre as argued in this chapter.

A Technological Point-of-View

As indicated in the Introduction one primary way of understanding science fiction is as fiction about science. This can in fact give the impression that science fiction does not focus on narrative, characters or their relationships but rather on technology, science and spectacle. Unlike genres such as the

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18 Captain John Hart (James Marsters) in “Exit Wounds” 2.13.
romantic comedy which highlights relationship narratives, these same narratives in science fiction have been considered to have a peripheral status. Pearson suggests that the focus on technology and science does not leave much room for human relationships in science fiction, she considers “whether sf has traditionally been better at imagining machines and their conjunctions than it has been at imagining bodies and their possible relationships” (“Science Fiction” 150). Mendlesohn suggests that “in sf [literature] ‘the idea’ is the hero” (4) and science fiction critic Gwyneth Jones suggests that the science fiction novel

has little space for deep and studied characterisation, not because the writers lack the skill (though they may) but because in the final analysis the characters are not people, they are pieces of equipment. They have no free will or independent existence [...]. (4-5)

Science fiction scholar Jes Battis also notes this peripheral position of characters in television and argues that “[in] most television SF, [...] the characters conform to well-used archetypes (the Captain, the Doctor, the Engineer) and their dialogue often serves merely to shuttle the plot along” (20) and Sontag writes that in science fiction film:

Things, objects, machinery play a major role in these films. A greater range of ethical values is embodied in the décor of these films than in the people. Things, rather than the helpless humans, are the locus of values because we experience them, rather than people, as the sources of power. According to science fiction films, man is naked without his artifacts. They stand for different values, they are potent, they are what gets destroyed, and they are the indispensable tools for the repulse of the alien invaders or the repair of the damaged environment. (43)

Sontag points out, things rather than humans are the emotional and ethical focus of these films. In addition, the lack of human emotions in the genre is for Sontag one of the reasons she calls it one of the purest forms of spectacle. Though Sontag wrote the essay in 1965 there are some valid points that still apply today. The loss of self through dehumanisation is as Sontag notes not completely a negative thing in science fiction narratives as it makes the human more efficient, rational and free of emotional bonds (46). These are all attributes traditionally connected to masculinity which Sontag fails to notice.

Bould argues that the spectacle of blockbuster cinema has overridden issues of character and narrative and that this results in

extremely conservative texts. [...] This is not to suggest that lower-budget filmmaking is never conservative in the stories it wishes to tell and the
As indicated by Bould, the potential consequences for this emphasis on spectacle can be the production of conservative narratives.

The scientific focus has also connected science fiction to a perceived male audience, which by traditional values is not associated to relationships or romance. Feminist science fiction scholar Helen Merrick even argues that traditionally, science fiction “naturally” excludes women due to the genre’s focus on technology and science (241). Even though the gendering of science fiction and the focus on science can contribute in explaining to some of the lacking focus on character relationships and romance, it is far from a truth about what a “male genre” is or in fact what female audiences are interested in watching. It presupposes a specific gendered position in which certain themes and contents are valued. When I use the argument I simply wish to point toward the construction of the genre as considered directed towards a young male audience. The factual audience and consumer of science fiction is not such a homogeneous group, consider for example the large number of women writing fan fiction based on science fiction texts (see e.g. Jenkins, “Star Trek” 43; Brooker 134) or the audiences presented by fandom scholars John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins in their book Science Fiction Audiences. However, if focusing on the texts themselves there has been a proneness toward male protagonists and by extension they primarily address an implied male spectator.

The relationship that is constructed as central in science fiction narratives is that between technology and humans rather than between characters. While this in itself does not exclude character relationships the focus is instead turned towards the science of science fiction. However, by turning the focus onto characters it is possible to reconsider the role they actually play in these narratives. While I agree that science fiction narratives often highlight the spectacle or the technological over relationships (including sexual or romantic) and even character – the critical discourse about science fiction as a genre of spectacle and science is part of creating a generic identity that is supposed to focus on certain things, rather than people. However, it is impossible to ignore that there are people and characters in most science fiction, but what role do they play if not plainly considered as “equipment” or “tools”? At a minimum the characters of science fiction, as in all narratives, have a dramatic function, in addition, the traits and the types of characters also have ideological or political impact and they are not devoid of historical influence from earlier representations.
As feminist critique of science fiction has shown, the protagonists of science fiction have been almost exclusively male and science fiction has traditionally and mainly been a genre directed at a male audience (cf. e.g. Telotte, *Science Fiction* 49; Johnston 28). Science fiction film is according to Keith M. Johnston “still largely controlled by men and aimed (as many Hollywood films are) at a masculine teenage audience” (36).¹⁹ Even though female characters, beginning with Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in *Alien*, have challenged this male dominance, in the 2010s a majority of science fiction protagonists are still male.²⁰ The archetypical or traditional characters playing major roles in science fiction are male, especially the hero.

Because the primary dramatic purpose of the hero is audience identification (Vogler 30), the consequence of predominantly having male heroes is that it maintains the idea of the science fiction spectator as male. This inequality is by no means unique to science fiction; the archetypical hero in almost any story is by default male, as scriptwriter Christopher Vogler describes him. Vogler presents the recurring archetypes of stories as tools for understanding the character’s function or purpose in addition to his well-known and influential dramaturgical theory called “The Hero’s Journey” (24). Though he attempts to meet the criticism about the hero as male he misses the point when responding to this criticism (xxi-xxii). By focusing on differences between the male and the female journey and the specifics of the female journey he overlooks the real implications of the masculine hero’s journey as a universal metanarrative. No matter how gender biased he may be in putting together The Hero’s Journey, the problem is not limited to his accounts but rather and more importantly, his accounts are a testament to a male dominated culture. The hero is either a hero or a female hero marked by gender difference. The hero he speaks of is generally not marked by any differences at all which extends beyond issues of gender as the *Torchwood*-example at the end of the chapter will display.

I will consider the narrative functions of male and female characters in science fiction (cf. Kuhn, *Women’s* 31) with primary examples from *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. Though they have different approaches to science and technology they both connect to this discourse of techno-centrism.

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¹⁹ Johnston suggests that this problem connected to the audience could be solved by introducing more female writers and creators. However, it is problematic to assume that it is merely the gender of the creators that dictates whether the content will be less “masculine” or more suitable for women.

²⁰ A search on IMDb on US science fiction films with a box office gross over $500 000 from 2012-2015 reveals 102 titles. Of these only about 25 titles has a female protagonist (and four of these are represented by the four part *The Hunger Games* - film series, 2012-2015).
Star Trek is filled with technological wonders, “warp drives, force fields, phasers, tricorders, communicators, transporters, and replicators – [which] have become a central source of the popular notion of what the technology of the future might be like” (Booker 50). Although Star Wars episodes IV-VI remain quite low-tech within their narrative, the visual spectacle of both on-screen technology such as space ships and the off-screen technology associated with the extensive use of special effects makes them highly technological films. They were the most expensive science fiction films produced at that time, partly due to their reliance on special effects (Telotte, Science Fiction 105).21 In addition, both of the franchises predominantly present white, heterosexual, male heroes.22 But before beginning this further inquiry into these science fiction characters the selections of my examples from, and definition of, what I call the Star’verses is in need of addressing.

Legacy of the Star’verses

Though the concept is named after Star Trek and Star Wars it is not limited to those narratives. They, collectively with others, dominate the construction of the genre and how it has come to be understood and defined. However, the discussion will be based on episodes IV-VI of Star Wars and Star Trek: TOS and TNG making the time period between mid 1960s to mid 1990s the main focus of this chapter. I argue that they together created a foundation for a

21 See e.g. Grainge et al. for a discussion about Lucas as pioneer of digital technology (535-6).
22 The concept franchise in this context relates to what Jenkins has described as a “coordinated effort to brand and market fictional content within the context of media conglomeration” (Convergence 285).
particular type of science fiction that dominated the mainstream idea of the genre at that time. But, I will also argue that the Star’verses has a foundation in the history of the genre and a longevity well into the 21st century.

The Star’verses as a concept represents a salient tendency in science fiction that primarily associates it with the juvenile and thus disassociated from issues of sexuality. In addition it represents male centered and predominantly heteronormative narratives. I will henceforth use the concept as a way to visualise and analyse this tendency. It can in fact be considered as a type of “generic cluster”, which is when “certain definitions, interpretations, and evaluations [come] together at any given time to suggest a coherent and clear genre” (Mittell, Genre and Television 17). When I suggest the juvenility of the Star’verses I mean that it is part of fostering the idea of science fiction as a genre directed at young people or even children and considered to some extent silly and childish.

This juvenile tonality lays a foundation for the expectations of the genre with association to juvenile narratives and themes. In addition I argue that this association with the juvenile actually disassociates it from other more adult concerns since they so rigorously exclude each other. Film and television with adult content is, by definition, not suitable for children – and this would include depictions of sex and sexuality. For example, the rating systems for cinema in the US from The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) includes among other things: nudity, sex, sensuality, sexually-derived words, and sexually-oriented nudity (Classifications and Rating Rules 6-8).

On a closer look, the ratings system also suggests a differentiation between the fantastic and realistic which I partly understand as a symptom of the idea of science fiction as juvenile. The Classification and Rating Administration (CARA) which provides specific ratings for films explains some of its ratings like this: Prometheus (2012) for example was “[r]ated R for sci-fi violence”, Star Trek (2009) “[r]ated PG-13 for sci-fi action and violence, and brief sexual content”, and Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace (1999) was “[r]ated PG for sci-fi action/violence” (my emphasis). While these motivations remain unclear, what is obvious is that sci-fi violence/action is

23 Mittell uses “discursive clusters” to display “a model for such stability in flux” (Genre and Television 17).
24 The Cambridge Dictionary Online states that juvenile means: “silly and typical of a child” or “of, by, or for a young person who is not yet an adult”.
25 The Cambridge Dictionary Online states that adult means: “typical of or suitable for adults: [...]. Adult films, magazines, and books show naked people and sexual acts and are not for children”. However, the topic of this dissertation is not adult as in pornographic.
26 For a historical overview of US television censorship see e.g. chapter i in Silverman.
deemed something different from violence/action in a non-fantastic narrative. In the TV Parental Guidelines there is similar generic labelling which has its own rating category: TV-Y7 FV. While TV-Y is suitable for all children and TV-Y7 for children over seven years, the TV-Y7 FV means programmes that are suitable from seven years but have a higher degree of fantasy violence (tvboss). This suggests that it is more appropriate for children to watch violence if it is within a fantastic narrative since they can more easily distinguish it from reality.\(^\text{27}\) I also believe that this has to do with the idea and the generic expectation of the fantastic, of science fiction, as a juvenile genre.

Although *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* have many differences in terms of setting, narrative and themes I consider their commonalities, for the purpose of this discussion, to be their major influence on the genre and their juvenile tonality. *Star Wars*, a mythical story of heroics with a primary focus on the battle between good and evil and the use of “the force”, is set “a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away”. *Star Trek* on the other hand is an exploration narrative set sometime in the future, a utopian vison of the future with mankind’s exploration of “Space, the final frontier”. While *Star Wars* was originally science fiction cinema, *Star Trek* was primarily a television series.\(^\text{28}\)

Notably both *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* came to represent the generic subtype “space opera” which according to science fiction scholar Gary Westfahl is “[t]o many, [...] synonymous with sf, [...] ‘the Star Trek, Star Wars stuff’” (197).\(^\text{29}\) The space-opera like the soap-opera lay stress upon simple plot and exciting adventure but in space-opera these were paired together with spaceships (Westfahl 197-8). This generic labelling also displays the tendency towards simplification of characters and plot in favour of visual spectacle, however the focus on relationships is not as prominent as in the soap-opera. Westfahl argues that “[i]n contrast to *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* (1977) was less mature and innovative as sf” (205). He instead considers *Star Trek (TOS)* as a “romantic space opera” that combines the space opera elements with the romantic novel (204). However, as I will display, though dealing with certain romantic themes the depictions of them remain both juvenile and safe in their dramatisation.

The influence of *Star Wars* on the genre is hard to overestimate. As such it is an especially good example of juvenile science fiction due to its long-lasting

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\(^\text{27}\) In fact, the TV-Y7 is motivated by the notion that these programmes “may be more appropriate for children who have acquired the developmental skills needed to distinguish between make-believe and reality” (tvboss). Thus, the separation into TV-Y7 FV could suggest that these children are considered to be able to cope with more violence at the same age if in a fantastic setting.

\(^\text{28}\) Both *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* eventually spawned films and other media as well as these initial products.

\(^\text{29}\) This definition also show the commonality with the adventure genre (cf. Westfahl 197).
impact on the genre. Although the science fiction canon from the 1960s-1970s was quite diverse, many narratives dealt thematically with the intersection between identity and technology as well as environmentalism (see e.g. Telotte, *Science Fiction* 103-4). Telotte argues that this eventually led to “a kind of recoil in the genre, what some might describe as a conservative turn away from these overtly political and ideologically laden stories, as the genre made its greatest capital by harking back to its mythical origins” (*Science Fiction* 105; my emphasis). The prominent example of this was George Lucas’s *Star Wars*-saga, which became the most profitable series of films in the history of the genre (106). In the late 1970s and early 1980s the genre experienced a revolution through the science fiction blockbuster due, in particular, to the success of *Star Wars* (cf. Bould 91). Even though many science fiction films from this time continued to question human identity in relation to technology and similar issues associated with postmodernity (Telotte, *Science Fiction* 108), *Star Wars* can be argued to be a conservative and nostalgic regression to the historical past of the genre which ironically infused it with new life.30 Bould states that “the 1980s witnessed a further juvenilization and sentimentalization of sf” as a consequence of the success of *Star Wars* (92).

*Star Wars* not only represents the return to a different tonality in the genre but also a novel way of producing blockbusters and high-concept films which combined film production with the market – a type of filmmaking that came to dominate Hollywood (cf. Wyatt; Grainge et al. 483-93). When the so-called movie brats Lucas and Steven Spielberg began to make science fiction films in the late 1970s they reinvented the classical Hollywood style and were closely committed to the history of both cinema and genre (Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* 8; see also Klinger 359). Thompson notes that Hollywood at this time experienced

> the ‘juvenilization’ of American cinema. The Movie Brat generation’s awareness of Hollywood history led them to inject a ‘retro’ quality into their films, [...]. Older, minor genres that had previously been designed to attract young audiences were elevated to the level of A pictures [...]. Now aging baby boomers go to the same popular sci-fi films that teenagers do. *(Storytelling in the New Hollywood* 8)

Notably, not only for science fiction, but for Hollywood cinema overall this time is characterised by filmmakers with an awareness of film history and Lucas is one of the primary examples of this trend (cf. Bordwell and Thompson 523-5). By returning to Hollywood nostalgia, Lucas was closely committed to the history of both cinema and genre, reinventing the classical stories which mostly echoed with a juvenile tone. The merchandise and toys associated with

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30 At least in terms of possible profit from science fiction film.
the films also helped establish the juvenility of the franchise. Grainge et al. suggest in their book *Film Histories* that “[Star Wars] is concerned with childhood innocence and the powers of imagination” (437). Gordon writes that Lucas deliberately made it appealing to “the prepubescent in us all” by his mix of new and old, and sexual innocence. (193) Gordon cites a Lucas biographer who suggests that “Lucas simply didn’t want sexuality in his fairy tale” (193-4), a statement my analyses of episode IV-VI will support.

The dominant discourse laid out by *Star Wars* in science fiction film (and television) owes much of its themes and content to an early history of science fiction. Science fiction film has, from its origin in the first half of the 20th century, often been described as a youth oriented genre and this is the history that Lucas writes himself into with *Star Wars*. It has been argued that *Star Wars* had “an indebtedness to the imagery, character types, and, [...] the world view shared by the serials of the 1930-1940s” (Telotte, *Science Fiction* 105; see also Grainge et al. 437). Science fiction serials were popular in the 1920s but became “far more prominent in the 1930s and 1940s, in great part because of shifting viewing/exhibition practices” (Telotte, *Science Fiction* 90). They were screened weekly to attract a younger audience to the theatres (Booker 3). During the 1930s and 1940s cinematic science fiction was kept alive mainly by the science fiction serials as the genre almost entirely disappeared from Hollywood feature films during the 1940s (Telotte, *Science Fiction* 91). Like other serials of this period “aimed at youthful matinee audiences from the 1930s to the 1950s” their target audience was young people (Bordwell and Thompson 61; see also Cornea 20). Film scholar Christine Cornea writes:

> The serial was plotted to a set formula that required a fast pace, easily recognisable and colourful characters and regular ‘cliff hangers’ to tempt children back to the cinemas to see the next episode. Many of these features found their way into later feature films and the American science fiction film genre therefore became inextricably linked with sensation, commercialism and a juvenile market. (21; my emphasis)

As Cornea also notes, this ongoing tendency in science fiction cinema, later on popularised and reinvigorated by *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, has a history that goes back to the formulation of science fiction as a cinematic genre.

After the Second World War the attendance in the American cinema theatres dropped due to the shifting viewing practices and the advent of television (Cornea 31). But still there was a thriving market for teenage oriented films in the drive-in theatres. Similarly for television the early science fiction programmes were mainly aimed at children in series like *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* (1950-1955), and these “helped establish science fiction as a central
television genre” (Booker 5). Johnston writes “[s]cience-fiction films had been
tagged with juvenile characteristics since the early 1950s, and this critical
reputation has echoed through the decades since” (9). Sobchack also notes
that “most American science fiction films play out scenarios which focus on
infantile experience while pretending to adult concerns” (“Virginity” 114). Up
to this day, science fiction is still often considered a juvenile genre (cf. e.g.
Douglas 24). For example, as Tulloch and Jenkins show a history of the way
the fans of Star Trek were conceptualised it also becomes clear that the science
fiction fans were, in many ways, associated with juvenility and even
infantilised (15-8). Sociologist Mary Jo Deegan considers the longevity of the
success of Star Trek: TOS to be connected to “its depiction of the future as a
Freudian fantasy” (209) in which sexual instinct is regulated by gender.

If the Star Wars-saga is one of the most highly influential texts of science
fiction cinema, Star Trek no doubt is its television counterpart. It became the
“prototype for the cult series” (Booker 50). Though initially TOS was only
mildly successful the franchise eventually, according to Booker, upheld its
dominance in science fiction television from 1960s and well into the 1980s.

The cancellation of the original Star Trek series marked the beginning of
a relatively slack period in the production of SFTV, [...]. Indeed, the
production of new series was so slow that, if Star Trek was ultimately the
most important science fiction series of the 1960s, it was probably also the
most important series of the 1970s. (Booker 67)

American science fiction television continued its low throughout the 1980s
and according to Booker, it was not until 1987 that the new “Star Trek: The
Next Generation propelled American SFTV into a rich new age” (68). Editor
Ginger Buchanan also notes that Star Trek is a “science fictional future that
has so much emotional power and longevity that for many [...] it (or some
variant of it) is the future” (52). For science fiction television, Star Trek is one
of the primary world building sources.

The importance of Star Trek to science fiction television cannot be
understated; Booker argues that “the Golden Nineties of science fiction
television could not have occurred without a groundbreaking predecessor like
TNG, which did so much to reinvigorate the genre, proving that SFTV still had
ideas and audience appeal” (109). According to Booker science fiction
television blossomed in the 1990s and became the richest decade for SFTV.
Not only with two new Star Trek series: Deep Space Nine (1993-1999) and
Voyager (1995-2001) but also The X-Files (1993-) and Babylon 5 (1994-
1998). In fact Booker’s disposition of his book, Science Fiction Television, is
built around the Star Trek-series. In addition, the impact of Star Trek to
American culture is evident in the major fan base of the franchise (cf. Tulloch and Jenkins).

The dominant discourse laid out by Star Wars and Star Trek in science fiction film and television owes much of its themes and content to an early history of science fiction but their legacy remained throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century. For example, Battis displays the dominance of Star Wars and Star Trek to the science fiction canon of the 1990s-2000s and how cemented values and genre expectations set the standard for new science fiction at that time. He writes that

SF has somehow managed to become cemented as either the voyages of the Enterprise or the heroic exploits of Luke Skywalker against a tyrannical empire. These benchmarks have become the cultural repositories that newer SF shows ‘borrow’ from. (Battis 12)

I also see this dominance and the “cemented values” of the Star‘verses remaining as a lasting impact on the genre well after the turn of the 21st century. The continued popularity of Star Trek is not least evident in the film reboots Star Trek (2009), Star Trek Into Darkness (2013), and the upcoming film Star Trek Beyond (2016) and announced television series to premiere in 2017 (“New Star Trek”). Similarly for Star Wars the production of episodes I-III (1999-2005), episode VII (2016), animated series Star Wars: The Clone Wars (2008-2015), Star Wars: Rebels (2014) and upcoming films such as Rogue One: A Star Wars Story (2016) and episode VIII (2017) display the continued popularity of the franchise. The fact that Disney bought Lucasfilm for $4.05 billion in 2012 (see e.g. “Disney buys Star Wars”) also speaks for its value as a franchise. The affiliation with Disney also falls well into line with the juvenile tonality that I am arguing.

However, this does not mean that the Star‘verses was the only available influence on the genre. I do not suggest that the Star‘verses constitute the entire genre of science fiction but instead represent a dominant discourse in the genre at a certain time. There are examples of more adult and explicit depictions of sexuality in science fiction, but many of which are genre hybrids drawing generic lineage from the horror film. Through its long history there are of course some examples of something one could call adult science fiction.

According to Booker, the 1950s’ Tales of Tomorrow (1951-1953) “established a tradition of thoughtful, adult-oriented programming that may be seen as a direct predecessor to The Twilight Zone [1959-1964], which can perhaps be considered the series that marked the maturation of science fiction television” (5-6; my emphasis). Cornea notes some exceptions to the juvenile, but most
of these are horror/science fiction hybrids (21). This hybridity, I argue, is vital here since horror films, due to their content, are a genre mainly aimed at an adult audience in contrast to the science fiction described here.

More contemporary examples of what could be conceived as a more adult science fiction such as David Cronenberg’s Videodrome or Ridley Scott’s Alien both owe parts of their generic belonging to the horror film. Similarly, the aesthetics of Blade Runner (1982) are attributed more to film noir than science fiction, and the overt sexual tension and allusions to sexuality and desire are not a surprise. Neale states that “the principal hallmarks of noir include a distinctive treatment of sexual desire and sexual relationships” (Genre 160). The noir style of Blade Runner makes its narrative concerns with sexuality and desire integrate smoothly with science fiction too. Thus, genre hybridity brings multiple and sometimes colliding generic expectations. The specific type of science fiction that the Star’verses represent however is far from these examples.

Although I have argued that the juvenile tonality of the Star’verses carried over into the 21st century, I will stress that by the turn of the millennium an “adult turn” took place in the genre that disrupted that dominant position. However, it does not mean that what the Star’verses represent disappeared or changed completely, but that more adult science fiction also became more commonplace. Thus, the heteronormativity and conservative values associated with the Star’verses began to change by that time. This however will be returned to in the Conclusion. Suffice to say, the Star’verses and what they represent had their glory days in the 1980-1990s, which eventually becomes subject to change.

Heroes and (Sexual) Relationships

“Sex in the Star Wars saga? But, one is tempted to say, these are only kiddie shows”. (Gordon 193)

As indicated by the quote above the juvenile tone of Star Wars makes it almost absurd to suggest sexual themes. In fact science fiction (or as I argue, a particular type of science fiction) seems to have this juvenile tone or reluctance to depict or deal with sex or sexuality. Booker writes that “themes (especially sexual ones) [...] have typically been avoided (or at least treated with kid gloves) on SFTV” (155). Sobchack describes the relationship between science fiction film and sexuality in more general terms:

While there are numerous boy-meets-girl encounters across the galaxy
and the genre, they tend to be *chaste and safe in their dramatization and peripheral to narrative concerns* – no matter when the films were made. ("Virginity" 105; my emphasis)

This points toward the narrative periphery into which science fiction often puts romantic or sexual relationships. However I do not suggest this to be true for all science fiction, which is implied by Sobchack, but specifically that this tendency is made dominant by the *Star’verses*. However, Sobchack does not question the presence of compulsory heterosexuality in the genre, she writes that the heterosexual encounters in the genre might fulfil “the vague demands of formula” (“Virginity” 105), something I will return to at length in *Chapter 3* by considering the storytelling formulas of Hollywood cinema. More importantly, she argues that these relationships are asexual, in the meaning of not expressions of sexual desire. “For the most part, human heterosexual relationships in the science fiction film are tepid – more obligatory than steamy” (Sobchack “Virginity” 104). In other words, not depicted as adult, real, relationships. She uses the astronaut as an archetypical symbol of the male protagonist in science fiction film and argues that he is remarkably asexual and committed mainly to the cool and rational (“Virginity” 107). Sobchack further argues that the typical male protagonists in science fiction “are cool, rational, competent, unimaginative, male, and sexless”, and these very qualities make them heroes, not only in science fiction but in popular culture (107). I will analyse some examples from *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* based on this idea of the science fiction hero. Hence, in what follows I will focus on the hero and also give some examples of some primary relationships from the *Star’verses* and mainly the portrayal of their sexual desire or lack of such.

Television and media scholar Sara Gwenllian-Jones, though focused on cult television and slash fiction when analysing “The sex lives of cult television characters”, contributes to a wider discussion about depictions of sexuality in science fiction (cf. 85). She poses the question of whether “fantastic genre cult television perhaps inherently [is] queer?” (82). Through a discussion about heterosexuality, domesticity and the fantastic that I will return to at length in *Chapter 2*, she argues that in order to remain within the fantastic the narrative has to avoid the dullness of domestic heterosexuality and thus the primary relationships of protagonists usually belong to one of two categories:

1. Primary relationships between a male and a female character which signal a mutual sexual attraction that is never fully realized (Mulder and Scully, Picard and Crusher […]) or which cannot progress beyond romance (Buffy and Angel […] )
2. Primary relationships between characters of the same sex (Kirk and Spock, Hercules and Iolus, Xena and Gabrielle) (89)
In *Star Trek: TOS*, *TNG* and *Star Wars* the primary relationships are between men (e.g. Kirk, Spock, Dr. McCoy; Pickard, Riker, Data; Luke, Han, Obi-Wan, R2-D2, C-3PO). Only secondary female/male relationships are fully realised in the narratives (e.g. Miles O’Brien (Colm Meaney) and Keiko (Rosalind Chao); and Leia and Han). Ginn notes that “Voyager was the first Star Trek series to allow major characters to fall in love with one another, marry, and reproduce [...] although minor characters had been doing it all along” (“Human, Alien” 231). None of the protagonists in *TOS*, *TNG*, or *Star Wars* have a (romantic) relationship with anyone that does not belong to one of the above categories.\(^{31}\) They thus avoid the possibility of primary relationships becoming domesticised, either through homosocial relationships that from a heteronormative point of view never runs the risk, or through unfinished heterosexual relationships - including temporary sexual encounters.

**Male Characters**

I argue that when sexual desire is presented in the narrative in male human characters in the *Star’verses* (such as Captain Kirk *Star Trek: TOS*, Commander Riker *Star Trek: TNG*, Han Solo *Star Wars*) or non-human male protagonists (such as Spock *TOS*, Data *TNG*) they either represent this logical, rational scientific exploration of sexuality and the female that is highlighted by Sobchack or fulfil the adolescent male fantasy of the flirtatious brave hero who always (temporarily) gets the girl. In both cases sexuality is for the most part depicted as chaste and in the narrative periphery; only suggested implicitly in the subtext and thus remaining unexplored within the narrative.

In *TOS* the qualities of the hero are split between Captain Kirk (William Shatner) and Mr. Spock (Leonard Nimoy) giving Spock the ultimate cool, rationality of a Vulcan and Kirk in contrast is the archetypical Captain with a woman in every port. Kirk is portrayed as something of a ladies’ man and is often put in sexually charged situations with beautiful women but the depiction of this desire falls into the juvenile tonality of the series and is depicted as chaste. David Greven describes Kirk in a similar manner in his study of *Star Trek*: “The archetypical Kirk [...] is the invincible seducer, yet the authentic, private Kirk blushes at sex-talk” (9). This well describes the tone of the series as regards sexuality. In addition, all encounters Kirk has with women are temporary and most of the time peripheral to the narrative. Since they never evolve beyond (temporary) romance they can be said to represent a narrative with little or no impact on the continued drama and thus avoid the

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\(^{31}\) As protagonists for this example I mean Kirk, Spock, Dr. McCoy from *TOS*; Pickard, Riker, Data from *TNG*; and Luke from *Star Wars*. 

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domesticity Gwenllian-Jones suggests. All of Kirk’s relationships remain safe and do not pose any risk of progressing.

The one time Kirk has a relationship that could potentially lead to a long lasting relationship it conveniently becomes impossible as he knows that she has to die (“The City at the Edge of Forever” 1.28). As Kirk and Spock chase a temporarily mad Dr. McCoy (DeForest Kelley) back in time to the 1930s Kirk falls in love with Edith Keeler (Joan Collins), whose death is key to resolving the damage in the timeline that they set out to mend. Their relationship also serves as an example of the visual representation of romance that is quite typical of the series. As they are about to kiss there is actually a cut right where the kiss should have been, so all that is visible when they kiss is Spock’s reaction to it. The kiss itself is left hanging in the middle of these cuts as a suggested action, but never visually depicted.

Another example of the dealings with sexuality in TOS is when Spock is going through the Vulcan reproductive state of Pon Farr in “Amok Time” (2.1). He is forced to return to Vulcan to go through a mating ritual in order to survive. In the ritual the woman T’Pring (Arlene Martel) must choose either marriage or challenge. When she chooses the challenge there is never an opportunity to visualise what would have happened if they were to be married. Pon Farr is here depicted as a highly emotional state and described in sexually infused words as plak tow - blood fever, a state that removes all logic and brings forth body over mind. Spock himself does not have any interest in mating when brought back to his senses, when he returns to his duties as first officer again with all emotions once again removed.

In Star Trek: TNG different relationships between crew members have developed or been explored. Commander Will Riker (Jonathan Frakes) is the character who is mostly affiliated with sexual desire and the controller of the male gaze. Riker is repeatedly seen flirting with different women and is presented as a ladies’ man similar to Kirk. Both representing the white, American, heterosexual man who not only explores foreign worlds but also women.\(^{32}\) As he continues to have temporary relationships throughout - he, like Kirk, can continue to be a ladies’ man and a brave hero not entrapped in the narrative dullness of domesticity.

Put into a colonial context in which the Star Trek narratives smoothly fit, these depictions look more historical than they do futuristic. Even though the world aboard the Enterprise in both TOS and TNG appears as an equal society it is quite apparent, especially in TOS, that the female presence is primarily a

\(^{32}\) For a further discussion about Kirk and the male gaze see e.g. Greven chapter 1.
visual pleasure or a representation of the otherness of women. However, during the almost 30 years from the beginning of *TOS* and the end of *TNG* the way these look has changed and by those standards the more explicit kissing in *TNG* is not suggesting a more provocative portrayal. It cannot be overlooked that certain changes in time influence what could be depicted, so in the late 1980s some depictions were possible that would not have been possible in the 1960s.\(^{33}\) The passage of time changes what is possible and allowed to air on television or in cinema, as well as changing what is accepted culturally at the specific time. While Kirk and Edith’s kiss was censored in season one, more elaborate kissing was allowed in later seasons and in *TNG* as is true for not only science fiction.

*TNG* continued to explore similar relationships as *TOS* but with some notable exceptions. There are some isolated episodes where crew sexuality and romantic relationships are more elaborately explored. However, the narrative dealings with those instances of sexual desire take a quite specific form. The sexual encounters that are positioned at the centre of the narrative seems limited to parallel universes, other versions of characters, in dreams, or on the holodeck. By extension, these events never really took place, or were fabricated by aliens or drugs and hence not free actions of the crew. For example the intoxication of the crew in “The Naked Now” (1.2): here Data (Brent Spiner) and Lieutenant Yar (Denise Crosby) have a sexual encounter and Data describes himself as “fully functional”, however, even though Data is intoxicated as well he is driven by his (scientific) curiosity and desire to be human. In addition, a potential relationship between Worf (Michael Dorn) and Deanna (Marina Sirtis) is considered in several episodes. Worf first moves between different universes, in some of which he and Deanna are married. So both he and the audience are given the chance to consider this romantic relationship between a Klingon and a human/betazoid without ever being at risk of the reality of this coupling. Worf early on comments on the possibility of a non-Klingon mate:

Worf: I am not concerned with pleasure, Commander, I am a warrior.
Riker: Even Klingons need love now and then.
Worf: For what we would consider love, sir, I would need a Klingon woman.
Riker: What about plain old basic sex? You must have some need for that.
Worf: Of course, but with the females available to me, sir - Earth females - I must restrain myself too much. They are quite fragile, sir. (“Justice” 1.7)

\(^{33}\) E.g. Greven challenges the common association of *TOS* and the sexism of the era in which it was produced, in order to suggest an allegorical reading beneath this obvious surface.
A similar departure from reality occurs when the crew devolves in an episode which explores the bestial nature of Klingon sexuality; Worf is turned into a 200 pound creature with an exoskeleton and, reduced to a beast, tries by any means possible to get to Deanna, whom he considers to be his mate. The implications of this are quite unnerving even though it is clear that he will not get to her, because if he did, he would rape her and - due to his size and lack of conscience – probably kill her. This is of course impossible in this story world so she is never at any real risk, the consequences of this would be irreparable. However, it is crucial to note that Klingons are depicted as black hence this builds upon the stereotype of the threatening sexuality of black men, especially to white women.34

These narratives can also fill the purpose of temporarily exploring otherwise impossible relationships and provide a pseudo-closure for these relationships. It is the use of these generic devices that allows for the temporary move outside the primary world and its structures without having to commit to heterosexual domesticity further on in the narrative.

The primary relationship between a woman and a man in *Star Wars* episodes IV-VI is that between Luke (Mark Hamill) and Leia (Carrie Fisher). It looks in the beginning as something out of the first category but evolves beyond the impossible as their family relationship is revealed. When this primary relationship instead is turned into that of two siblings all romantic or sexual aspects between them are removed. Instead Leia and Han (Harrison Ford) initiate a romance that has the tension of the “never fully realised” relationship. Leia and Han’s relation is never depicted more elaborately than a kiss, as the storyworld remains unable to suggest that they could have a sexual encounter, at least we would never get to see it or hear about it. Their relationship is safe, and it is free from desire and the adult parts. Considered through the lens of Gwenllian-Jones’ categorisations the avoidance of a domestication of their relationship is achieved through not allowing the romance to play out within the narrative. Desire and human relationships - even though chastely depicted - are embedded in the plot. The suggestions of incestuous desire between Leia and Luke are - even though present - never at any real risk of coming to pass as the tension between Han and Leia begins. It appears almost impossible and out of place to even imagine a scene of overt sexual content in *Star Wars*, even between the perfect heterosexual coupling of white, masculine, rough-handling Han and chaste, feminine, Princess Leia and that I argue, is partly due to the juvenile tone of the franchise.

34 The episode draws attention to the stereotype of black men that Donald Bogle calls “the brutal black buck’ a sexually uncontrollable figure who lust after white women” (qtd. in Wiegman 161).
The depictions of sexuality in *Star Wars* are if we believe Jim Holte, embedded in Puritan ideology. He writes that

> seldom in recent films have viewers seen two characters more pure of heart than Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia. Even Han Solo, the most ‘worldly’ of the central trinity of heroes, exhibits adolescent coquettishness in place of mature sexuality. The heroes of *Star Wars* are essentially sexless. (189)

What supports Holte’s analysis further is that explicit dealing with sexuality in *Star Wars* is not only nonexistent, but condemned. A Jedi knight is not allowed to have sexual interactions or romantic engagements, and today we all know what happened to the only character that evidently had sex in *Star Wars*, Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader - it will lead you to the dark side.

Holte also notices the repression of sexuality in the genre and argues that the American science fiction film, in many ways, draws its imaginary worlds and narratives from American myths, and especially its Puritan heritage. The Puritan has according to Holte almost become synonymous with sexual repression. Sexual activities are considered sinful if not practiced within marriage and under patriarchal forms (183).

An essential element of this myth, [...] is the repression of sexuality and concomitant understatement or denial of the importance of women. The tendency for mass culture in general, and the science fiction film in particular, to exploit popular mythology and replicate its elements explains why American science fiction has often – even characteristically
– been a macho genre that ignores women and represses or sublimes sexuality. (Holte 181-2)

He uses *Forbidden Planet* (1956) as an example of them both; the dangerous, repressed sexuality represented by the id and the sublimated sexual energy which is represented as innocent looks between the hero and the girl. Holte describes this ideology and myth as central to a large number of science fiction films, and underlines the avoidance of women and sexuality as characteristic of these. He further suggests that science fiction can in fact solve the Puritan problem with both women and sexuality through the ascension of man beyond biology, where neither is needed for reproduction (188). Sobchack likewise suggests that the narrative importance of the virginity of (male) astronauts in science fiction is that they fill the purpose of embodying the breakaway narrative; men freed from biological dependence on women (“Virginity” 107-8). The question then is what narrative function the female characters have in these narratives.

**Female Characters**

Non-human (aliens, robots etc.) female characters are often depicted as both sexual objects and sexual predators and are the most common way to use sexuality in science fiction—however, they are not the heroes - they are the antagonists. Sobchack also notes that films where sex and sexuality are depicted are mostly related to non-human entities (“Virginity” 104-5).

Predominantly when sexuality is a part in science fiction it is mostly as a narrative device to metaphorically enhance the threat of the alien. There are countless examples of female-coded aliens using their sexuality in order to subdue the male protagonist. This tiresome trope of female sexual power over men and heteronormative values associated with it can be exemplified by *Metropolis* (1927), *Blade Runner, Species* (1995), and *Terminator 3. Rise of the Machines* (2003), Borg queen in *TNG*, and *Men in Black II* (2002) to mention a few. Understood plainly from a gender perspective these are narratives about evil women using their sexuality in order to dominate men. However, as antagonists they fill a different dramatic function than the hero and the protagonists.

When it comes to female characters who are not antagonists they have an ambiguous relationship to sexuality. Both Holte and Sobchack emphasise the clash between the generic identity and women’s role in the narrative as a sort of carrier of sexuality and the threat posed by female characters to force the narrative to include sexuality and relationships (“Virginity” 103). The recurring technological focus suggests that women as characters and the primarily homosocial relationships in science fiction are one of the reasons for the de-emphasis of sexuality in the narratives. At the end of the 1980s during
the period in which I would argue that the Star’verses dominance is in place, Sobchack also argues that the absence of female characters in science fiction narratives is intricately connected to a de-emphasis on sexuality in the genre (“Virginity”). What is at stake here according to Sobchack is the risk the female presence poses to the “cool reason and male camaraderie necessary to the conquest of space, the defeat of mutant monsters and alien invasions, the corporate development and exploitation of science and technology” (“Virginity” 103). She states that “[h]uman biological sexuality and women as figures of its representation have been repressed in the male-dominated, action-oriented narratives of most American science fiction films from the 1950s to the present” (103). She draws this connection between women and sex from a wider cultural understanding of “women”, meaning the traditional values associated with women connected to sexuality. In other words, from a heteronormative point of view, there cannot be any sexuality without women, and women are understood as “naturally” connected to sexuality.

Sobchack also suggests that the inclusion of women in science fiction is a way “to answer the unspoken charges of homosexuality which echo around the edges of the genre” (“Virginity” 105). I understand this as a way for Sobchack to criticise male dominance in the genre, which in an all-male crew aboard a spaceship always “runs the risk” of non-heterosexual desire, for both characters and spectators. I do believe that this threat of homosexuality induces the need for these narratives, and even the mere presence of women in the genre can subdue this threat, as they have done. By introducing peripheral narratives about heterosexual encounters the threatening question of non-heterosexuality needs not be addressed. In addition, within these narratives, as in most narratives, there is a continual reaffirmation of heteronormativity and male heterosexuality through less explicit means, such as the use of humour, irony and dialogue to defuse and disarm the constant threat of homosexuality; reaffirming, in small ways, characters’ masculinity and heterosexuality.

Considering the homosocial focus of the Star’verses this risk Sobchack points toward is constantly at hand. In Star Wars if it were not for Leia the entire cast would be male, even Han and Chewbacca’s (Peter Mayhew) close relationship could potentially be called into question. Fortunately Leia turns out to be Luke’s sister and thus provides a heterosexual alibi for Han. Leia even serves the purpose of reassuring Luke’s heterosexuality before he becomes a Jedi. Through the short romantic scenes with Leia it is established that it is not due to a deviant sexuality that he does not pursue women, but as a sacrifice for the force.

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35 Obviously, the present Sobchack speaks of is not now, but rather the late 1980s - early 1990s.
The peripheral romantic plots between Kirk and various women in *Star Trek: TOS* could indeed be considered as a sort of alibi, especially considering that the subtextual sexual and romantic tension between Kirk and Spock presents a more elaborate romantic narrative. The unseen kiss in “The City at the Edge of Time” described above is, in fact, similar to the closeness existing between Spock and Kirk which is constantly just a frame away from visual depiction. Greven notes that

> When watching the original series, one has little trouble understanding the basis from which slash writers derived their fixation on this male couple. The love between Kirk and Spock is quite palpable, lending their banter a depth and urgency that exceeds the boundaries of typical male friendship on television. (6)

I cannot agree more, a prime example of this closeness is the scene in which Kirk and Spock reunite in *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (1989) as illustrated by the image above.

These examples display how a female presence (even if it turns out to be your sister) can ensure heterosexuality and disqualify any assumptions of queer desire. But this is not the only dramatic function of these characters, though often in conflict with this idea of women as sexual objects rather than subjects.

In order to successfully achieve the status of science fiction protagonist the female character might in fact have to de-emphasise her relationship to
sexuality. When attempting to legitimise them as cool, rational science fiction heroes, attributes connected to femininity and sexuality do not fit the characteristics of "hero." According to Sobchack

when [women and sex] turn up they tend to be disaffiliated from each other, stripped of their cultural significance as a semiotic relation, carefully separated from each other so that biological sexuality is not linked to human women and human women are not perceived as sexual. ("Virginity" 103)

Notably, Sobchack speaks of human women and exemplifies it through two types of women in science fiction, both of which, according to her, are separated from sexuality. Both of these types of female characters serve the same ends according to Sobchack, to disguise biological differences and disaffiliate women from sexuality, but in different ways ("Virginity" 106). One type is described as a narrative substitute for men, who are sexually confused with males, a type exemplified by Ellen Ripley (Alien). Practically a male hero but with a female actress. Notably, the character of Ripley was initially written for a male actor and only slightly revised when Sigourney Weaver was cast for the role (Gallardo and Smith 3; Sobchack, "Virginity" 106). The other type is exemplified by Princess Leia (Star Wars), who is, through attitude, social position, costume and occupation, seen as an unthreatening, safe and sexually defused woman ("Virginity" 106).36

However, as time progressed, several more science fiction protagonists were women. Around the turn of the millennium science fiction film and television saw a development that brought forward more visibility for female characters, not only as protagonists but also as sexual bodies. This could be understood in terms of spectacle in contrast to narrative, as a move between women as “a fantastic spectacle” (cf. Johnston 60) and women as subjects and protagonists.37 The two sides are seldom combined however. The higher degree of sexual visibility in science fiction (for example Megan Fox in Transformers, 2007) only emphasises the objectification of women rather than a move towards female characters who can combine being a woman and having a sexuality and at the same time remaining a subject.

In the final part of this chapter I will continue this discussion about the science fiction hero and what is connected to it in addition to the gendered attributes

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36 Dale Pollock suggests that Lucas even had Carrie Fisher tape her breasts down in order to avoid them drawing attention on-screen. (qtd. in Gordon 193-4). This from my perspective is a way to hide all gender differences. However, as I will argue at length in the next chapter the inclusion of the gold bikini is another story.

37 Johnston uses this to describe the robotic Maria in Metropolis.
as described here, through an analysis of the character Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) from the television series *Torchwood*. I will investigate the possibilities for a queer science fiction hero through this example. But first I will display the friction between genre and sexuality, and the juvenile vs. the adult through an analysis of a contemporary debate in the British press concerning season four, “Miracle Day”, of *Torchwood*. It displays this lingering uneasiness of the relationship between science fiction and sexuality, and especially queer sexuality. Simultaneously I present an example of the more adult science fiction that followed the turn of the millennium that includes science fiction narratives that, in contrast to the *Star’verses*, deal more freely with issues of sexuality. Issues such as changed regulations regarding depictions of sexuality in film and television also indicate this changed tonality in the two media.

**Regulations of Sexual Content and Changes in Time**

Overall, sexuality or sexual content in film and television has become more explicit as time has passed and the question of what can be screened in theatres or aired on television is highly dependent on the time and place of exhibition. Compare for example the kiss between Captain Kirk and Lt. Uhura in *TOS* (‘Plato’s Stepchildren’ 3.10) which in 1968 was the first interracial kiss on television, with the sexual content of television from the 1990-2010s in for example *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), *The L Word* (2004-2009), and *Game of Thrones* (2011-). What is deemed appropriate and is allowed to be aired changes over time due to several factors. The changes in science fiction I am examining are not isolated from other changes in cinema, television, society, discourse, politics, technology, and aesthetics. All of which contribute to the way in which moving images can be produced and exhibited. This inevitably brings about changes to film and television content and themes, science fiction not excluded.

Issues of censorship and similar regulations do not only provide guidelines and rules about representations in cinema and on television, they can also be treated as documents that display what values are assigned to certain norms at certain times. As cinema developed as a new form of entertainment and art, the question of respectability and morals of the cinema partly drove

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38 See e.g. the introduction in Arthurs for a discussion about both the increased amount and explicitness of sex on television over the last decades and previous research on sexuality and television.

39 What can be screened also differs from country to country, for example the film *The Danish Girl* (2015) with a transgender theme was banned in Qatar in January 2016 (see e.g. “Qatar bans Eddie Redmayne transgender film The Danish Girl”).

51
Hollywood studios to adopt a practice of self-censorship which became the Production Code in the 1930s. The Code was in a way a response to the immorality of both Hollywood personnel and its narratives in the 1920s pre-Code era (see e.g. Leff and Simmons 3; Doherty; Grainge et al. 100) This was a way to avoid legislation and for the Studios to remain in control of the industry. The Code regulated content and issues of plot, making it virtually impossible to make films outside of these regulations for over 30 years in the US. This was, as is well known, partly due to the vertical integration of the major studios which meant that studios controlled production, distribution and exhibition. In addition, no theatres owned by members of the MPAA would show unapproved films (see e.g. Bordwell and Thompson 144, 334-5), in practice this meant almost all major theatres. In order to get a film into a theatre it had to have been approved according to the Code.

The Code regulated among other things depictions of violence, drug-use, religion, evil, nudity, and sexuality. According to the Code, films were to uphold the institution of marriage and the home: "The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationships are the accepted or common thing" (see e.g. Doherty 362). Nudity and sexuality were strictly regulated in the Code, which meant that Hollywood cinema for a long time dictated both what was visually acceptable to show and what types of stories were allowed to be told. Hence, the direction of the plot and its characters were inevitably adapted to the Code (cf. Doherty). Although the Code was eventually abolished in the 1960s and replaced with a rating system, it too regulates to some extent what can be depicted, as noted at the beginning of this chapter (cf. CARA). A similar development has taken place in television.

As for cinema, censorship and regulations for television were and are primarily aimed at protecting children from unsuitable content (cf. Arthurs 23; tvboss), and television has, in a way, a dual position in society as a link between the public and the private spheres. Television has through its history been firmly associated with a family audience which inevitably affected its address and content. Television scholar Jane Arthurs writes that:

"Television is a mass medium whose institutional routines were formed in the 1940s and 1950s within a set of practices and regulations that assumed a middle-class family audience with traditional patterns of gendered behavior. These households were imagined as nuclear families, with one television in the sitting room that the family watched together; [...]. (1-2)"

It has been associated with a conservative address (Arthurs 1). Television regulations have been affected by the fact that television is a medium, in
contrast to cinema, that is watched at home. Arthurs argues that “regulatory practices in television are the conceptual boundaries that classify and define what is appropriate to the public and the private spheres” (21). They are, according to Arthurs, dependent on normative ideas of how it is appropriate to address a family in its own home (21). Television can also regulate its content as regards time of day, different channels, etc. to suit the intended viewer and as in the US technologically regulated by for example the V-chip (cf. Arthurs 24).

While issues such as taste, religious or political views play a major part in these regulations, the market itself is pivotal. In the US the television industry is

an almost entirely market-based, commercial enterprise [...]. For entertainment programmes on the networks (ABC, NBS, CBS, Fox, WBN) the standards and practices department for each company regulates output. It regulates each programme from its inception, basing its judgment on audience research. (Arthurs 23)

The financial and market aspect of content is of course pivotal to these networks as it is for the Hollywood film. Public service channels however, as Arthur indicates, have “ideals [...] based on the assumption that television should improve the tastes of the masses [...]. [P]ublic service television should educate, inform and entertain” (9).

While primarily a British example, season four of Torchwood which is the primary topic here, is co-produced with an American network and in-between systems. The first season of Torchwood aired in 2006 on BBC3, a channel aimed at a more niched audience and season 2 was moved to BBC2 as a testimony to its success. In the US the show premiered in 2007 on BBC America and became one of the channel’s highest-rated shows (Hills, “Torchwood” 276). The third season; the mini-series “Children of Earth” was aired on the more mainstream channel BBC1. While the first three series were produced by BBC Wales, the fourth season “Miracle Day” was a co-production between BBC Wales, BBC Worldwide and the American network Starz and was also aired on BBC1 in the UK (johnbarrowman.com).

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40 For a developed discussion about US and UK television regulations see Arthurs (21-6).
Genre Identity and a Queer Hero in Torchwood

Torchwood is an example of a science fiction series which focuses on sexuality and sexual identity in a prominent way. In fact Torchwood is one of the few science fiction film or television texts that I would label “overtly queer” to use Pearson’s vocabulary. Overt in the way it “questions the ‘naturalist fiction’ that sex, gender and sexuality are matters of ‘human senses and common sense’” (Pearson, “Alien Cryptographies” 19). Series creator Russell T. Davies “has pointed out, part of the program’s distinctive identity comes not from its depictions of sex but rather from its representations of sexuality” (Hills, “Torchwood” 278). It is a series that I would argue is a perfect example of the more adult, mature science fiction narratives that emerged in the 21st century.

Davies, whose earlier works include Queer as Folk (1999-2000), relaunched British cult series Doctor Who in 2005 and in 2006 the show’s spin-off Torchwood. After an appearance in Doctor Who the character Captain Jack Harkness, a former time agent born in the 51st century, becomes the protagonist of Torchwood and leads the organisation Torchwood Three, around which the series plot revolves. The Torchwood Institute was founded by Queen Victoria in 1879 as a response to the alien threat to the British Empire after her encounter with the Doctor (“Tooth and Claw” 2.2). The main characters of Torchwood investigate extraterrestrial occurrences and try to control a rift in time and space located in Cardiff, from which otherworldly or othertimely beings or objects sometimes emerge. In the midst of this Jack leads his team with the following ambition:

Torchwood: outside the government, beyond the police; tracking down alien life on Earth, and arming the human race against the future. The Twenty-First Century is when it all changes. And you’ve gotta be ready. (Torchwood intro)

Though set in the Doctor Who-universe Torchwood is far from what the fans of Doctor Who had come to expect during the, approximately, 50 years of the show. Doctor Who was originally intended as an educational series, displaying scientific ideas and depicting major historical events through the use of time travel (Creeber, The Television Genre Book 37). This also meant that the show was directed at a family audience. While the original Doctor Who had more in common with the Star’verses in this respect, the reboot of 2005 differs from the original series and at times becomes a darker and more adult TV series,

41 The original Doctor Who was aired from 1963-1989 with a total of 26 seasons and one TV film.
but it is still aired before the 9pm watershed on BBC One in the UK.\textsuperscript{42} Torchwood on the other hand is aired post-watershed due to more adult content (see e.g. Barron 216; Hills, “Torchwood” 276). According to media scholar Matt Hills Torchwood “supposedly offers a more [in contrast to Doctor Who] adult, sophisticated franchise” (“Torchwood” 276). He suggests that the show’s adult (and cult) transgressiveness is visible in a number of ways, from adult language and sexual content to political and religious themes (“Torchwood” 277). The description of the afterlife, or indeed lack of afterlife, which in Torchwood is non-existent - “there is just blackness, an everlasting nothingness” (Hills, “Torchwood” 277) - also contributes to the adult tone in the series. Richard Berger even suggests that Torchwood could be seen as a slash fic of Doctor Who. That is the fan fiction subgenre in which same-sex characters from a story are paired together sexually, a fan fiction practice that notably began with Kirk/Spock (see e.g. Greven 5-7).

In addition, most episodes of Torchwood were rated 15 in the UK (bbfc). Television rating systems display what type of issues are to be considered as inappropriate for children or young viewers, such as violence, but also include issues of sexuality and even taste (cf. Arthurs). Arthurs performs an analysis of the regulations of television in USA and the UK and highlights television as a domestic medium that “brings public events and debate into the private world” (21), something that becomes apparent in the debate about Torchwood.

The critical discussions about the adult themes of Torchwood in fact bring to light issues of genre and those same juvenile characteristics previously discussed. Hills devotes most of his writing on Torchwood in The Essential Cult TV Reader to a discussion about whether the show is juvenile or adult and that its telefantasy-content renders this a difficult distinction to make:

[British TV critic Charlie] Brooker alleges that despite the program’s inclusion of sex and gore, its telefantasy adventure elements – the high-tech SUV, an invisible entrance to the Hub via a magic paving stone, the Doctor’s severed hand preserved in a jar – add a childish aspect to the otherwise adult content, resulting in a bizarre and jarring mixture of tonalities. (“Torchwood” 278; my emphasis)

\textsuperscript{42} OfCom, Independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries writes: “The watershed starts at 21:00 and material unsuitable for children should not, in general, be shown before 21:00 or after 05:30. The watershed is a concept well understood by parents and carers as the time which signals the move towards adult content on television".
The mixture of tonalities for Brooker relates directly to expectations of genre. These contradictions lead Stephen James Walker to suggest that the unevenness of the show must be related to its generic identity.

Arguably the only way this criticism makes any sort of sense is if one takes the view that there is something inherently juvenile or childish about TV science-fiction, and that presenting it in an adult context is thus bound to produce an incongruity. (qtd. in Hills, “Torchwood” 278; my emphasis)

Even though I agree with Walker’s observation it is impossible to separate this incongruity from other aspects regarding the production of the series, such as for example the availability of special effects due to financial or technological restrictions.

“It’s supposed to be sci-fi, not sex-fi”
The episode, suitably named “Immortal Sins” (4.7), consists of two parallel stories, one set in the present day and one that depicts Jack in the 1920s and how he meets Angelo Colasanto (Daniele Favilli) with whom he initiates a relationship. After the episode was aired in 2011 the conservative British newspaper the Daily Mail published an article with the headline: “It’s supposed to be sci-fi, not sex-fi: Hundreds of viewers complain to BBC over ‘pointless’ gay scenes in Torchwood”. Journalist Chris Hastings writes that over 500 viewers complained to BBC for the (homo)sexual content in the episode “which they said were ‘pointless’, irrelevant to the plot and out of place in a sci-fi show” (my emphasis). I do not want to use the debate to demonstrate public opinion because only 500 people complained and the episode was watched by over 4 million people in the UK (doctorwhonews.net). The analysis instead highlights the types of arguments brought up by the article and how they relate to genre expectations.

In the Daily Mail article there are two major themes which relate to why science fiction should not depict (homo)sexual relationships; firstly the intended audience and secondly narrative coherency. Hastings quotes one of the viewer’s responses:

‘This show is meant to be a sci-fi show. I had to turn it off as my grandson, an avid sci-fi fan, was in the room. ’I am sure both myself and others are disgusted at last night’s show. Leave the gay scenes for the programmes more suited – not sci-fi’. (my emphasis)

In the comment section of the web-article a lively debate takes place regarding the fact that Torchwood is aired after the watershed and therefore not suitable for children, something also addressed in the article. Hastings quotes Mediawatch UK’s spokesman David Turtle who tries to invalidate the BBC’s
claim that the explicit sexual content in the show is acceptable due to the fact that the show is aired after the watershed. He suggests that this does not make it impossible for younger viewers to watch the programme at any time on for example iPlayer. The shifting distribution channels make the control of televised shows and content more difficult and potentially negates the use of concepts such as the watershed altogether. The fact that Jack, in that same episode, is suspended from the ceiling, subjected to torture and is brutally killed, not only by Angelo but by several people, is not mentioned in the article. This however does not seem to offend as much as the sex scenes.

The other argument used in the article and comments relates to a question about narrative and plot – whether it advances the plot and if not – if it is rendered “pointless”. The question of whether this type of character background is central to the plotline is in itself a telling question, since the plot in Torchwood pivots around Jack and his past. The visualisation of his sexuality in the episode “Immortal Sins” should be closely connected to the outrage of the 500 viewers. I suggest that it is not the disturbance to the plot that is in question; it is the plot itself. The relationship between Jack and Angelo depicted in the episode is pivotal to the plot of the episode, as well as the entire season. The only way to argue for this strongly stressed “pointlessness” and irrelevance to the plot is by looking back in time. When these viewers complained and used this argument they had in fact not seen the entire story, three unaired episodes remained, rendering - if anything - this argument “pointless” due to the simple fact that they could not know to what extent the story arc of Jack and Angelo was relevant or irrelevant to the plot. As it turns out the narrative in this episode is pivotal not only to the story of Jack, which is at the core of the series, but also to the resolving of the plot in “Miracle Day”.

Returning to Sobchack’s argument above can serve to illuminate this discussion: “While there are numerous boy-meets-girl encounters across the galaxy and the genre, they tend to be chaste and safe in their dramatization and peripheral to narrative concerns” (“Virginity” 105; my emphasis). Even heterosexual relationships in science fiction, according to Sobchack, are supposed to be safe, meaning that they are not overtly sexual and most importantly, peripheral to narrative concerns. In Torchwood it is rather the opposite, the boy-meets-boy or boy-meets-girl or girl-meets-girl or girl or boy-meets-alien, is neither chaste and safe nor peripheral to the narrative, making Torchwood, even though clearly a science fiction show, for some, a questionable part of the genre.43 Indeed, I would suggest that Torchwood is a

43 For instance Andy Medhurst calls Torchwood “a post-queer, pan-sexual perv-fest” (80).
series out of place in its genre, making it a possible subversive element in an otherwise heteronormative discourse.

The generic convention to give sexuality a peripheral position as well as safe dramatisations are defied in “Immortal Sins”, confusing the audience expectation of what constitutes the genre. When a sexual relationship, pivotal to the plot, between two men in a science fiction show is unsafely visualised in the manner of the episode it might not be such a surprise that some react with claims that it is out of place in the genre. In relation to the previous depiction of sexuality in the series it might be suggested that they were more peripheral to the narrative and therefore more acceptable, even though explicit. Sexual content did not suddenly appear in the show in season four but has been there all along. The BBC notes this when responding to the criticism: “We felt the content was justified in terms of the con-text and character and within the expectations of regular viewers. ‘We aim to depict relationships, whether hetero-sexual or homo-sexual, in an honest and realistic way’” (qtd. in Hastings). What is apparent in the analysed article and in these viewers’ responses to the show is the uneasiness toward science fiction and sexuality in general, and an uneasiness toward homosexuality in particular.

The homophobic responses in the article and in the commentary sections are not however rare in contemporary media. As shown above I would suggest that the argument for misplacement of sexual content in science fiction is related to children and youths watching science fiction and generic expectations. In addition, a homophobic discourse is highly visible in this discussion and in the article, and it is impossible to overlook the fact that the actors in the scenes are both male and that the *Daily Mail* is a conservative newspaper. *Torchwood* had in fact, during its earlier seasons, depicted many sexual scenes, both between women and women, men and men, and women and men and alien and humans. Even though these viewers see this as out of place in a sci-fi show it is indeed not out of place in *Torchwood*. The article and the comments in the critical battle over *Torchwood* not only suggest a homophobic discourse but also something about science fiction as a genre. The debate called *Torchwood’s* status as science fiction into question. In fact, as I have shown, several critics and scholars graze the subject of how *Torchwood’s* adult themes and content clash with its generic identity. Similar to science fiction film, as shown above, science fiction television could also be rightfully connected to the juvenile, something vividly apparent in the debate.
**Image 4:** Jack (John Barrowman) and Angelo (Daniele Favilli) initiates their romance. The woman in the background is, in contrast to the Star Wars and Star Trek examples, used as an alibi for initiating the romance. Jack describes to Angelo what he wants to do with her, and she is slowly faded out of the picture until there is only the two men left. “Immortal Sins”. 2011. Torchwood. © BBC. All Rights Reserved.

**Image 5:** Jack (John Barrowman) wakes up after being killed again, suspended from the ceiling in a slaughter house. The scene with Jack and Angelo having sex was included in the same episode as this but apparently only the sex scene offended the viewers when they watched the show with their children. “Immortal Sins”. 2011. Torchwood. © BBC. All Rights Reserved.
This out-of-place-ness in science fiction and the complaints to the BBC can be contextualised further in relation to not only the specific episode, “Immortal Sins” and season four of the series, but also more generally. To be able to understand the heteronormative context the overt religious theme in the episode cannot be overlooked in relation to the complaints directed at it. Even though the article never mentions this theme, I would argue that the parallels drawn between symbols of Christianity, or more specifically Catholic belief, and the depiction of Jack as a symbolic Christ makes this episode more controversial due to this connection. The entire narrative about Jack and Angelo pivots around issues of sin, sexuality, religion, belief, modernity and tradition. They stand at each side of these; Jack totally removed from the religious beliefs contemporary to Earth in the 1920s, and Angelo who made the trip to the land of the free travelling from a small village in Italy, highly embedded in Catholic belief. His self-sacrifice as a religious figure goes hand in hand with the dramatic function of the hero.

A Queer Science Fiction Hero

“Jack looks like a hero. He’s handsome, witty and subversive with a killer smile”.

Returning to the issue of heroes I will analyse Jack as an unlikely science fiction hero in order to further display the relations between genre conventions and depictions of sexuality. Though he has been considered an archetypical hero, traveling the hero’s path, a man initially forced into heroics only to later on become the hero, I suggest that the reinvention and playfulness with the Hero archetype and generic conventions of the hero is one additional reason for the reactions to Jack in “Miracle Day”. I will consider how the figure of the science fiction hero and its generic conventions, as suggested by Sobchack, relate to a portrayal of a queer science fiction hero. I will suggest that Jack, as a queer science fiction hero, is indeed Out of Time and Out of Place, but that it is exactly this out of placeness and out of timeness that makes it possible for him to be a hero.

One of the major dramatic functions of the hero is audience identification, scriptwriter theorist Christopher Vogler writes:

Heroes have qualities that we all can identify with and recognize in ourselves. They are propelled by universal drives that we can all

44 Description of Jack on the BBC’s website presenting “Miracle Day” (“Torchwood, Captain Jack Harkness”).

45 For additional sources on Jack as hero see e.g. Estelle Frankel; Powers; Davis; Barron; and L. Porter, 239-66.
understand: the desire to be loved and understood, to succeed, survive, be free, get revenge, right wrongs, or seek self-expression. [...] In a sense we become the Hero for a while. [...] Heroes need some admirable qualities, so that we want to be like them. (30)

To bend Vogler’s words into another vocabulary - the hero needs to be “normal” enough to fulfil its dramatic purpose. In a society where white, heterosexual masculinity is the universal norm the hero will correspond to the ideals of that society. In contrast, if a trait or quality is deemed unwanted in a society the chances that the heroes of that society will engender those qualities are slim. For example, characters with deviant sexuality, gender, or ethnicity are more often depicted as villains than heroes. Contextual aspects are unavoidable here since the ideals of a society are in constant flux, and with them follow (or lead) cinematic visualisations. Vogler also states that the Hero cannot be solely universal; he also needs to be unique in order to be perceived as a real individual with flaws and somewhat unpredictable behaviour (30-1). Suppose then that the hero lacks these elements and the balance between universal and unique attributes. What will that lead to? “Nobody wants to see a movie or read a story about abstract qualities in human form. We want stories about real people”, writes Vogler (30-1). This suggests that stereotypical depictions probably fail as heroes. Cinema scholar Richard Dyer writes that a stereotype is “any character constructed through the use of a few immediately recognizable and defining traits, which do not change or ‘develop’ through the course of the narrative and which point to general, recurrent features of the human world” (13). - The antithesis of a hero. As has been suggested, the quest for identity is what lies at the core of the hero’s journey (see e.g. Estelle Frankel 54). The “hero’s story is always a journey”, internal and/or external (Vogler 7). Thus this internal journey for the hero is for Vogler the “search for identity and wholeness” (29). In other words, it is the search to become a homogeneous and comprehensible person, much like the journey of Jack.

Jack appears to meet the normalised gendered requirements of a (science fiction) hero, by possessing the right type of male body. He also seems to embody all the common characteristics of a science fiction protagonist, being a young, white, handsome, American male. Or as he puts it himself: “With a dashing hero like me on the case, how can we fail?” (“Captain Jack Harkness” 1.12). However, this is only at first glance. In the very first episode of Torchwood, it is revealed that Jack was once pregnant. Whether that is something most 21st century males have gone through or not remains

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46 For a discussion about science fiction and race see Nama.
47 With the exception of Will Smith as suggested by Nama (39-41).
unknown. However, it seems as though Jack himself at least is born of a woman. It is clear later on that The Face of Boe (whom is indicated to be a future Jack) was also pregnant, so the biological body does not inhibit the possibility of pregnancy, neither being male nor a giant head (“The Long Game” 1.7). This could be understood as a transgendered position which puts into question Jack’s position as male. As I argued elsewhere (cf. Wälivaara) Jack indeed subverts the heteronormativity of the 21st century by introducing the norms of the 51st century. And he does so with a smile, as an adult listening to children’s stories knowing for sure that humanity will grow up and see beyond our time’s, as he puts it himself, “quaint little categories” such as binary gender and sexual categories.

Screen writer, critic and filmmaker Robert Grant points out how unusual depiction of non-gendered or single gendered societies are in science fiction. In addition he notes that “standard ideas of sexual orientation are easily subverted in science fiction, but far more in fiction [literature] than in films” (53). He continues by stating that he believes it to be as difficult to sell a science fiction story about a homosexual character today (the book is written in 2013) as it was in the 1950s and that “at least gay and lesbian characters are far more commonplace now – even if they still can’t be the hero”(54). Grant instead suggests alternative (nonhuman) subversion as an alternative which I read as coded, hidden queerness and finally ends his discussion by emphasising: “The point here is not to subvert for the sake of subversion; there has to be a proper reason for any of these things to be different and it must always be in service to the story” (54). The counter-question I pose in relation to this claim is: What proper reasons might one find to use heterosexual characters? Grant’s argument is from my point of view a heteronormative assumption in which the Other always has to be explained and marked as different while the norm remains unseen and uncontested. However, the craftsmanship of storytelling demands certain dramatic logic that Grant highlights, as well as an understanding of the commercial aspects of these stories. The story has to have all necessary components in order to be successful (storytelling-wise and commercially) from a scriptwriter’s

48 He is at least referred to as having a mother and a father (“Adam” 2.5).
49 It has been indicated that Jack and the Face of Boe are the same person but from different points in the character timeline (see e.g. “Last of the Time Lords” 3.13).
50 When Grant continues to discuss the creation of alien characters he lists 20 basic questions for the scriptwriter to consider. These range from questions about environment, gravity, number of suns, presence of moons to colour, skin, eating habits, ability to speak and how loud they are. However, there is not a single question concerning the alien’s reproduction, gender, sexuality, family constellations or similar. So even though Grant less than ten pages earlier seemed to argue for issues of gender or sexuality he leaves the subject as soon as the paragraph ends (61-2).
perspective. However, I suggest that there is a difference between attempted subversions of norms and subversions of the modes of storytelling.

Let me repeat Sobchack’s description of the typical hero of not only science fiction, but popular culture: “cool, rational, competent, unimaginative, male, and sexless” (“Virginity” 107). On the surface Jack appears to be a standardised hero but in fact subverts the archetype. In contrast to the heroic qualities in the science fiction hero as described by Sobchack Jack has an intense sexuality and imagination, or as teammate and lover Ianto Jones (Gareth David-Lloyd) suggests with an answer to a direct question about Jack’s “skills” in the bedroom: “Innovative [...]. Bordering on the avant-garde” (“Reset” 2.6). However Jack is still cool, competent and rational. Sobchack continually notes that “[t]he male heroes who dominate almost all science fiction films are [...] remarkably asexual” (“Virginity” 107). This makes Jack as a hero even further out of place in the genre. While Jack can be said to be many things, asexual is definitely not one of them. He is described as omnisexual by some (see e.g. Ireland, “Introduction” 1) and bisexual by others (see e.g. Pullen 135). I argue that the difficulty in categorising Jack’s sexuality mainly has to do with time; Jack is indeed first and foremost a 51st century guy who does not conform to the categories of the 21st century. The Doctor (Christopher Eccleston) describes or rather explains Jack’s sexuality to his human companion Rose Tyler (Billie Piper) from the 21st century in the second episode starring Jack. As Jack walks off to distract a (male) guard the camera returns to the Doctor who smilingly explains to a baffled Rose - who had previously been romanced by Jack - emphasising his fluid sexuality.

The Doctor: Relax, he's a 51st century guy, he's just a bit more flexible when it comes to ‘dancing’.
Rose: How flexible?
The Doctor: By his time you lot have spread out across half the galaxy.
Rose: Meaning?
The Doctor: So many species, so little time.
(“The Doctor Dances” 1.10)

Regardless of categorisations, Jack’s traits include an outspoken, active sexuality. When Jack first appears on-screen in Doctor Who (“The Empty Child 1.9) he watches Rose hanging from a barrage balloon in the middle of the Blitz. We are invited to his point of view through his high-tech binoculars, and simultaneously we are made aware that he, despite his World War II uniform, is not from around here. His first line is “Excellent bottom” as he zooms in on Rose, another soldier tells him that there is a time and a place suggesting a history between the two. Jack turns around and reveals his face for the first time, there is a close-up on Jack’s face smiling and he tells the
soldier: “Sorry old man, I have to see a girl – and by the way you have an excellent bottom too”, and he walks off and gives him a little slap on the behind. This short introduction presents the constant ambiguity of the character. He looks like a World War II officer but is from the future. He likes women, and men. He is daring and breaks the rules both by ignoring the safety regulations during the Blitz and by openly displaying affection to another man in public in this historical environment.

I will now return to how Jack’s position as a hero could be connected to the viewer’s responses to “Immortal Sins”. The fourth season of Torchwood: “Miracle Day” was a way to introduce Torchwood to a wider audience in the US not necessarily familiar with the Doctor Who-universe. I argue that, throughout the season and when introducing Jack as a character in the US he is depicted as a more stereotypical character. In relation to the dramatic function of the hero, Jack somewhat loses his appeal for audience identification, when turned into a more static and stereotypical character. This is also noticeable in the available space for actor John Barrowman to act and portray his character. Vogler writes: “We want stories about real people. A real character, like real people, is not just a single trait but a unique combination of many qualities and drives, some of them conflicting. And the more conflicting, the better” (30-1). Jack in season four, I argue, is “straightened out”, not to suggest that he is made straight but rather gay. Instead of being presented as the omnisexual, pansexual, bisexual, hard-to-define-sexually character the audience from previous seasons was used to, Jack is more or less depicted as homosexual in the fourth season. This leaves much room to fall into a long line of stereotypical depictions of homosexual characters in film and television. The simplification of the character into more of an intelligible and static stereotypical homosexuality could also invite a more troublesome identification for an audience in a homophobic society, where heterosexuality is constantly reinforced, not at least through film and television.

Despite the lacking range of character portrayal in season four, Jack is still supposed to be the hero. I argue that this lies at the root of the conflicts since the character lacks some of the depths required for a viewer to fully identify with him as a hero and simultaneously follow him through the Hero’s Journey, which lies at the core of the narrative in the season. For instance, in the episode “Immortal Sins” several of the hero’s dramatic functions are clearly present: the sacrifice of a loved one, the active hero, the learning and growth of the character with the assistance of a lover. As Vogler writes: “The heart of many stories is the learning that goes on between a Hero and a mentor, or a Hero and a lover, [...]. We are all each other’s teachers” (31). The story of Jack and Angelo is a story of both teaching and sacrifice. For those familiar with the previous seasons of Torchwood it is evident that the events taking place
between Jack and Angelo are not only pivotal to the narrative of season four but to Jack’s character development and story arc throughout. The effects of the sacrifice of Angelo and the lessons learned by their relationship in the 1920s echoes through the character later on in his timeline, most prominently in the relationship with co-worker Ianto in the previous seasons. The lesson learned is the flipside of immortality, Jack cannot die himself but as he says when deciding to leave Angelo: “It is men like you who kill me”. Having a companion, as the Doctor does, and the thought of losing that companion, becomes too much to bear for Jack.\textsuperscript{51} Jack indeed is the hero in “Miracle Day”. The hero’s dramatic function is described by Vogler as “someone who is willing to sacrifice his own needs on behalf of others, [...]. At the root the idea of Hero is connected with self-sacrifice”, and that is exactly what Jack does to save the world in the final episode (29; bold in original removed). The storyline with “Miracle Day” enables Jack to make the final sacrifice; he is able to give his life for others without knowing that he will survive.

Despite the fourth season’s narrative problems, \textit{Torchwood} overall suggests the possibility for a queer science fiction hero. What indeed makes it possible for this unlikely character to be a hero, I would argue, is his relationship to time and space which is a narrative made possible by the genre. It is not until he becomes immortal and stuck in time that he begins his heroic journey, forced to live through the 20\textsuperscript{th} century waiting for the Doctor to cross paths with him again, and get an explanation for his inability to die. By being out of his time Jack can become a queer hero. He is arming the human race against the future, but maybe not only in the obvious meaning but rather discursively.

When Jack appears in \textit{Doctor Who} he flirts by merely introducing himself to humans as well as aliens regardless of gender. The Doctor soon realises this and constantly intervenes in order to keep Jack focused (see e.g. “Bad Wolf” 1.12; “Utopia” 3.11). The Doctor’s recurring intervention to Jack’s flirting could, in a suspicious type of analysis be understood as condemning. But I argue that the Doctor’s comments are meta comments on Jack’s out of placeness in the genre. For instance when he tells Jack: “There is a time and a place...” and \textit{Torchwood} creates that time and place. By using Jack’s status as a “51\textsuperscript{st} century guy” as the Doctor puts it, it is possible to create subversive

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\textsuperscript{51} As producer Richard Stokes says when discussing the immortality of Jack and the dramatic functions in the story in \textit{The Life and Deaths of Captain Jack Harkness}: “A character who can never die it’s a bit of a double-edged sword actually, because the writers can have great fun in coming up with new ways of killing Captain Jack but the problem is the audience never really feel that he is under any jeopardy, they always know [...] that he’s gonna come back to life. So where’s the problem? Where’s the jeopardy? Where’s the danger? And so, we have to be careful to make sure the other members of the team are put in jeopardy. He suffers the pain of losing people around him who he adores, and respects, and admires and loves. So in that way he is emotionally vulnerable, he has to live on while others around him are dying”. [My transcription]
\end{flushright}
spaces in *Torchwood* and by extension display the possibilities of the genre. That is not only to investigate the latest technology and extrapolate scientific results, but through a mix-match of time, comment on the norms of the present and make visible how these are culturally, socially and historically constructed.

Jack is not only out of his time and place in the narrative for not being on his home world in the Boeshane Peninsula or in the 51st century, he is also outside time and space. Jack became a fixed point in time and space, something never meant to happen to a person, which explains his immortality. His death would mean the destruction of reality. A fixed point in time and space in the Doctor Who-universe suggests that he is a fact, a person who has such long-lasting impact on the timeline that not even Time Lords such as the Doctor could or dare interfere (cf. “Fixed Point”). If interfered with or broken, a fixed point in time and space would result in the end of reality and the collapse of time and space (cf. “The Wedding of River Song” 6.13). Jack is supposed to have a long-lasting impact on the timeline and I suggest that it is not achieved primarily through saving the world a few times, but rather the everlasting impact of the queer hero who arms the human race against the future. Jack represents a new type of hero in science fiction, the one who not only fights off the aliens but also teaches us to live with them. Contrary to Grant’s suggestion, one can in fact have an LGBTQ-hero in science fiction - at least in science fiction television.\(^{52}\) It displays the possibility to depict a white, queer hero mainly coded as male. Jack in fact, even though on the surface, engenders most traits of the traditional hero. This raises more questions about gender, ethnicity, and the hero. However, Jack still shows us that there is a time and a place for everything and everyone, even those of us who are out of place and out of time, and gives the viewers a queer hero to identify with and a reassuring confirmation that heteronormativity will not be everlasting.

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In this chapter I argue that sexuality and relationships have been disassociated from science fiction. Thus I argue that prior to the turn of the millennium a juvenile tonality represented by the *Star’verses* held a dominant position in the genre, even to the extent that adult themes such as sexuality became disassociated from science fiction. Through an analysis of a debate in the British Press on *Torchwood* I reveal the still uneasy relationship between the genre and depictions of sexuality in a contemporary context. I also suggest how *Torchwood* can be seen as out of place in science fiction, potentially functioning as a subversive element in the genre. However, as the *Torchwood*  

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\(^{52}\) LGBTQ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.
example displays, the connection between science fiction and the juvenile remains even in 2011 though, as I will argue, an adult turn has taken place. Narratives like *Torchwood* display the shift of boundaries of the genre and one of these days depictions of sexuality and other adult themes might not be in conflict with the genre identity of science fiction. The *Torchwood* example displays something as unusual as a science fiction narrative with a queer hero at its core, and a queer use of the possibilities of the genre. However, as my next chapter will show, the use of potential in this way is far from common in science fiction, and especially in science fiction cinema.
Chapter 2: Heteronormativity and Science Fiction

“That sounds like something out of science-fiction”. 53

In the previous chapter I argued that science fiction has been disassociated from issues such as sexuality. Furthermore, as indicated by the Torchwood example, the depiction of non-heterosexuality or queerness in science fiction is an additional matter. Science fiction seems to have endless fictional possibilities for portraying non-normative characters and societies due to its speculative/fantastic elements which grants it narrative possibilities to depict a wide range of characters not limited by species, time or space and to imagine alien societies and different ways of life. In this chapter I investigate some generic traits that I consider to give science fiction extensive queer possibilities. Although these possibilities invite queer readings, few actually use them in a queer way. While I consider the reasons behind this as connected to the de-emphasis on characters and relationships as described in Chapter 1 there are additional aspects that will be in focus in what follows. I will thus argue that it is actually partly due to these same generic frameworks that science fiction has rarely depicted non-heterosexual or queer characters and/or societies.

Queer Possibilities

Generic traits that give science fiction many queer possibilities are all connected to the fantastic or speculative aspects of the genre. Depiction of the future, of other species and other societies and worlds are possible parts of science fiction narratives. Scholar Adilifu Nama for example suggests that: “Science fiction films, with their fantastical plots and far-off worlds, have the luxury to create any kind of character, social system, and world within the confines of their narratives” (9). Pearson writes: “Knowing sf’s potential for using the future to explore contemporary reality and its alternatives, one might think the genre ideal for the examination of alternative sexualities” (“Science fiction” 149) Pearson also asks the questions:

53 Wash in “Objects in Space”.
How, we might ask, does sf allow us to develop alternative notions of subjectivity? What practices of representation have developed within the genre to allow for the expression of a subject who is not male, white, middle-class, and heterosexual? (“Alien Cryptographies” 17)

Hollinger argues that “Science fiction would seem to be ideally suited, as a narrative mode, to the construction of imaginative challenges to the smoothly oiled technologies of heteronormativity” (“(Re)reading queerly” 24). As suggested by these scholars, there is something about the science fiction narrative that gives possibilities to create new worlds and characters that do not have to correspond to our current time and culture. This potential could at its very best be used to disrupt ideas of a current society and its norms. It is in this way that science fiction indeed seems ideally suited for queer considerations and challenges to heteronormativity.

Pearson argues:

Critics of sf have generally agreed that science fiction is a ‘literature of ideas’. [...] Sexuality is also an idea. [...] For many people, however, sexuality – and particularly heterosexuality – can be envisioned only within the category of the ‘natural’. To these people, sexuality is quite specifically not an idea. (“Science fiction” 149)

As such, science fiction - science fiction film and television not excluded - has an affinity with exploring ideas, or to paraphrase Mendlesohn, the idea could be considered the hero of science fiction. Thus if, as is done by a queer perspective, sexuality is considered an idea, science fiction should be a prime narrative form for queer themes and characters.

In addition, science fiction has a history of being affiliated with cultural criticism partly due to its relationship to reality. Although all narratives have a relationship to when and where they were created science fiction has been argued to be further removed from reality and able to present a more extensive critique of the current society. It is partly due to these same elements that science fiction has been considered a vehicle for social criticism throughout its history.54 In the 1950s the potential for cultural critique through science fiction film was becoming evident. Telotte writes:

If the content of many of these early cold-war films ultimately seems to offer little more ideological complexity than could be found in the era’s television programming or even the late serials, the best of them

54 See also Catherine Johnson, Telefantasy (7-8).
established that science fiction, [...], could prove an important vehicle for articulating cultural anxieties and for commenting in a serious way on those concerns. (Science Fiction 95-6)

The argument is that due to the fact that the narrative is dealing with subject matters concerning a reality far removed from our own it is possible that it could afford more freedom in its critique of the society in which it developed (Telotte, Science Fiction 97). I argue however, that there are certain types of cultural criticism that have mainly been associated with science fiction - that of technological developments, and humanity’s relationship to that technology. This focus, as I have suggested in the Introduction, is part of the creation of how the genre is perceived and reproduced.

Science fiction narratives often comment on contemporary issues such as the environment, war, segregation and equality and as such many science fiction narratives often present quite diverse casts. For example, the issue of human development towards a progressive or failing society has been an important part of the science fiction narrative. Equality has then been used as marker of progression, evolution and modernity and has been part of science fiction narratives for a long time. However, many of the characters used to symbolise this equality are often used as a token presence without narrative value and also as supporting characters rather than protagonists. For example, though many films of the 1950s depicted female characters in the central role of scientists, cinema scholar Mark Jancovich underlines that women were cast in these roles in order to legitimise the inclusion of women in the film so they could be rescued by the male protagonist (326). In Star Trek TOS the crew of the Enterprise was intentionally multicultural and paired the American crew with a black woman, a Japanese, Russian and Scottish man (and of course an alien). This apparent striving for equality in the visualised utopian future of TOS can suggest such a cultural commentary on, for example, the equal rights movements of the 1960s. But however utopian and progressive the worlds of TOS and later TNG looked like, it took almost 30 years before a female captain was the protagonist of a Star Trek show, in the 1995 Star Trek Voyager.

The Star’verses not only represent desexualised worlds, as displayed above, but also present a heteronormative discourse for science fiction. Though the possibility always remains for queer readings of narratives within the Star’verses they present rather homosocial and heterosexual worlds. While Star Wars has no overt non-heterosexual characters, but in fact highlights the heterosexuality of its protagonists, as discussed in Chapter 1, Star Trek in contrast has been considered a quite progressive narrative world in many respects, but still excludes non-heterosexual characters. Consider for example the fan criticism of Star Trek regarding the unwillingness to include a
homosexual character in the series (see e.g. Jenkins “Out of the Closet”). Despite the franchise’s utopian and multicultural inclusive approach, the inclusion of non-heterosexual characters remained unexplored. When faced with complaints from fans the producers argued that the inclusion of homosexual characters is impossible in the utopian Star Trek-universe (Pearson, “Alien Cryptographies” 15). They argued that in that future, there is no homophobia; hence homosexual characters cannot be depicted since it has to revolve around the “problem” of homosexuality. Thus, to depict a future free from homophobia the future needs to be without homosexual characters. The fans of Star Trek on the other hand wanted to see “the vision of a future in which queerness is neither hidden nor revealed as difference, but is simply there” (Pearson, “Alien Cryptographies” 15). Despite the willingness to create a multicultural world, which even allowed Americans and Russians working together during the Cold War, the inclusion of non-heterosexuality was an impossibility.

Which groups or individuals are assigned to the progressive narrative project of equality and modernity is based on discourses of the current culture. Nama for example argues in relation to depictions of blackness in science fiction film that “[n]o matter where the film is set – in a futuristic or otherworldly backdrop – the ‘cultural work’ that the film is performing is not divorced from the real state of American race relations” (5). It has been argued that:

> Whilst science fiction would seem to take us outside of [the] structuring elements of class and gender by a discourse of fantasy and futurism, the metaphorical transformations always speak about the historical time in which the production took place. (Leman, qtd. in Creeber, The Television Genre Book 41)

Portrayals of for example women and black characters in science fiction have somewhat changed in the past 30-40 years. Instead of relying on token presence of female or black characters they have started to be integrated into the narrative as real characters of dramatic value. Consider for example the change in gender relations in science fiction after Sigourney Weaver played Ellen Ripley in Alien in 1979, or the number of science fiction films with black actor Will Smith as protagonist from the 1990s and onwards (cf. Nama 39-40). This progression is visible not at least in Star Wars Episode VII where the two protagonists are a (white) woman and a black man. As I will elaborate in the Conclusion certain changes have taken place in science fiction in terms of mature themes, but also in the possibilities for depiction of characters not only white, heterosexual and male.
However, it has taken a long time for issues of sexuality to become part of that same discourse.\(^5\) In the wake of theoretical as well as political changes in gender and queer understandings of society certain types of stories, are made possible today, that might not have been possible yesterday. This in fact is one of the core issues of this dissertation, the (hetero)normative issues of representations, in which it is impossible to imagine some things at some points in time. The question to consider is to what extent science fiction makes it possible to image a non-heteronormative culture. As Hollinger argues:

> On the whole, science fiction is an overwhelmingly straight discourse, not least because of the covert yet almost completely totalizing ideological hold heterosexuality has on our culture’s ability to imagine itself otherwise. “(Re)reading queerly” 24

Hollinger discussed science fiction literature but this holds true, even more I would argue, when it comes to science fiction film and television. To find non-heterosexual characters, and by that I mean characters that obviously have romantic or sexual relationships with people of the same sex, in mainstream science fiction film is almost impossible, to find protagonists is even harder. As I will develop further later in this dissertation the availability of non-heterosexual characters is becoming more and more visible in science fiction, but this development has taken place primarily in science fiction television.

When I claim that there are few depictions of non-heterosexual characters in science fiction I mean that most characters in science fiction are both depicted and understood as heterosexual or unmarked by sexuality (and hence seen as heterosexual until proven otherwise). This does not exclude the possibility for queer readings of these characters, or that some could understand these characters as non-heterosexual but rather that the logics of heteronormativity presupposes that they are heterosexual and that we are without reason to doubt that fact until obviously stated in the text. Gwenllian-Jones writes, when discussing slash fiction in which fans write same-sex narratives based on existing characters, often from science fiction, that

> slash is interpreted as ‘resistant’ or ‘subversive’ because it seems deliberately to ignore or overrule clear textual messages indicating characters’ heterosexuality. Even where characters’ sexualities are not indicated in the television text, a wider cultural logic dictates that heterosexuality can be assumed while homosexuality must be proved. (81)

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\(^5\) Interestingly a genre such as horror film and the gothic has an extensive queer scholarship and representations. It is an interesting sidenote since both genres have, at times, been seen as indistinguishable (cf. Benshoff, *Monsters* 5-6).
This cultural logic that Gwenllian-Jones points to can easily translate into the concept of heteronormativity which dictates that heterosexuality is the uncontested norm. As such I consider characters unmarked by sexual preference as heterosexual until proven otherwise. Gwenllian-Jones further writes about the “source text’s preferred meaning of heterosexuality” and considers, opposed to previous researchers, that slash fiction could instead be considered “an actualization of latent textual elements” (81-2). Thus in one way Gwenllian-Jones also points to this ambiguous fact where science fiction is both dominated by a preferred meaning of heterosexuality while still having latent queer elements. In other words, often read in terms of heteronormativity but that does not equate a queer possibility or presence in the text. Using Pearson’s vocabulary when she attempts to categorise queer texts, these texts would be not overtly queer (“Alien Cryptographies” 19).

Greven’s study of Star Trek also displays the dual-sidedness of the genre’s relationship with queer sexuality. On the one hand, Star Trek has received massive criticism for not representing homosexuality and for lacking characters that openly display same-sex desire. On the other hand, as Greven displays, Star Trek can be read queerly. He argues that the allegorical narratives of Star Trek both speak to a queer audience and can be interpreted as allegories of homosexuality, making visible the queer sensibility of the series and the films. I see the genre’s relationship to queerness in a similar manner. Thus, on the one hand the genre has throughout its history not depicted homosexuality to any greater extent, but on the other hand certain generic tools such as allegorical narratives and the alien encounters invite queer readings.

In what follows I will use some examples to consider one of the generic tools of science fiction that I see as pivotal to this queer potential, the inclusion of aliens. In addition to the alien, the use of the future and time travel in for example Torchwood displays a queer use of these generic traits unusual for science fiction. While most narratives tend to ignore these issues, Torchwood as discussed above, instead uses these in an active and overtly queer way. Due to these apparent possibilities, one could argue, science fiction should be able to bring forth challenging considerations of sexuality and gender, however that is seldom the case. I argue that these possibilities - which in fact are certain generic conventions - invite queer readings. This queer look at the genre can afford and make visible many queer representations and narratives, even though not overtly queer.

To clarify, it is not only an issue of depiction of aliens, but alien as a concept of the unknown and incomprehensible. A depiction of an alien being is not necessarily alien while an alien depiction is not necessarily of an alien being.
What makes something alien is not fixed, a spaceship is not always and forever alien or a tomato familiar. Sobchack displays how the content of the image is not always what constitutes whether it “evokes a sense of strangeness – a sense of wonder – or whether it seems familiar” (*Screening Space* 87). It is the context of the image that matters rather than its content. Depending on from where a spectator looks a setting can seem alien and unfamiliar while another spectator finds it familiar. Consider for example the TARDIS in *Doctor Who*. While it might seem alien and wondrous to a spectator not familiar with the *Doctor Who* universe - a blue British police box that is bigger on the inside and travels through time and space - due to the cult status of the series, in the UK especially, a TARDIS might well seem as familiar as the red telephone box. For the fans the TARDIS has, since 1963, remained one of the familiar aspects of the series even as its main character has consistently changed.

For example, the relationship between different species, such as aliens and humans, invites readings in terms of queer relationships even though they are presented as heterosexual. Through this type of queer reading, relationships between humans and non-humans can be understood as queer. Those depictions can serve as a good example of a possible queer (re)reading of a relationship not necessarily representing the heteronormative, though they are depicted as being between a woman and a man as heteronormativity presupposes a certain kind of heterosexual behaviour. Feminist scholar Gayle Rubin’s now classic text “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” describes the hierarchies of sex and the idea of normal/abnormal sexual behaviours and how these are positioned against each other. It is not only heterosexuality, but a certain kind of heterosexuality that is accepted. As Ambjörnsson points out, based on Rubin’s hierarchies of sexuality, heteronormativity is those things that contribute to the idea that a certain type of heterosexual life is the natural and most desirable way of life (*Vad är Queer* 52). It is, as I see it not only a question of heterosexuality, but of relationships between two people, monogamy, within a certain appropriate age etc. that constitutes this hegemonic heterosexuality towards which heteronormativity strives. Halberstam describes this in terms of queer temporality and spatiality and argues that the structure of time and place is based on a preconceived heteronormative idea of life; birth, reproduction, death (2). This also points towards a specific type of heterosexual life that is highlighted as normative and encouraged in society. This temporal heteronormativity can likewise be disrupted by queerness.

The relationships between non-humans and humans in science fiction can function as an example of this phenomenon. The relationship or desire between the human and the non-human could be seen as a deviant to heteronormativity, even if depicted as people of the opposite sex in
heterosexual relationships. Thus, even though a majority of interspecies relationships in science fiction film are heterosexual couplings these particular heterosexual relationships are not necessarily hetero-normative.

A queer reading of inter-species relationships in *Star Wars* could display this view and highlight the fact that even though I consider the *Star'verses* to represent the heteronormative it can still be considered otherwise. The relationship between Leia and Jabba the Hut can serve as such an example, as it is one of the few scenes in episodes IV-VI in which sexuality is both visually and narratively central. Even though travelling with an all-male crew, Leia is never at any risk due to her gender while remaining in the company of human men - it is the alien who threatens her with sexual violence. Jim Holte suggests that this is a rewrite of the “captivity narrative” of Puritan literature which is the only one that put emphasis on sexuality. It grants the opportunity for the pure woman to have her virtue tested by an evil Other (190). Accordingly when captured by Jabba the Hut in *Return of the Jedi* Leia is chained to him dressed in the golden bikini, which has become an emblem of geek desire. When made a slave girl to Jabba, Leia is on display for the male gaze for the first time in the films. This gaze is controlled by Jabba who is licking his mouth and stroking her with his tail which, even without Freud, can be seen as a phallus. The visualisation of the unpleasantness of Jabba’s alien body and character makes a clear statement; alien-human relationships are neither desirable nor equal. Even though Han also uses a light amount of force in his encounters with Leia, this is clearly a completely different story. As Leia is forced to become a sexual object she is then free to return to the company of human men, which by default will always be better, and can return to being a subject.

Being the only human-alien encounter where sexuality and desire play a part and also the only scene where sexuality is in the foreground in the films, makes the scenes with Jabba and Leia and their connotations pivotal. According to the narrative, the threatening sexuality of the alien Other is to be avoided at any cost. Leia manages to get rid of her captor by suffocating him with her own chains as the camera cuts between Jabba’s outstretched tongue, the chain that chokes him and his shaking tail, finally subduing the threat of the alien sexuality.
With this as a background it might not be a surprise that there are almost no alien character relationships in the films. To even suggest that someone would have a sexual relationship with Chewbacca, C-3PO or Admiral Ackbar seems as wrong as suggesting such a relationship with Mickey Mouse. They are depicted as asexual and archetypical, even to the extent of being de-sexualised. I suggest that this de-sexualisation of the alien can be seen as a way to remove the possibilities, not only for sexuality, but specifically for queerness in the franchise. Although inter-species relationships are quite common in science fiction, the times the alien involved in the relationship is not a humanoid, or even a perfected human being are very rare (cf. Ginn, “Human, Alien” 230). Jabba is an exception but he is supposed to be an antagonist, and as argued, presents a threat enhanced by his sexual undertones.

When used in this way as an antagonist, the gender of the alien attraction is more often female than male. Consider for example the female robot/android/replicant which has a long representational history in science fiction cinema, starting with Maria in *Metropolis*. The figure of the female robot is systematically either threatening or a representation of a misogynistic dream. The otherness of women, as Merrick suggested (241), fits well into the depiction of the perfect woman-machine. This is manifestly portrayed in *The Stepford Wives* (1975) where a group of men exchanges their wives for robot counterparts, making them exemplary housewives by removing their ability for free thinking, enabling the men to live a misogynistic dream life. On the other side of the scale is the sexually threatening woman who uses her sexuality in order to overthrow the (male) protagonist, *Species* being the prime example.
The male robot in science fiction on the other hand, even though perfectly constructed, is not subjugated to a sexualised gaze. The prime example is Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator* (1984) and its sequel. Though appearing completely naked with a perfect Mr. Olympia body, the visual spectacle of the rippling muscles is rather associated with power and agency than sexual availability. As he steps into a biker bar in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) to acquire clothes, weapons and transportation he is the centre of women’s gaze in the bar, but for the spectators it is always the T-800 directed and analytical gaze that we are allowed to follow. And this robot gaze is only interested in the statistics of the male bodies in the bar. One could suggest that this gaze de-sexualises the male body. Though remaining a spectacle and a source for identification for the male spectator it is still first and foremost a tool for destruction, power and agency. If compared to the later introduced T-X (Terminatrix) model, played by actress and model Kristanna Loken in *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*, the only Terminator model with a female appearance, the gendered differences are obvious. For instance, when pulled over by the police for speeding, the T-X’s gaze, which in this scene is not filtered by the alien vision with its analytical focus but rather the gaze of (wom)man, sees a Victoria’s Secret billboard of female underwear with the slogan: “What is sexy?” leading to a close up of her enhancing her breast size. As if that would be necessary for a Terminator that is a newer, enhanced and more powerful model compared to the one played by Schwarzenegger.

The ability to consider these relationships in terms of heteronormativity can give narratives further dimensions that take into account sexuality and relationships in a queer way and also display the queer possibilities that I suggest in science fiction, even though a majority of science fiction films and television series refrain from using these possibilities. In the next part of the chapter I will consider how these same generic traits that give science fiction extensive queer possibilities can also serve as an explanation of the heteronormativity of the genre.

**Unused Possibilities**

I argue that these same generic conventions that together create the queer possibilities of science fiction in fact also restrain the genre from depicting non-heteronormative characters. The fact that science fiction can deal with aliens, other worlds or similarly unbelievable narratives requires, as a popular narrative form, a certain degree of familiarity, comprehension and believability. I argue that the purposes of science fiction narratives to aim to balance these aspects are twofold: The first has to do with science fiction as a mainstream genre that, in its form, requires easily understandable and believable stories. The other is more genre specific but not unrelated to the first, the specific requirements for creating stories that display probable
depictions of aliens (or otherness) and technological extrapolations which in turn has to do with the idea of what science fiction is.

In one respect this falls back on the science/techno-centred approach to science fiction which in turn demands a certain level of probability. Science fiction can be described as a genre highly concerned with the question - “what if?” - and in order for the narrative what if-game to be successful in storytelling terms the narrative has to maintain a plausibility of the things it suggests (see e.g. Medlesohn 4). This is especially true for scientific extrapolations. For example, Telotte writes that science fiction is “after all, [...] manifestly about science and scientific possibility – even probability” (Science Fiction 3; my emphasis). Early definitions of science fiction actually highlighted its relation to scientific methods (Stableford, Clute, and Nicholls). This relation to science, not as technology, but as practice, gives science fiction a generic lineage that owes much to ideas of truth, probability and likewise scientific results. Telotte continues this analogy by arguing that: “In fact, it commonly presupposes the sort of ‘what if’ game in which scientists are typically engaged as they set about designing experiments and conducting their research: extrapolating from the known in order to explain the unknown” (Science Fiction 3; my emphasis). As seen in this argument the way to produce believable science fiction is connected to a scientific discourse which lies in the connection between the known and the unknown.

Regardless of genre, the issues of causality and unity are central to the Hollywood film from which much science fiction cinema developed, as I will discuss at length in Chapter 3. According to cinema scholar David Bordwell “unity is a basic attribute for film form; [...] the Hollywood film purports to be ‘realistic’ in both an Aristotelian sense (truth to the probable) and a naturalistic one (truth to historical fact); [...] the film should be comprehensible and unambiguous” (3). Both of these “realistic” traits called forth by Bordwell remain central in science fiction film however counter-intuitive it may sound. The first corresponds with the Hollywood film’s need for believability in storytelling terms. It is one of the defining aspects of the Hollywood film; an easily understandable story built on a clear causal chain of events. This is the storytelling legacy that the science fiction discussed in this thesis is based upon. The second might seem contradictory as it often lacks historical facts or creates its own as part of its generic conventions. However, this issue of realism is not absent in the genre and especially in science fiction dealing with time travel, this dedication to historical accuracy functions as a way to make it appear realistic as well as believable. Because the

56 Darko Suvin also suggest that “the novum is postulated on and validated by [...] scientific method” (64-5).
line between realism and fantasy is central to the genre it is necessary for the narrative to remain believable and plausible. For example, one could not travel back to Germany 1939 and not witness the rise of the Nazis. However, the narrative could extrapolate from that historical fact and play a what-if game. But too much deviation from historical facts eventually dismisses the story from any sense of reality.

In science fiction film the visual representation, the image and what we see affect the believability of the narrative. Sobchack argues in *Screening Space. The American Science Fiction Film* that though lacking the components necessary for an “informative iconography, [...] the SF film still has a science fiction ‘look’ and ‘feel’ to its visual surfaces” (87). According to Sobchack this is a unique visual surface that includes all science fiction films and hence makes it a unifying genre element. She argues that this visual tension is found in every science fiction film and has no counterpart in other genres.

The visual connection between all SF films lies in the consistent and repetitious use not of specific images, but of types of images which function in the same way from film to film to create an imaginatively realized world which is always removed from the world we know or know of. (Sobchack, *Screening Space* 87)

In fact, she argues that in contrast to a genre such as fantasy, science fiction strives for the audience’s belief rather than their suspension of disbelief. The films have to be credible and “make us believe in the possibility, if not probability, of the alien things we see” (88). This points towards a certain requirement, due to the inclusion of the alien, for creating narratives which are highly believable because the spectator has to believe the premise of the story in order for the story to be successful.

We have discussed those SF films which, through their extensive use of studio-devised settings and special effects cinematography, strive to remove us from familiar experience and perception into the realm of the unknown, but which at the same time also attempt – for the sake of narrative, meaning, and relevance – to relate their alien images to human and familiar concerns. The result is a visual tension, produced from two opposing impulses. (Sobchack, *Screening Space* 107-8)

As demonstrated by Sobchack, the dual meaning and function of this visual tension in science fiction film is connected to genre specific elements but also to more general storytelling elements. In addition, the quote also highlights the relationship between the alien and the familiar.
Familiarity and Normality

Scholars have argued that science fiction inhabits a liminal position between the realistic and the fantastic. Literature scholar Darko Suvin argued in his seminal work *The Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* that the novum is pivotal to science fiction as he sees the genre as a type of “cognitive estrangement” (4). Suvin considers the novum as “a strange newness” (4) a “phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author’s or implied reader’s norm of reality” (64). The purpose of the novum is to separate the imagined world from our own and is characterised by its disruption from our reality. Suvin argues that the normative world is estranged through the tension between it and the novum (64). The tension described can be considered as a type of *verfremdung*, to use theatre theorist and writer Bertolt Brecht’s words.57 Cornea suggests that “science fiction is most usefully understood as a genre that relies upon the fantastic. […] I would suggest that science fiction is a genre that is demonstrably located in between fantasy and reality” (4). Johnston also argues that the *mise-en-scène* of science fiction somewhat depends on the relationship between the realistic and the fantastic, making it possible to create “a world that is different but familiar enough to be recognizable” (15).

Sobchack argues that “[t]he major visual impulse of all SF film is to pictorialize the unfamiliar, the nonexistent, the strange and totally alien – and to do so with a verisimilitude which is, at times, documentary in flavor and style” (Screening Space 88). She argues that the visual surface of all the films within the genre displays a combination of and a confrontation between alien images and images perceived as familiar. She continues: “the visual surfaces of the films are inextricably linked to and dependent upon the familiar” (88). The speculative or extrapolative images, which are there to astound us, derive “their poetic power from their very separation from a familiar context” (103). Science fiction narratives from this point of view strive to remove the spectators from the known and at the same time keep them visually grounded, trying to alienate the spectator from the familiar (Sobchack, Screening Space 108). Thus in storytelling terms, to achieve a credible story and make the audience believe the narrative is only possible if that which is alien is paired with the familiar.

The dominant position of special effects and spectacle in science fiction film is central in creating its sense of wonder and its alien images as it relies on the visual. In science fiction, as in other audiovisual material, the visual

57 A connection that Suvin also makes (6).
components are essential in achieving believability. Neale states that “the processes and issues of judgment and belief are ultimately focused – and founded – on what it is we see, and hence ultimately also on the cinematic image and it powers” (“’You’ve Got to Be” 13). According to Johnston, special effects tread the line between fantasy and realism in the way they try to create incredible scenery which at the same time has to be perceived as possible (16). He notes that it is not a requirement for science fiction to have a desire for realism, but still, realistic traits within the mise-en-scène are found in the majority of genre films. He continues by saying that “there are few films that do not make some claim to a recognizable verisimilitude” (14). A certain generic verisimilitude allows for some things to be considered probable that might not in other genres. These systems help the audience to comprehend what is taking place on the screen, it explains why someone would burst into song (in a musical) or as in science fiction why it could be plausible that aliens have invaded earth (cf. Neale, Genre 31).

Although the visual components and mise-en-scène are highlighted above, I suggest that this tension between familiar and alien can be located elsewhere. One way to achieve that is to use realistic traits within the mise-en-scène, such as linking objects familiar to us with the fantastic or alien. This should also apply to the narrative level of the films or the characters in the way Johnston suggests when he mentions films such as Star Wars when saying: “Even those films set in a distant part of the universe [...] rely on certain realistic or naturalistic traits that audiences can relate to” (14). In this context meaning aspects such as the use of language, breathing oxygen and falling in love. Imagine then a film in which the mise-en-scène is completely alien or on the other hand familiar, in what other parts of the film can this tension be displayed or enhanced by other aspects? Sobchack notices how sound, music and dialogue also play a part in this tension (Screening Space 151). But I would like to stretch it even further to incorporate all levels of the cinematic language, both within different levels of the films and in-between different levels of the films. The complex system of cinematic storytelling which is not limited to mise-en-scène but further includes aspects such as sound, dialogue,

58 At the end of the 1970s science fiction film developed greatly as a high-concept genre in which the spectacle and the visual is central. See, for example, Wyatt who argues that high-concept is one of the main developments in the 1960-70s and that it is through this that “the diverse manner through which economics and aesthetics are joined together” (8).

59 Neale connects this to film theorist Christian Metz (“’You’ve Got to Be” 13-5).

60 Genre scholar Tzvetan Todorov points toward two types of verisimilitude “generic verisimilitude” and “social or cultural verisimilitude”. The first being “rules of the genre: for a work to be said to have verisimilitude, it must conform to these rules” and the latter is a relation “between the work and a scattered discourse [...] in other words [...] public opinion”. Neither of these, Todorov notes, equates with ‘truth’ or ‘reality’. These regimes consist of laws, rules and norms. (Neale, Genre 32).
characters and character development, narrative, editing, themes, and motifs should be able to engender this tension in combination with these different levels, as well as on separate levels. In what follows I will focus on characters and character development as one of these sites of tension.

So this inclusion of the alien, the novum or fantasy elements, are due to the genre’s affinity to reality, realism, scientific claims and belief, a central part of science fiction, but the question at hand is what these generic conventions do to science fiction narratives and the depiction of the normal and the deviant. Gwenllian-Jones argues in response to the idea that slash fiction would be a resistant or “deviant” reading of cult texts, that the relationship between the familiar and the fantastic is based on a queer construction:

[C]ult television series are already ‘queer’ in their construction of fantastic virtual realities that must problematize heterosexuality and erase heterosexual process in order to maintain their integrity and distance from the everyday. It [...] implicitly ‘resists’ the conventions of heterosexuality. (90)

Most of these cult texts are science fiction or similarly speculative genres. Gwenllian-Jones also states that “the fictional worlds of cult television series are quite unlike the ordinary world [...]. Cult television worlds are exotic and exciting. [...] [T]he overwhelming majority of those series [...] belong to the fantastic genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror” (84-5) She continues to elaborate that “[t]he aesthetic, intellectual and imaginative appeal of fantastic genres is precisely that they are fantastic” (85). Through this logic she considers heterosexuality as too familiar and ordinary for cult television characters.

Heterosexuality’s narrative form is [...] the most embedded and pervasive foundational structure of ordinary reality. [...] [H]eterosexuality is antithetical to the exoticism and adventure that characterizes the fictional worlds of cult television series. If heterosexual relations between major characters go beyond the preliminary courtship, this exterior narrative of social practice is invoked [...] the cult fiction [...] [is] unceremoniously returned to the structures of realities and stresses of everyday life. (Gwenllian-Jones 87)

She argues that this is one of the reasons for few successful heterosexual relationships in science fiction because the fantastic, in order to stay fantastic, has to avoid these or inevitably fall into the ordinariness of heterosexual domesticity.
I understand Gwenllian-Jones’s argument as dual sided, both sides fit well into my arguments about science fiction. On the one hand it creates an unwillingness for heterosexual closure, and the narratives, due to the fantastic, avoid primary relationships that are fixed and established. This can well correlate to the de-emphasis on relationships in science fiction as described in Chapter 1. The narrative form of the mutual attraction but never consummated relationship is based on an implicit tension, and not the action into which it becomes a relationship. On the other hand, Gwenllian-Jones argues that “[t]he failures of heterosexual romances in cult television series [...] position the audience to find queer pleasures in cult genres and texts” (88). It is due to this unwillingness to allow heterosexual relationships to play out that she considers the unfulfilled heterosexual relationships or same-sex friendships as the two dominant relationships in cult television (88-9). But the same-sex relationships are safe in this respect precisely because they will never, like the heterosexual relationships, progress beyond “friendship”. It is not surprising that these relationships are often understood as more than friendships – since they follow the same narrative pattern as the heterosexual ones do – but with an even bigger freedom for closeness and closure since they, in a heteronormative logic, can never become more than friends.

By connecting these concepts of the familiar and the alien to concepts such as otherness and normativity I want to display how they can be understood from a queer perspective. I argue that the relationship between the familiar and the alien images can find resonance in queer theoretical notions on the normal and the queer. Sobchack for example writes:

> We expect unnatural behavior from something seen as unnatural, alien behavior from something alien. What is so visually devastating and disturbing about the SF films’ ‘taken over’ humans is the small, and therefore terrible, incongruence between the ordinariness of their form and the final extraordinariness of their behavior, however hard they try to remain undetected and ‘normal’. Most of the films which subvert human form and behavior – make of them something unknown - depend for their visual and emotional effectiveness on the contrast between the most dully normal, clichéd and commonplace of settings and the quiet, minute, yet shocking aberrant behavior of the invading aliens who pose as just plain folks. Thus, the setting of nearly all such films is small-town America, [...]. In such a world, against such a background, the smallest deviation from the norm, [...], Americana will carry the visual force of a Fourth of July fireworks display, if not a space-age nuclear detonation. (Screening Space 121)

The quotation displays not only the importance of the tension between the alien and the familiar, but also draws attention to parallels between the
familiar and the normal as well as the deviation from that norm and the alien Other. Multiple science fiction film director and producer Steven Spielberg also notes in an interview this relation between the familiar (or indeed normal) and the alien:

Don Siegel [director of Invasion of the Body Snatchers] and his writers worked very hard to humanise his characters [...] to make it seem like you were their neighbours and you understood what their lifestyles were, the small town they lived in, it was very hyper real and I learned a big lesson from that [...] if you create a hyper reality then you can do anything on the other end of the spectrum, in terms of bringing the goofiest, you know concepts of... and then when you upset, [...] the level of ‘I know people like that, I’ve been to houses like that, I’ve friends who’re just like them’. Then it’s really scary, and that’s where fear comes from. Fear doesn’t come from eccentric characters being invaded by the body snatchers. Fear comes from normal characters being invaded by things that are unimaginable [my transcription] (Hollywood Between Paranoia).

Both of these quotes exemplify the connection between human/normality and alien/otherness. They highlight the importance of a constant return to the familiar in order to create meaning for the alien. Hills also notes this in a somewhat different context:

The fantastic thus takes on a quality of everydayness by virtue of its repetition, familiarity and narrative iteration. This transformation from exotic or extraordinary into homely/ordinary is, [...] one of the key ways that cult TV appeals to its audience over time. (“Defining Cult TV “ 511)

In that same article Hills shows how a combination of fans, intertexts, and texts best defines cult television (“Defining Cult TV”). In an investigation of cult television he elaborates on the fantastic nature of the narrative and how the tension between the fantastic and the familiar allows for cult status:

Science fiction [...] varieties of cult TV often render the fantastic diegetically commonplace by virtue of defining and developing fantastic beings and worlds over a lengthy period of time and in great amounts of detail. (“Defining Cult TV “ 511)

Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry states that:

Perhaps the fact that we are ‘science fiction’ and therefore somewhat suspect, we may need even more than average attention to a story which starts fast, poses growing peril to highly identifiable people, with identifiable problems, and with more than the average number of ‘hooks’ at act breaks. (qtd. in Tulloch and Jenkins 7)
I suggest that a genre so highly concerned with the impossible, the unknown and the alien necessitates something familiar. Although the alien requires the familiar to be believable the relationship between the two is also a relationship between comprehension and incomprehension. When Sobchack describes the different functions of the alien and the familiar she stresses that they are mutually dependent on one another in order to create believable and comprehensible depictions because the alien strives for the incomprehensible while the familiar grounds it in a recognisable context (*Screening Space* 88-9). Since the alien image in its construction is aiming to be incomprehensible its pairing with the familiar has an additional function – to make an intelligible narrative. Thus, a science fiction film cannot rely solely on alien images, in fact Sobchack argues that no narrative film, no fiction film, can sustain itself on visual surfaces which are completely and continuously strange and alien to either our experience or our mode of perception. We have to understand what we see and if what we see is unfamiliar, it must – to have meaning – be eventually connected to something we can comprehend, to something we know. The SF film, although it strives in part to transcend the limits of human knowledge and imagination, is not aimed finally toward achieving total abstraction. (*Screening Space* 103)

The fact that science fiction is a popular genre makes further demands on general narrative comprehension, which is also a base for the Hollywood cinema as I will display in *Chapter 3*. Here it is very clear that Sobchack’s argument is focused on popular cinema because an art film is conceivable where total estrangement is the object. Science fiction film generally does not withdraw the narrative to the point of abstract art. Most science fiction films are not attempting to move towards the avant-garde by escaping human meaning, connection and perception. They must return to the known and familiar to achieve meaning (Sobchack, *Screening Space* 103-4). It would be a different analysis to look towards avant-garde or art films, such as *Gay Niggers from Outer Space* (1992), but the main focus here is popular films and television series. I see these as an important part of this equation since popular film, especially from Hollywood, necessitates a large mainstream audience. In addition, Hollywood really has not been known for its portrayals of LGBT-characters or queer consideration throughout history, especially compared to avant-garde film.\(^61\)

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\(^61\) The new queer cinema of the 1990s was first and foremost art films and independent films, such as *Tongues Untied* (1989), *Looking for Langston* (1989) and *My Own Private Idaho* (1991).
Intelligible Science Fiction and the Otherness of Aliens

Throughout film history, depictions of LGBT characters have often been located within the logics of the heterosexual matrix. One of the ways this has been made visible is through reoccurring portrayals of these characters as not quite qualifying as humans and even becoming a type of monster. For example, LGBT characters have continually in film history been depicted as psychopaths, murderers and other villains (cf. Dyer 114; Russo 181-246; Weiss 84-108). As for example John Phillips notes in regards to transgendered characters in film, where the characters’ cross-dressing or transsexualism “are represented as perverse or hysterical symptoms of a psychotic condition” (85; my emphasis). In his book on homosexuality and the horror film Harry M. Benshoff argues “that the figure of the monster can frequently be equated [...] with that of the homosexual” (Monsters 4). A failure to conform to the heterosexual matrix is often used in film narratives in this way to explain the characters’ menacing actions. I suggest that this is closely connected to how they, within the logics of the heterosexual matrix, are made unintelligible and hence, not quite qualifying as persons or even humans. The more unintelligible a character is, the closer it is to becoming a monster. The alien calls into question aspects of humanity, personhood, and subjectivity.

Science fiction, and especially its use of aliens or the alien, can be said to rely on a similar dynamic as between the norm and “the Other”, a term that brings to light the creation of normality and otherness. Postcolonial studies scholar Ziauddin Sardar draws similar parallels between otherness and the alien in the introduction to Aliens R Us. The Other in Science Fiction Cinema. He argues that the presence of aliens, or what appears alien to the Western viewer, is essential to science fiction and that “[o]uter space, distant galaxies, the whole universe is populated by fictional creatures intimately familiar from the narrative conventions of Western civilization” (5-6; my emphasis). Sardar also locates the tension between the alien and the familiar and he continues to note that:

Alien presence is basic in another sense. [...] Alien creatures serve the purpose of ghosts, ghouls and things that go bump in the night – they are the dark antithesis that illuminates the patches of light within the structures of the stories, throwing into relief what it is to be human. Aliens demonstrate what is not human the better to exemplify that which is human. Difference and otherness are the essence of aliens, for only then can they stiffen the sense of self and self-defence that completes the chain of science fiction as normative genre. (6; my emphasis)

Hence, the alien could be seen as the constitutive Other, the being that with its presence produces the boundaries of normativity which are highly
dependent on an ethnocentric viewpoint as the otherness of the alien, as well as the notion of the human, which in these films are mostly conceptualised through an American point of view. It is through the relationship between the human and the alien that the borders of humanity appear. The alien sets the agenda for what is not human through its Otherness, and many science fiction films deal with this issue of differentiating between the meanings of humanity and its alien counterpart.

Judith Butler argues that gender intelligibility is a requirement to qualify as a person, or even human. To be understood as intelligible and thus as a person one needs to perform the right connections between sex, gender and desire – in other words, conform to the heterosexual matrix. Butler argues that the emergence of “discontinuous” or “incoherent” gendered beings calls into question the notion of the person, as they appear to be persons but fail to match the requirements of the gendered norms of intelligibility. (Gender Trouble 23). Butler further states: “The mark of gender appears to ‘qualify’ bodies as human bodies”, as for instance when children are humanised through the gendering act of calling them him or her (Gender Trouble 142).

It is crucial that Butler uses the word human rather than person in this context, for in science fiction the question of the limits of humanity is central, especially with the introduction of the alien. It is rarely the personhood that is at stake as much as the humanity of the characters in these narratives. This is also made visible in science fiction, not least in the depiction of the non-human, such as aliens, cyborgs or monsters.

For example, in the Torchwood episode “Cyberwoman” (1.4) this is made apparent. In the episode Ianto smuggles his girlfriend Lisa (Caroline Chikezie) into the Torchwood hub in order to save her. She has been only partly upgraded to a cyberman and Ianto hopes that he can save her. Lisa’s incomplete upgrade to a cyberman instead makes her - as the episode title suggests - a cyberwoman. It is through the gendering of Lisa it is possible to maintain her humanity and throughout the episode she is referred to both as her and it as in this example, where the monster/human divide also is made visible:

Ianto: “I can still save her [...] she’s not a monster”.
Jack: “That thing is not human”. (my emphasis)
This displays the connection between the gendering practices and humanity in such a way as Butler suggests. It also goes to show that Lisa’s personhood is not what is in question but rather her humanity. In *Alien* Ripley’s status as human is likewise called into question. Sobchack writes that she is de-sexualised because she is masculinised and “confused with her male companions” (“Virginity” 106). However, it could also be argued that what happens is that Ripley is not considered a sexual female object for the male (heterosexual) gaze and therefore not perceived as sexual. But this stretches even further what is indicated by Sobchack: “Ripley, indeed, is hardly female (and considered by her shipmates as *hardly human*)” (“Virginity” 106; my emphasis). Ripley is, as Sobchack notes, hardly seen as human, which I would argue is due to her discontinuity of sex, gender, and desire. I suggest the possibility of equating the familiar with the normative and the alien with its deviants, by using the heterosexual matrix as a gauge of the familiar and the impossible identities within that cultural matrix as that which becomes alien.

**Science fiction and Queer Characters**

Working with the connection between normality and familiarity one could assert that familiar characters (often humans) within the boundaries of normativity could not only help enhance the believability of science fiction but are required to keep at bay the incomprehensibility of the alien presence. Take for instance the following example: In classic 1950s science fiction film
In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), the familiar is represented by the American small town, the neighbours, and the young couple in love. The alien appears in relation to this familiarity making it believable as something that could happen to anyone. But, it also makes it comprehensible; the aliens are understood as alien in relation to the familiar and are constantly brought back to the familiar through this familiar context. Imagine instead that the small town was located in a less familiar geography and was inhabited by less familiar characters. What if the protagonists instead were queer, what consequences would that have for the tension between alien and familiar?

What I am suggesting is that the introduction of queer characters in science fiction potentially upsets these dynamics and hence puts the comprehensibility of the film, or at least its characters, at risk if the familiar is unfamiliar and alien, the dynamic is broken. If the “familiar category” of suburbia, nuclear families and girl-next-door were to be switched for queer characters, which according to Butler’s arguments are unintelligible, the film would potentially lose its believability and by extension be incomprehensible and potentially lack meaning. This points towards the fact that there is something within science fiction as the genre of the impossible which, instead of making it possible for queerness, makes it even harder to introduce such characters or ideas into its narratives since it has to balance the alien presence with the familiar.

While I suggest, in the case of depictions of queer non-alien characters, there is a potential disturbance in the tension there is also a distinct difference in relation to the characters who are *supposed to be alien* – and hence, strive for the incomprehensible. Indeed, the dramatic function of these characters does not only have nothing to lose by association with the unintelligible, but indeed has everything to gain. And there is not much surprise that these alien characters are more often interpreted as more generally Other or even sometimes specifically queer. The theme of the alien as in some way connected to a specific queer Otherness is discussed by Benshoff in *Monsters in the Closet. Homosexuality and the Horror Film*, where he, even though mainly discussing the horror film, mentions science fiction. This is no wonder since the genres have – as mentioned - an intimate history of hybridity and fluid genre boundaries, both as regards critical works on the genres and specific film hybrids (see e.g. Telotte, *Science Fiction* 5-6; Sobchack, *Screening Space* 26-43; Neale, *Genre* 92). Benshoff states that “in science fiction films, the narrative elements themselves demand the depiction of alien ‘Otherness,’ which is often coded [...] as lesbian, gay, or otherwise queer” (*Monsters* 6). This can be exemplified by *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* in which the aliens have been understood by Pearson as queer in their ability to ‘pass as human’ while being sexual deviants, instead of an allegory for communism which is a
more common way of understanding this in 1950s science fiction film ("Alien Cryptographies" 21). Regardless of how we interpret these aliens, whether seen as sexual, racial, or ethnic others, there is not as much at stake as for non-alien characters since they, as aliens, have a different role to play. To strive towards the incomprehensible is one of the purposes of the alien and to add gender unintelligibility to such a character should not thwart that attempt but rather enhance that same process.

**Using Queer Potential**

The overt queer text, to use Pearson’s vocabulary is rare in science fiction film and television. For example, depictions of non-heterosexual relationships and characters are rare and non-heterosexual inter-species relationships are still up to this day almost nonexistent. *Torchwood* is the one exception I have found so far. As I argued, *Torchwood* also becomes in this way out-of-place in the genre. Both because it depicts non-heterosexual characters as protagonists and because it is an overtly queer text. In *Torchwood*, it is noted by, and in relation to, Jack that sexuality is indeed historically, socially and culturally constructed and not something natural and everlasting. *Torchwood* is a narrative using the possibilities of the genre to question heteronormativity. By using genre conventions such as time travel and aliens it manages to make a queer use of these possibilities and display the queer potential of the genre.

These types of overt queer texts remain rare, especially in science fiction film. Most analytically interesting texts appear in the domain of science fiction television, a discussion I will continue in Chapter 4. This is also visible in the examples of science fiction that uses its queer potential that are used in this thesis also exemplify. To conclude this chapter I will briefly consider how these narratives work with the familiar and alien in order to exemplify their relationship between the familiar and the alien.

In *Torchwood* I argue that through the focus of narrative concerns about Jack’s identity and history the series presents an investigation into the alien. Through the choice to put Gwen Cooper (Eve Myles), a newcomer to the fantastic world and the Torchwood team, as the outside eye, the focal point of narrative experiences, they together create the familiar/alien tension. It is through Gwen we are allowed to step into the alien space, the very first episode “Everything Changes” (1.1) is focused on Gwen meeting and becoming a part of the Torchwood team, and the second episode “Day One” (1.2) is as suggested by the title her first day working with Torchwood and their fight for humanity. In this way, she is positioned in the narrative as a link between the familiar and the alien. In addition I consider the space important to the series’ way of remaining both believable and comprehensible. *Torchwood’s* 21st century Cardiff needs no long introduction due to its familiarity and as I have
argued elsewhere (cf. Wälivaara) the familiar and normative space of Cardiff is countered by the alien-queer space of Torchwood-hub, in which the possibility for alien-ness as well as queerness is made available for the characters and the space they inhabit. In addition, it cannot be overlooked that Jack, though human, is alien in some sense, due to the fact that he is from the future and from another planet. As suggested the depiction of queer aliens is not as contradictory to the genre as are queer humans. However, almost all main characters in Torchwood are depicted as non-heterosexual which underlines the fluidity of sexuality. The Torchwood-hub becomes the visual alien presence in a familiar contemporary Cardiff – and within these walls, anything is possible.

The use of space and time in science fiction has these possibilities to depict queerness. In a setting as familiar as our own reality or a setting which is depicted as inherently familiar to the characters as our reality, the visual alien-ness can be located elsewhere. Another example of this is television series Firefly which will be presented later in depth. I argue that the queerness of Firefly rather lies in its overall depictions of “misbehaviour” towards several aspects of normativity not exclusively norms of sexuality but also gender, ethnicity and genre. The setting of Firefly is a time and space intermix between a universe 500 years into the future and American Civil War aesthetics. Though set in the future, it is made familiar through a link to an American historical past. It is a realistic portrayal of a colonial future in which high-tech environments are reserved for the powerful and wealthy while the rest of the world is still shaped by hard work, agriculture and crime. It is a future, unlike that of Star Trek, that has not successfully annihilated poverty, crime, prostitution or political corruption. In addition, the protagonists do not belong to the high status society and represent a diverse crew of misfits.

I suggest both the domestic and historical familiar contexts are a focal point that allows the series to depict queerness without risking incomprehensibility. They are still utilising the tension between alien and familiar. I argue that it is more freely located in the characters, but of course in different ways in the series. In Firefly the narrative focus lies with the relationships between the crew of spaceship Serenity, and the ultimate lack of aliens in the series, in the narrow definition of the word, further enhances possibilities for alien elements in the characters’ portrayals.62

62 But that does not rule out the fact that there is alien presence in the series such as the Reavers. However, Reavers being aliens in the broader sense of the concept rather than in the narrow description of aliens as another species. Because Reavers, even though alien in their presence, are humans and thus, the Firefly-verse is only inhabited by humans.
The main action takes place onboard Serenity and this space is, though a spaceship, an extremely familiar setting. With its low-tech, personal, homely and family-oriented interior, Serenity is depicted in contrast to other science fiction vessels such as the U.S.S Enterprise, Battlestar Galactica, Millennium Falcon or the Death Star, as a highly familiar environment. Notably, the mess hall on Serenity is constantly returned to rather than the bridge (as in the other examples), a domestic space which features a large dining table where the crew eats together as a sort of family. In contrast to the bridge, which not only is a space traditionally coded as male, where control, warfare, and colonialisation primarily take place, the mess hall is coded as feminine; family, relationships and everyday life dominate. This everyday struggle that pervades the series creates a familiar setting.

There is a scene in the episode “Objects in Space” (1.14) where this familiarity is commented on in relation to the genre. The following conversation takes place in the mess hall about the character River (Summer Glau) potentially being a psychic:

Wash: Psychic, though? That sounds like something out of science-fiction.
Zoë: We live in a spaceship, dear.
Wash: So?

The dialogue with this meta-reflection suggests a separation between the inhabited space and science fiction conventions and generic expectations, as well as a clear rejection of Serenity as something non-familiar. The setting is alien in its content but familiar in its context. Even though Serenity is a spaceship, she is first and foremost a home and a workplace. Whedon scholar Lorna Jowett also considers the Western/Science fiction setting of Firefly and argues that “[s]etting helps create the estrangement that is a key part of science fiction, […]. Firefly melds past and future through costume, set, and props, offering a hybrid visual style” (“Back to the Future” 101-2).

In both of these examples, the relationship between the characters and the space they inhabit become ways to incorporate queerness into science fiction narratives. However, as time progresses depictions of non-heterosexuality are becoming more common as part of western culture, and as visibility for LGBT-characters becomes greater and more integrated into society, they also become more and more familiar.

63 The Eddie Izzard stand-up comedy routine on the Canteen in the Death Star actually provides a sharp critique of this unfamiliarity – what happens day to day on the Death Star, and where does Darth Vader go to eat?
64 See also Burns, for a discussion about familiarity in Firefly.
Although I want to suggest that the introduction of queer non-alien characters is inhibited by this tension due to their unintelligibility, the introduction of lgbt-characters does not necessarily disrupt this tension - if they are stereotypical and thereby made familiar. These characters are to a greater extent made intelligible even though they are depicted as lesbian or gay since they, in their stereotypical presentation, are displaying the only possible and intelligible connections between sex, gender and sexuality for someone who is not heterosexual within the logics of the heterosexual matrix (cf. my discussion about Jack in Chapter 1). Even though they may not present the “correct” connection, it is still more intelligible than say a masculine gay character or a character who is displaying a fluid relationship as regards sexuality, gender and sex.

According to Sobchack there are ways to (dis)integrate the alien and bring back the familiar which can also be connected to deviant positions. The first one is through repetition of the alien image to such an extent that it in itself becomes familiar. The second one is through humanising the alien to the extent that it no longer evokes wonder but rather comprehension and the third one is to remove the viewers’ attention through the camera’s de-emphasis of the alien image. These are often used together to “turn our wonder into interest, our interest to comprehension and acceptance” (Sobchack, Screening Space 105; my emphasis). The first strategy is what I would suggest has happened with the depiction of lgbt-characters throughout the years. The images of certain types of lgbt-characters in popular culture are now so common that they are familiar. Hence, the images, as well as the identities, are made comprehensible which lead to acceptance. However great that might sound, the idea of accepting something suggests that it has to be approved by the rules of normality. This strategy of familiarisation resonates in Rosenberg’s notion on the upholding of heteronormativity through either exclusion or inclusion in the norm. The latter can be described as a strategy of familiarisation where the deviants are included in the norm in order to uphold heteronormativity as the threat of subversion is subdued (102). The second one displays the connection between the human and the alien as counterparts, as soon as the alien is associated with the human it ceases to be alien and the third is plainly ignoring the existence of the deviants until they appear to be gone. As such the techniques described by Sobchack allude to processes of heteronormativity.

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In this chapter I have considered whether the seemingly infinite possibilities of science fiction might be a fundamental clue in understanding why the genre, in spite of these possibilities, rarely depicts queer characters. I have
argued that science fiction has extended narrative possibilities that invite queer readings but that few use these in a queer way. I argue that it in fact is these same generic possibilities to depict the extraordinary and alien that requires a greater presence of the familiar, the ordinary and the normal in order to remain believable, comprehensible and create meaning for the spectators of popular science fiction narratives. This chapter has displayed how the alien and the familiar in science fiction narratives can be related to gender intelligibility, normativity and queer deviants and how these concepts can be used together to understand the lack of queer depictions in the genre despite its possibilities. In the next chapter I will continue this discussion through a further consideration of the storytelling conventions of the Hollywood cinema in terms of heteronormativity.
Chapter 3: Storytelling in Science Fiction Film


Though there are certain genre specific issues that limit the depictions of queer characters and queerness in science fiction as described in the previous chapter, there are other influential aspects that instead come from the media in which these take place. In this chapter I will focus on science fiction as a cinematic genre that developed in a quite specific context – the Hollywood film. I will also suggest that the connection between science fiction film and classical Hollywood storytelling is key to the type of depictions and narratives common to science fiction by arguing that the classical Hollywood style is heteronormative. Hence the traditional and unquestioned dramaturgy of Hollywood storytelling is built upon a heteronormativity in storytelling and that this basis in itself - as it has been constructed throughout the years by seminal scriptwriters and scriptwriting “gurus” such as Syd Fields and Christopher Vogler - is continued in an unquestioned manner. I suggest that the dramaturgy of Hollywood film has been embedded with heteronormativity as a default setting and an unquestioned way to tell stories and to create dramatic effects. I argue the normativity of the use of these techniques and the constant reaffirming of a way to tell a story to such an extent that it becomes an uncontested truth. The continued use of these formulas without consideration upholds and reaffirms its status as norm. Furthermore, I consider whether subversive storytelling is dependent on a subversive form and end the chapter with an analysis of Videodrome from that perspective.

Classical Hollywood Storytelling

In what follows I will describe the classical Hollywood style and how the dramaturgy of it has been motivated. When I use the word dramaturgy I suggest the art, craft and techniques of dramatic composition inspired by Bert Cardullo. Cardullo describes dramaturgy as a collective consideration that I

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65 The shortest science fiction story ever written (qtd. in Hollinger, “Feminist theory” 125).
66 Cardullo suggests that the dictionary meaning of dramaturgy is “‘the craft or the techniques of dramatic composition considered collectively,’ [...] the Greek word dramaturgy [...] is made up of the root for ‘action or doing’ (drame) and the suffix for ‘process or working’ (-urgy)” (3).
understand as the discursive formations of how these techniques develop and eventually solidify into something that seems natural and given. These techniques developed collectively with scriptwriters, directors, filmmakers, audience and not least the teachers of scriptwriting. As financial stakes in the film industry grew, a working, selling story became top priority. The history of the American narrative film also suggests this development into a form and style that today seems like normal stories told in the way stories are told. But this storytelling convention in fact sprung from a historical development into a narrative, comprehensible and entertaining cinema which not least was guided by certain ideological influences and norms.

While the main focus of this chapter is the storytelling techniques of Hollywood cinema there are certain interlocking aspects of its history that need to be highlighted that have influenced the way in which it developed. The Production Code is one of those. Cinema scholar Thomas Doherty writes that

> the Code gave Hollywood the framework to thrive economically and ripen artistically and [...] Hollywood in turn gave the Code provenance over a cultural commodity of great price – the visible images and manifest values of American motion pictures. What makes Hollywood’s classic age ‘classical’ is not just the film style or the studio system but the moral stakes. (5)

This is not to say that the filmmakers followed the Code in all ways possible, in fact “the code worked productively and made audiences sensitive to connotation and ambiguity” (Grainge et al. 191). It has been shown that filmmakers worked around the regulations in order to insert issues or plots that were prohibited or had limitations. This inevitably affected the way stories were told.68

Although the foundation for the classical Hollywood style began pre-Code the Code eventually dictated both content and plot as the classical style developed. Doherty suggests that “Hollywood’s vaunted ‘golden age’ began with the Code and ended with its demise” (1). However, though the influence of the Code lessened partly due to the so-called Paramount Decision of 1948 which forced the studios to sell their theatres to avoid monopolising the industry and the

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67 Cardullo could mean that the “collective considerations” are practical – that it indicates the process of creating a certain story for example, the collective process from script to film.

68 Cf. Leff and Simmons where they discuss A Streetcar Named Desire (1951) and negotiation between the Code regulations and the way the movie was made (172-7). See also Grainge et al. (191).
Code's transformation into a classification system in 1966 (Bordwell and Thompson 515), the impact on Hollywood storytelling was already a fact.

The Code and its content is in this way inseparable from the type of storytelling techniques that became grounds for the storytelling of Hollywood that we know today. For example, the Code specifically forbade depiction or inference to "sex perversion" which mainly intended portrayals of homosexuality (cf. Doherty 363; Russo). Partly due to the Code regulations, as has been convincingly argued by film scholars engaged in gay and lesbian studies, depictions of homosexuality in Hollywood have been a history of invisibility, comedy, violence, and untimely deaths (cf. Russo). The changes in the Code and its eventual demise also signal changes in how they appear. For example, when the Code was abolished and homosexuality was allowed to be depicted, many antagonists were then portrayed as gay (see e.g. Russo 181-246).

Classical Hollywood cinema refers to storytelling norms formulated during the early years of cinema at the beginning of the 20th century (Thompson, Storytelling in Film and Television 19; see also Bordwell et al.; Doherty 4-5; Grainge et al. 74-5). Thompson argues that

these norms provided the means to make unified, easily comprehensible, entertaining films. So successful have Hollywood films been internationally that this system remained largely intact until at least 1960, with minor variations added along the way. (Storytelling in Film and Television 19)

With the production of longer films in 1904 came the necessity for comprehensible storytelling in order to make the audience understand the film and especially its causality and spatial/temporal movements. To do this filmmakers used every means of technology and narrative technique available to guide the spectators, some specific to the silent era such as intertitles, and some, though developed through the years, are still used today. For example the introduction of continuity editing; a development of cutting techniques guiding the spectator to understand the relationship between cuts and how they relate to each other in time and space. The centrality of the characters to the narrative and character-based causality was also being established by the end of the 1900s. All of these techniques developed to create narrative clarity and easily comprehensible causality for the spectators (Bordwell and Thompson 43-50).

When trying to identify the Hollywood-style Bordwell writes: "Suppose that between 1917 and 1960 a distinct and homogeneous style has dominated American studio filmmaking – a style whose principles remain quite constant
across decades, *genres*, studios, and personnel” (3; my emphasis). This suggests that the classical Hollywood film in its flexibility contains a variety of genres, science fiction not excluded. But before turning our attention to more specific questions of genre I will discuss what constitutes this distinct and homogeneous style.

**Building Blocks of Stories**

The structure of classical Hollywood cinema derives its form from simplified versions of Aristotle’s notions of what constitutes a story. Simply put: a classical narrative with a beginning, middle, and end connected by a unity of cause and effect-chains throughout the story (see e.g. Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television* 20). The three-act structure is often seen as the foundation of this dramaturgy. Consider for example Syd Field’s influential description of “the paradigm of dramatic structure” from *Screenplay. The Foundation of Screenwriting*. It visualises a story structure with a beginning, middle, and end that are divided into three acts: Act I the set-up; Act II the confrontation; and Act III the resolution. The majority of a film consists of what Syd Field calls *confrontation*, a middle part surrounded by a set-up to that confrontation and concluded with its resolution.

Field’s paradigm also includes two Plot Points and one Midpoint. The Plot Points are located at end of Act I and Act II. “The function of the Plot Point is simple: *it moves the story forward*. Plot Point I and Plot Point II are the story points that *hold the paradigm in place*” (Field 143). They are the points in which the story takes a turn, where Neo chooses the Red Pill in *The Matrix* (1999) or when Louise kills Harlan in *Thelma & Louise* (1991). It spins the story into the next act, either starting the story line and its confrontation in Act II or spinning it into the resolution of Act III (Field 142-59). The Midpoint is located not surprisingly at the middle of the story line. The dramatic function of the midpoint is to intensify the action of Act II. The Plot and Midpoints are always, according to Field, connected to the main character (26). The protagonist is connected to the plot as I will display below.

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69 See also Aristotle 14-27.

70 These acts could be considered in time with the division of screen time ¼ - ½ - ¼ and the different acts should contain the appropriate content differently formulated by different scholars or scriptwriters as shown by Thompson (*Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, 22-7).

71 Though Field seems to lack a cohesive line when relating the dramatic structure of film to theatre plays and drama (cf. 19) he notes that the three-act structure he uses is indeed sprung from Aristotle (cf. 30).

72 In the revised edition of Field’s *Scriptwriting* from 2005 the midpoint is actually not mentioned in the paradigm. However at sydfields.com he has added the midpoint to his paradigm.
Thompson however argues in contrast to Field and other advocates for a three-act structure that the Hollywood film could be considered to be based on four acts rather than three (Storytelling in the New Hollywood 27-29). She considers the Midpoint as a division of acts into four equal parts with major turning points in-between; “the set-up, the complicating action, the development, and the climax” (28). Regardless of the formal elements the aim of the structure remains quite similar in these approaches.

The structure partly aims to create dramatic effects, or rather chains of dramatic cause and effect. This causality is central to the classical Hollywood film, which sprung from the silent era as a method of creating comprehensible stories. The classical structure has, since the early 20th century, aimed at enabling comprehension by maintaining causality at several levels: narrative logic, spatial and temporal transitions. A single cut can transport the spectator from scene to scene, from one set of characters to another, from one storyline to another – actions that could be disorienting for the spectators. Hollywood film strives to avoid this disorientation through a variety of storytelling techniques assisting the spectator in comprehending these transitions. Thompson states that “part of the appeal of Hollywood films stems from their ease of comprehension on a scene-to-scene level” (Storytelling in Film and Television 23). Thus, as a spectator one should not have issues in following the causal chain of events or movements in time or space.

The three-act structure used in classical Hollywood films is centred around conflict and action. Field argues that: “All drama is conflict. Without conflict, you have no action; without action, you have no character; without character you have no story; and without story, you have no screenplay” (25). Conflict and action is what creates the foundation for the story, however, the characters also play a pivotal role in this dramaturgy.

Psychological causality, presented through defined characters acting to achieve announced goals, gives the classical film its characteristic progression. The two lines of action advance as chains of cause and effect. [...] The conventions of the well-made play – strong opening exposition, battles of the wits, thrusts and counter-thrusts, extreme reversals of fortunes, and rapid denouement – all reappear in Hollywood dramaturgy, and all are defined in relation to cause and effect. (Bordwell 17)

73 This too echoes Aristotle who writes that “without action there cannot be tragedy” (12).
74 This also points towards the influence of theatre dramaturgy on the classical Hollywood film. The well-made play refers to a specific theory and form of the well-made play or pièce bien faite as described by Eugène Scribe at the beginning of the 19th century. According to John Russell Taylor this formula did not have a classical motivation as Scribe worked and lived in the context of the Romantic period. Instead of aiming for proportion and balance in the plot he created “a mould into which any sort of material, however extravagant and seemingly uncontrollable,
Hollywood characters, especially protagonists, are *goal oriented* and are driven by desire. It is this same desire that makes her assume a causal role, driving her towards her desire, either to restore the status quo or to get something new.\(^{75}\) By extension, the Hollywood film is goal oriented and its conflicts mainly relate to obstruction of these goals. As Bordwell points out the system of narrative logic in the Hollywood film “depends upon story events and causal relations and parallelism among them” (6). These story events pivot around character in the classical Hollywood style: “Character-centered – i.e., personal or psychological – causality is the armature of the classical story” (13). This does not suggest that the classical film never commits to other types of narrative causality such as impersonal or social causality. However, Bordwell argues that they are “almost invariably subordinated to psychological causality” (13).

As characters play such a pivotal role in the classical film, character consistency is a requirement in order for this character-centred causality to be successful. Bordwell describes how this consistency is achieved; beginning in the film’s exposition the character’s *traits* are presented and their consistency is established by recurring actions or statements clearly reflecting these traits. Traits serve the purpose of individualising the character and the most prominent traits are usually dependent on that character’s dramatic function. The characters will also be *typed* by gender, age, occupation, and ethnicity according to Bordwell. I would, in the wake of intersectional theory, add aspects such as sexuality, (dis)ability, religion, etc. to this list. I consider the type as a general template for a character while the traits conform it into an individual. As audience, we are supposed to understand the characters as homogeneous identities (Bordwell 14).

So, while types generalise characters, traits make them unique – but it is the consistency of these traits and conformity with the types that makes characters appear as homogeneous identities. Bordwell writes: “If characters are to become agents of causality, their traits must be affirmed in speech and physical behavior, the observable projections of personality” (15). The slightest action or reaction of a character co-constructs that character’s psychology. It is what the character *does* that constitutes her identity. In other words, we have to see it to believe it. We do not believe that the male protagonist in a conventional romantic comedy really has changed when he

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\(^{75}\) Bordwell states that this is a reflection of the American idea of enterprise and individualism recreated to narrative causality (16).
tells his romantic interest that he has and neither does she. We have to see him spring into action, follow her to the airport and declare his love.

**New Hollywood?**

By the late 1960s a number of changes had occurred in Hollywood and the label *New Hollywood* marks this turn in the film industry. It is considered that the 1960s marks a break from “old” Hollywood, that which I have discussed above. The term New Hollywood is used as a label for the period “after World War II, when Hollywood’s entrenched ‘studio system’ collapsed and commercial television began to sweep the newly suburbanized national landscape” (Schatz 15). In terms of production, exhibition and relation to the market this period differed from the classical era and the blockbuster is a key example of this change (cf. Schatz 15).

The narrative potency of the blockbuster is called into question, genre historian Tomas Schatz for example writes that it has often been understood as “reduced and stylized to a point where, for some observers, it scarcely even qualifies as a narrative” (39). Thus the spectacle overrides the narrative. Schatz continues to discuss how the new Hollywood in contrast to classical Hollywood lacks “narrative ‘integrity’” (40). The intertexuality of the new Hollywood for Schatz suggests incoherent texts that are, “strategically ‘open’ to multiple readings and multimedia reiteration” (40). Schatz also argues that the emphasis on plot over character marks a significant departure from classical Hollywood films [...] wherein plot tended to emerge more organically as a function of the drives, desires, motivations, and goals of the central characters. In *Star Wars* [...] particularly male action-adventure films, characters (even the ‘hero’) are essentially plot functions.

Similarly the fragmented storytelling of, for example *Easy Rider* (1969), has suggested to film scholars that a new practice in storytelling was going to take place during this time. Thompson however, suggests that films such as *Easy Rider* from the so called ‘youthquake’ were exceptions and counter argues the notion of a ‘post-classical’ cinema. She argues that

> What happened in the mid-1970s was not a shift into some sort of post-classical type of filmmaking. Rather, some of the younger directors helped to revivify classical cinema by directing films that were widely successful. The three most significant of these were *The Godfather, Jaws*, and *Star..."*

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76 E.g. the Paramount Decision, financial crisis, competition from television etc. (see e.g. Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* 3-4; Schatz 15-41).
Wars, and it is hard to imagine films more classical in their narratives. They perfectly exemplify how Hollywood continues to succeed through its skill in telling strong stories based on fast-paced action and characters with clear physiological traits. The ideal American film still centers around a well-structured, carefully motivated series of events that the spectator can comprehend relatively easily. (Storytelling in the New Hollywood 8)

Thompson argues that the classical style continues to dominate the Hollywood film after the 1960s. I, like Thompson, do not see this as a step away from classical storytelling, but rather a prevailing notion of the fragmentation of Hollywood films and what implications it brings forth (Storytelling in the New Hollywood 344-52).

Thompson analyses how the classical style remains as a dominant storytelling mode in Hollywood, illustrating not only the persistence of the classical style in Hollywood as a whole but in science fiction as well. As argued by Thompson, Lucas’s Star Wars is a prime example of the longevity of the classical style. In contrast, when Schatz uses the Star Wars example he fails to take into account its generic lineage and its implications which to me suggests a problematic view on genre film. He writes that Star Wars may indicate a shift in the nature of film narrative. From the Godfather to Jaws to Star Wars, we see films that are increasingly plot-driven, [...] reliant on special effects, increasingly ‘fantastic’ (and thus apolitical), and increasingly targeted at younger audiences”. (29; my emphasis)

To suggest that the apolitical status of the Hollywood film is due to fantastic narratives presupposes that certain types of narratives could be apolitical, which I disagree with. To disqualify the fantastic as apolitical and juvenile is to take away some of its agency which I am trying to suggest with this thesis. I agree that Star Wars relies on special effects, is targeted at a young audience but not that it is plot-driven rather than character driven. Though the character development is represented by the external rather than internal, as Schatz himself suggests, it is still, I would argue, a goal-driven protagonist and a classical narrative. While it is influenced by some aesthetic and narrative changes from this time it is not necessarily an abandonment of the classical narrative format.

While the classical storytelling as such persisted even after the 1960s-1970s, there were indeed big changes in Hollywood at that time. Film scholar Justin

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77 Thompson uses two science fiction films as part of her analysis of the persistence of the classical style: Back to the Future (1985) and Alien (Storytelling in the New Hollywood).
78 See also Schatz for an analysis of Luke Skywalker reliance on visual transformation (29).
Wyatt argues that the dominant aesthetic difference in post-classical cinema is described by “high concept” – which he argues is the central development of the cinema of the time. It represents “a style of filmmaking molded by economic and institutional forces” (8). Wyatt suggests that

[b]y style, I am referring to the usage of techniques within the film that become characteristic of the film. [...] I am also including as style those elements within the film (such as stars and music) which are central to the film’s operation (and marketing). (23)

Hence after the 1970s narratives and the aesthetics of popular film were inseparable from the market in which it developed (see also Grainge et al. 483-502).

In narrative terms high concept is easily understood, described and unambiguous. Summarised as “the look, the hook, and the book” high concept highlights the visual, marketing and a reduced narrative (Wyatt 22). This, according to Wyatt, creates certain kinds of narratives which are based on market; related to both production and audience (8). This very much brings to the surface the discussion about spectacle vs. narrative as high concept becomes a dominant trend in cinematic storytelling. In a high concept film the reduced and uncomplicated narrative is central, the narrative in fact should be able to be described in only a few words to both producers and audience. The high concept film should in addition to its pitch not deliver any surprises and stick to the expected (cf. Wyatt, chapter 1). Wyatt argues that high concept should be considered a spectrum based on its three main parts (hook, look, book) and that “all Hollywood films fall along the scale, some falling toward the low end of the spectrum (the low concept films), while some fall toward the high end of the spectrum (the high concept films)” (22). While the high concept film utilises all or many of these qualities and styles the low concept film makes use of fewer. For example, the narrative of a low concept film cannot be described in terms of that same short, inclusive, cohesive way without misrepresenting the film.

Like the story, the characters of high concept film are quite reductive and created in tune with the market as part of the advertising. Wyatt argues that “[w]hile Hollywood has always privileged the presentation of clearly definable, consistent characters, high concept relies even more strongly [...] upon character typing, rather than character exposition” (53). In addition, the lines between character, actor (star persona), and advertising in high concept films often become blurred (Wyatt 55). As the characters often lack development (internal) the high concept film relies once again on the image, and a physical development instead (Wyatt 56-7).
The high concept film actually represents a move from narrative to spectacle to use another vocabulary. A prevalence of the image over narrative, easily understood over complexity, visual over internal transformation and marketing before character and story. This development of the high concept film had an impact on the Hollywood film and hence also on science fiction. For the Star’verses this style of filmmaking is pivotal, not only for Star Wars, but for Star Trek as well, as the narrative is expanded into film series during this time. Wyatt lists Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn (1982) as an example of a high concept film (21) and the other films could arguably also fit into that categorisation. If I were to put the style of the Star’verses on the high/low concept spectrum it would end up at the high end, this is another commonality between Star Trek and Star Wars, the visual emphasis, the reduced, unambiguous narratives and characters. Images such as the Enterprise or the Millennium Falcon, characters such as Luke or Spock work extremely well in advertising and the narratives could, without misrepresentation, be considered to be the battle between good and evil and the explorations of the final frontier. In addition, the characters of episodes IV-VI of Star Wars go through few internal changes, but rather rely on visual transformation, for example, Luke from white to black costumes and Vader from machine to human. The changes of the protagonists of Star Trek: TOS and Star Trek: TNG are also primarily visual – age, rank (as indicated by costume).

Science fiction film, new Hollywood, and high concept have an intimate relationship. For Neale a difference between the new Hollywood blockbuster and the old is that many of the new ones are science fiction while they were considered B films of the old Hollywood (“Hollywood” 52-3). Wyatt presents a list of approximately 80 high concept titles produced 1975-1992 and at least 15 of them can be considered science fiction. High concept relies on a “visual form, presentable in television spots, trailers, and print ads” (Wyatt 23). As science fiction cinema is very visual, both in extensive use of spectacle and in creation of the visual tension as discussed in Chapter 2 it fits comfortably with high concept. Star Wars once again proves its dominant position from this time in use of merchandise and market sensibility (cf. Wyatt 150-3) – a product of both market and filmmaking. The easily understood narrative, the aspects of the style that characterise the franchise such as John Williams’s music score, the image of, for example, Darth Vader and Storm Troopers, even the font used in the title is directly associated with the film and easily marketable. The marketing of the 2015 Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force

Awakens further displays the use of this style and look of Star Wars as high concept films. 80

Science Fiction Storytelling

There is a substantial body of previous research on science fiction film that focuses on relating the content of the genre to cultural significance and commentary (cf. Kuhn, Alien; Redmond; Telotte, Science Fiction 96-7; Johnston 28-30). Specific research on science fiction dramaturgy in relation to this content however is a subject less explored, which probably has to do with the genre’s affinity to classical Hollywood storytelling. Science fiction, together with other Hollywood genres, has served as material for a more general debate about Hollywood and classical structure that has been governed by scholars such as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.

Science fiction cinema developed as a popular Hollywood genre in the 20th century. A majority of canonised films can be considered classical Hollywood films in storytelling terms, something I will give some examples of in this chapter and consider what implications this has for the genre. During the time period discussed above (1917-1960) science fiction film was developing as a major genre in, as well as outside of, Hollywood. The 1920s were the glory days of film movements such as German expressionism cinema, French impressionist cinema and the Soviet montage movement. Telotte argues that this period eventuated in the production of the first truly distinct body of science fiction films. In this body of work, anchored in a more serious approach to the world of science and technology, [...] we can begin to see the variety of narrative concerns and types that would come to mark this genre as it developed well into the 1940s: utopian and dystopian [sic!] tales, stories of marvelous inventions and mad scientists [...]. (Science Fiction 81)

During the 1930s and 1940s the popularity of science fiction film was at a low. The American branch of the genre was dominated by genre hybrids of science fiction and horror movies such as Frankenstein (1931) and Island of Lost 80

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80 The first teaser for the film relies heavily on visual style and music. It includes Storm Troopers, X-wings, TIE-fighters, the Millennium Falcon, a hooded figure with a red light saber and a droid (BB-8) with both sound and appearance taking inspiration from R2-D2. In addition it uses the music score associated with the franchise and ends with the familiar logo. The second teaser presents the voice of Luke Skywalker, the burnt mask of Vader and mention of “family”. It ends with the voiceover of Han Solo who then fades in as he and Chewbacca are made visible on-screen and Chewbacca answers with the recognisable Wookie-voice.
Souls (1932) (Telotte, Science Fiction 89). The heritage from the German expressionistic movement was evident in the Hollywood productions:

While such films often seem essentially horrific in intent – thanks in great part to their emphasis on striking makeup effects, their visual designs that often recall the distorted, nightmarish world of German expressionist cinema, [...] – their more essential suggestion is one of scientific and technological caution. (Telotte, Science Fiction 90).

While the science fiction film almost entirely disappeared from Hollywood during the 1940s the genre was mainly kept alive by science fiction serials (Telotte, Science Fiction 91). They consisted of twelve to fifteen episodes approximately 15-20 minutes per episode screened weekly to attract a younger audience to the theatres. The plots were concerned with many of the themes common in cinematic science fiction such as alien invasions, interplanetary travel and time travelling (Booker 3-4). In the early 1950s the serials were to become increasingly rare, partly due to the development of television (Telotte, Science Fiction 94).

By the 1950s science fiction firmly established itself as a film genre, creating conventions for the genre that still, however modified, apply today. This era that followed World War II would come to be the golden age of science fiction and the popularity of cinema was once again on the rise (Science Fiction Film 94-5). The science fiction films made in America during this era were in contrast to their predecessors dealing with more serious and ambitious subject matter (Telotte, Science Fiction 95). Telotte for example sees three prominent topics appearing in the films of this era: The nuclear threat, exemplified by films such as: Them! (1954), Godzilla (1954), and The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957) (98-9). Space exploration - Destination Moon (1950), Rocketship X-M (1950), Forbidden Planet. The final one that Telotte calls “alien invasion films”(96) and Sean Redmond calls “invasion narratives” (316-7) can be exemplified by films such as The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951), The Thing from Another World (1951), The War of the Worlds (1953), It Came From Outer Space (1953) and Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Science Fiction 96). The increased use of novel technologies in film production such as Technicolor, Cinemascope and 3D techniques all contributed to the aesthetics of the films made in this period.

Even though science fiction deals with a variety of subjects, whether it is a story about nuclear disaster, alien invasion or space exploration - the structure of the story owes its form to the classical Hollywood style. Scriptwriter Robert Grant for instance, presents a common three-act structure in writing science fiction film; beginning, middle, end, in Writing the Science Fiction Film from...
Grant sees characters as core to science fiction scriptwriting which correlates with the goal driven, character-centred style of Hollywood cinema. Though the generic identity of a film makes for some genre specific elements in the dramatic structure it still often follows the patterns of the classical Hollywood style. For example, the type of Plot Points that are common to science fiction are not necessarily applicable to other Hollywood genres.

An example can be found by considering how Susan Sontag described the science fiction form of 1950s films in “The Imagination of Disaster”. In it she describes it as “predictable as a western, and is made up of elements which, [...], are as classic as the saloon brawl, the blonde schoolteacher from the East, and the gun duel on the deserted main street” (40). In the article Sontag describes three formulas for science fiction film. In order to present this Sontag had to - in a time before science fiction film had become a subject matter for research - clearly display typical forms. My interpretation of her formulas is that they could all be understood as generic varieties of classical Hollywood storytelling.

However, it is as easy to use a paradigm as a mould into which something is pushed as it is to use it as a template to compare two forms. I wish to stress the generality of this paradigm in storytelling to display the suggested similarity. This structural division and its validity could be questioned depending on the level of specificity or universality one is attempting to attain. In this particular case I simply aim to display a commonality between the forms and suggest a flexible application of the same. The usefulness of any single formula is as I see it only valuable in its context. Due to the flexibility of the norms of the classical Hollywood style no single film can be required to use them all. “No Hollywood film is the classical system; each is an ‘unstable equilibrium’ of classical norms” (Bordwell 5). Therefore, it is not possible to create an extensive and unambiguous mapping and classification of science fiction as the classical system but rather consider typical traits derived from this tradition.

Fitting Sontag’s formulas into a normative storytelling scheme such as Field’s storytelling paradigm would pose few contradictions and illustrate science fiction storytelling formula as embedded in Hollywood style. Put together,

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81 Sontag describes three “model scenario[s]”. The first applies best to a higher budget (wide screen/colour) film and goes through five phases: arrival of the alien, the confirmation of this arrival, the plans to destroy the alien, a fight and destruction sequence, and finally the resolution. Sontag’s second scenario is best applied to lower budget (black-and-white) films and it has four phases: The introduction of the normal hero, the findings of the alien in which no one believes the hero, advice is sought but without any results, and finally the hero either destroys the alien or contacts the proper authorities. The third scenario is described as similar to the first two but deals with a journey through space (cf. 40-1).
Sontag’s formulas can be described as follows: The film begins by displaying the status quo in where the hero is situated within the normality of the narrative, whether that is the small town or a space ship heading for another planet. This would be a quite typical science fiction set-up and Act I which is disrupted by Plot Point I. Then begins the action with the arrival of the thing, the discrepancy from normality or in other words, the antagonist or antagonistic situation facing the hero. But no one believes him. This propels the action into Act II. The first half of which is often some kind of investigation where it appears as if the threat is unbeatable. By the Midpoint a confrontation with the threat is made and often followed by large scale destruction and the efforts to stop it ends in failure. As the hero gains support from others he continues further investigation with assistance. There is a possibility for a solution and a spark of hope. The others are killed or otherwise disposed of which often marks Plot Point II. The hero comes up with a solution and can defeat the threat. Finally a return to status quo and normality ends Act III. In addition to the three-act structure formula, other aspects pivotal to the Hollywood style seemingly fit well with the classic(al) science fiction film.

Science fiction is indeed - from a dramaturgical point of view - character centred and has like the classical Hollywood film a goal oriented narrative structure. This contradicts the disassociation of science fiction from its characters and displays what I mean to argue when saying that science fiction does not de-emphasise its characters. However, this does not mean that science fiction productions can de-emphasise scripts, acting, and directing in order to promote spectacle. The action is usually bound to the goal of the hero and his desire to stop the threat. Though we are closely following the protagonist, the character oriented narrative is almost inseparable from the outer effects of the situation but it is still the protagonist’s goal that drives the story forward. When the hero finds out about the threat at Plot Point I the action begins and the confrontational part of the film in Act II culminates when he at the Midpoint is able to convince others that this is a real threat – the point of no return.

Christopher Vogler’s *The Hero’s Journey* is another example that can be used to display science fiction’s relationship to character. Using this structure to describe the formal elements of a science fiction film would in most cases work well. In his book *The Writer’s Journey* Vogler’s approach to storytelling lays its focus on character. Vogler argues in his use of Joseph Cambell’s concept *monomyth* that all stories are made up by a few frequently used structural elements, which become The Hero’s Journey (xxviii). As described by Vogler it is governed by the idea that “[a]ll stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and movies” (xxvii; bold in original removed). Vogler in fact returns to several science fiction films
as examples and the Star Wars-saga is one of the examples he is highly influenced by and is even credited as having helped to develop his overall theory (286). In fact Vogler uses science fiction as both primary and secondary examples of his dramaturgy.\footnote{Including e.g. Star Wars, The Terminator, Terminator 2 Judgement Day, Star Trek, The Matrix, Mad Max, Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), and E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (1982). For further inquiry into science fiction and mythic storytelling structure see Palumbo, The Monomyth in American Science Fiction Films.}

The hero for Vogler is, as previously discussed, by default male and the hero in science fiction for Sontag is typified by gender and occupation as a male scientist. An occupation (and a gender) symbolically filled with connotations of rationalism and non-superstitious detachment. The hero is almost always unambiguous and clearly defined as consistent. Any inconsistency would in fact risk his credibility as a witness to the unbelievable event and in return put the entire story into jeopardy. The ultimate object here is to lay the ground for an argument that formula oriented production schemes also tend to uphold the gendered matrix. To see that connection is to queer the dominant dramaturgical formula of much science fiction.

**Heteronormativity and Hollywood**

Through a critique from a gender and queer perspective on the storytelling techniques and its representatives I suggest a fundamental and necessary criticism of the heteronormativity of the Hollywood style. Vogler’s Hero archetype is by default male and likewise for Bordwell a part of the creation of consistent characters is, as shown above, a definition of type and traits. In order to make characters appear as homogeneous identities, or in fact “real” people that can be identified with; consistency is vital. I suggest that a consistent and comprehensible relationship between type and trait is a necessity for this consistency. For example, Bordwell notes that traits are fitted according to gender type (read: female or male) and these traits fit into the roles in a heterosexual relationship (16). What he is unwarily touching upon here is the heteronormativity of the classical Hollywood film.

It might not be news to suggest that classical Hollywood film is heteronormative in its content and its narratives, what I suggest however is that in addition to those claims the dramaturgy of the classical Hollywood film is heteronormative. By this I mean two things, firstly that the historical foundation of the techniques of dramatic structure commonly applied to Hollywood film have developed into a mode of storytelling where these techniques are intertwined with the heteronormative. Secondly, these
normative aspects of dramaturgy are neutralised as truth - as a normal mode of telling a story - when they in fact are cultural, historical and social constructions. In addition, the unreflecting use of these techniques by filmmakers and scriptwriters is constantly reaffirming this as natural. However, this also suggests that subversion of these norms is available for filmmakers whom intentionally or sometimes unintentionally break the rules, potentially disrupt and thereby possibly initiate changes to these conventions.

There are several instances when heterosexuality is implied, or explicitly described as an integral part of the classical Hollywood style. Bordwell describes the Hollywood style as a set of norms derived from structuralist philosopher Jan Mukarovský’s notion of aesthetic norms for creating art works. As these norms are tools for creation of art it also means that deviation from these norms is understood in terms of negative or positive - it can instead be either productive or unproductive. Mukarovský divides these into four different types of norms; materials, technical, practical and aesthetic. Bordwell uses the dominance of heterosexuality in America as an example of the practical or what he calls *ethico-socio-political norms*. In this brief example he states that he will only “mention these [...] when the particular ways of appropriating such norms are characteristic of the classical style” (5; my emphasis). He continues, “heterosexual romance is one value in American society, but that value takes on an aesthetic function in classical cinema (as, say, the typical motivation for the principal line of action)” (5). Hence, Bordwell clearly states that he views heterosexuality as characteristic of the classical style.

The inclusion of the heterosexual plotline developed simultaneously with the narrative film in the early days of the American cinema that intended to make film a comprehensible medium for storytelling. From the 1910s onwards filmmakers became accustomed to longer features and developed films towards more character based and goal driven narratives.

Hollywood filmmakers established firmer guidelines for creating intelligible plots. These guidelines have changed little since then. Hollywood plots consist of clear chains of cause and effects, and most of these *involve character psychology* (as opposed to social or natural forces). Each major character is given a set of comprehensible, consistent traits. The Hollywood protagonist is typically goal-oriented, [...]. Hollywood films usually intensify interest by presenting two interdependent plotlines. *Almost inevitably one of these involves romance*, which gets woven in with the protagonist’s quest to achieve a goal. (Bordwell and Thompson 72; my emphasis)
As we are reminded by Thompson the motivation of characters in most Hollywood films is desire; it is what drives the protagonist and the narrative forward.

Almost invariably, the protagonist’s goals define the main lines of action. [...] Most films actually have at least two major lines of action, and the double plotline is another distinctive feature of the Hollywood cinema. As we all know, romance is central to nearly all Hollywood films, and typically one line of action involves a romance, while the other concerns some other goal of the protagonist. These two goals are usually causally linked. (Storytelling in Film and Television 22-3)

In the quote above Thompson uses the term romance to describe one line of action but as more clearly stated by Bordwell, it is the story of heterosexual romance that is told in this line of action. He discusses heterosexual romance as part of a fairly specific dramatic form: “The classical film has at least two lines of action, both causally linking the same group of characters. Almost invariably, one of these lines of action involves heterosexual romantic love” (16; my emphasis). In addition he argues that this effects the characters in the plot: “Character traits are often assigned along gender lines, giving male and female characters those qualities deemed ‘appropriate’ to their roles in romance. To win the love of a man or woman becomes the goal of many characters in classical films” (16). This produces two effects; first a storytelling norm which depends on heteronormativity, and secondly, characters developed as part of this heteronormative story.

Both Thompson and Bordwell fail to note how the double plotline is embedded with normative assumptions and power relations. Even though Bordwell touches upon this controlling environment for the characters no further analysis is done. The “appropriate” traits for female or male characters lie in their relationship to the heterosexual romance. From a queer perspective this becomes a heteronormative machinery in which genders, sexualities and identities are produced. So throughout film history the Hollywood film has created stories in which heterosexual romance is inevitably connected to basically all other types of stories – hence making it part of the natural, everyday lives of all humans – constantly reaffirming and naturalising heterosexuality. In addition, the characters created within this discourse are required to have “appropriate” traits in relation to their role in a heteronormative society. Thus, the conventions of the classical Hollywood film do not only uphold the heterosexual as the norm, but also the system and details of roles played by women and men.
Traits traditionally associated with binary gender such as active/passive; nurturing/violent; and body/mind are upheld as “appropriate”, especially for protagonists. In order for them to be consistent, comprehensible and believable characters the traits have to be in line with the type (gender). In order for gender to be a type, it has to be associated with general ideas of what it means to be a (wo)man (the traits associated with being a certain gender) in the same way as we have an idea of what it means to be for example a scientist. The categorisation of characters into gender and sexual categories also lays the foundation for stereotypes. As Dyer famously disassembles how Walter Lippmann once defined and coined the term stereotype he points toward the most problematic issue of the concept; the normativity and the illusion of consensus. “The stereotype is taken to express a general agreement about a social group, as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype” (The Matter of Images 14). In fact, he continues and I agree, stereotypes create ideas about certain groups and are an expression of a certain world view (14).

The dramatic values assigned to the heterosexual plotline are intertwined with the other plotline. Bordwell asserts that a resolution of the heterosexual romance is required at the end of the film, not necessarily a happy resolution but a conclusion to the chain of cause and effect. It is in fact a requirement for concluding the film since it is part of the film’s causality (Bordwell 18). Without tying the heterosexual knot the film will not succeed in its cohesion which is pivotal to the classic film. A romantic engagement or disengagement is necessary between two people, depending on the genre: in a tragedy a heartbreaking loss and in a comedy a warm embrace. In both of these the death or the success of the romantic (heterosexual) couples is an intrinsic part of the catharsis.

It might appear as though the Hollywood film has developed into a less heterosexist story machine through the years, I suggest however that this rather has to do with the fact that gendered discourse is changeable over time. For example we do not see as many damsels in distress in the 21st century as we did in the 1950s. Hegemonic masculinity for example, as gender theorist R.W. Connell describes, is not static but rather fluid and changeable over time and space (see e.g. Connell and Messerschmidt 846). What is deemed appropriate for women today has changed since the 1950s and will have changed by the 2050s.

Similarly the available space for lgbtq-characters even in mainstream Hollywood cinema has rapidly increased, but not necessarily upsetting this dramaturgy. The successful coupling at the end of a film does not necessarily have to be romantic, and for some characters this is impossible in the story.
world as some characters are presented as asexual, or impossible for the purpose of romance. It is the beautiful protagonists that need to succeed in their romantic goals, not other secondary characters with traits making them unsuitable for romance such as old or young age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability etc. If lacking the suitable coupling for such a character, it can even be substituted with a non-romantic coupling, such as the gay man and the old lady, or the funny black guy and his dog. It is in fact an unthreatening coupling made to often stereotypical characters but still creating a similar dramatic effect. No one who does not deserve it (with a causal link) is left alone as the film ends if it is to be a happy ending.

This is the reason I call the double plotline heteronormative rather than heterosexual. Though changes in depictions, representations and society have occurred and lgbtq-characters can play central roles in Hollywood films they still remain within the storytelling structure that is based on heteronormativity. The dramaturgy suggests a progression towards goals – and that goal is for two people to unite in order to achieve happiness. Thus the goal for the male protagonist is traditionally in the second plotline to get the object of his desire – the woman. While this presents, from a feminist point of view, an objectification of women, it is also a heteronormative story structure, from a queer perspective.

The narrative strategies and the structure of the Hollywood style have been subjected to criticism not least from a feminist point of view.\(^\text{83}\) Feminist film scholar Lucy Fischer writes that: “It is a truism of the commercial cinema that the subject of love is central to the standard plot mechanism. [...] [T]he drama typically rests on a heterosexual romance” (89). She continues, with the influence of Roland Barthes, to investigate “fiction as structured by desire” in order to follow Teresa de Lauretis’ suggestion of “mapping’ sexual difference into the text” (90). Fischer focuses on the place into which women are positioned in film in relation to the heterosexual plot in which “the phrase ‘boy meets girl’, [reveals] the male bias at its core” (89). Fischer criticises the male subject and female object of commercial cinema.

In her influential theory of the male gaze Laura Mulvey showed the patriarchal workings of narrative cinema and the Hollywood style. The Hollywood style according to Mulvey “arose, not exclusively, but in one important aspect, from its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure” (“Narrative Cinema” 60). Hollywood cinema is driven by character-centred causality and desire, but as Mulvey argued, it is the male gaze that dominates this desire. This too

\(^{83}\) For an insightful analysis of women, feminism and dominant cinema see e.g. Kuhn, *Women's Pictures.*
presumes a heteronormative desire, even though there are positions for the spectator to inhabit such as a “trans-sex identification” of looks as suggested by Mulvey in her “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’” (125). The heteronormativity lies in a structural organisation of images from the male perspective including the objectification of women. The patriarchal structures of the narrative cinema presume and are built upon a rigid gender system. Judith Butler suggests that sexuality is inseparable from the creation of gender (see e.g. Gender Trouble), and it is from this point of view that I understand Mulvey’s male gaze. It is a dichotomised relationship between male and female whom are bound by an obligatory heterosexuality in order to produce intelligible genders.

Heterosexuality is imbedded in the classical narrative cinema, but heterosexuality can in fact be considered to have a narrative of its own. Sara Gwenllian-Jones described heterosexuality as a social practice which

assumes a narrative form of its own, with plot points of courtship, marriage, domesticity, reproduction, child-rearing, provision for the family. Heterosexuality’s narrative form is, arguably, the most embedded and pervasive foundational structure of ordinary reality. (87)

I believe that this heterosexual narrative as produced at different levels of discourse, the Hollywood film not excluded, is part of upholding it as “normal” and an unquestioned part of life. Considered not as a metanarrative, but a specific narrative which is socially, culturally and historically created and with a status as such which can be displayed. Queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman uses the concept of chrononormativity which she describes as “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (3). It is for Freeman “a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts” (3). Thus the heterosexual narrative which is closely connected to the concept of time could be similarly questioned.

Scholars such as Halberstam have displayed how the organisation of time into a progressive straight line is based on a heteronormative way of life. Halberstam uses the concept of “queer time” and “queer place” and

makes the perhaps overtly ambitious claim that there is such a thing as ‘queer time’ and ‘queer space’. Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification. If we try to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices, we detach queerness from sexual identity […]. (1)
Halberstam argues that “[q]ueer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2). That is, pointing out how our concept of time is intimately connected to heteronormativity. Niall Richardson et al. stresses in their book on sexuality and representations that “[h]eterosexuality underpins every representation, [...] – marriage and family – is portrayed as normal and natural” (58-9). They also continue to suggest the commonality of narrative punishment of those who do not comply with a heteronormative way of life.

**Heteronormative Story Structures in Science Fiction Film**

Hollywood film in general, and specifically genre film such as the romantic comedy, is highly dependent on the analysed dramaturgical structure, but what about science fiction? Though the visual pleasure of science fiction is, on the one hand, similar to other cinema, science fiction also derives its visual pleasure from destruction (Sontag) and the alien (Sobchack). This visual pleasure is in as much directed from a male gaze, in science fiction in fact the objectification of women through the male gaze can take us beyond the metaphorical – women can in fact become objects such as robots. This generic possibility could instead be used as a way to move beyond the heterosexual narrative as robots can inhabit a different temporal and spatial existence. However this is seldom the case as displayed in Chapter 2.

When describing the formats of typical 1950s science fiction films Sontag, in addition to the plotline discussed above, also describes the protagonist. His type, to use Bordwell’s term, i.e. the gender and occupation of the hero is firmly established and in addition Sontag actually describes the romantic/heterosexual plot line. The hero is described in the exposition as "a young scientist [...]. The hero is not married, but has a sympathetic though also incredulous girlfriend". Or, "The hero (usually, but not always, a scientist) and his girlfriend, or his wife and two children, are disporting themselves in some innocent ultra-normal middle-class surroundings" (40). Hence, in Act I the hero’s type is established; a young, white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, American, often working as a scientist. The character’s traits are of course somewhat more individual, but I think it is safe to presume that some of them follow with the types, especially the occupational type. The scientist alludes to reason and progression and disqualifies non-logic and superstition. In combination with the character types this is a safe and unambiguous

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84Halberstam also analyses different narratives such as films when investigating queer time and place.
character, so the types in themselves can function symbolically to reinforce these character traits as well as prove their consistency. So begins the action and "[a]t some point the hero’s girlfriend is in grave danger" and finally when the alien threat is subdued "the hero and his girlfriend embrace cheek to cheek" (40). This illustrates the romantic plotline and its relationship to the closure of the films.

The family’s dramatic function in Sontag’s description lies in the creation of normality and familiarity and henceforth they are subjected to dangers allowing the hero to save them. The wife or girlfriend serves the purpose of embodying the hero’s goal towards recreating that heterosexual union. As Bordwell suggests, the goal oriented hero’s desire (hence, motivation) is almost always to either change something or restore something that has been changed, the heterosexual union in this case (16). It does not necessarily have to be a happy reunion in order to be successful depending on whether the film ends happily or not, as for example in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* where the hero loses his girlfriend to the aliens. Unable to restore the romantic plotline the only probable ending for the hero is to fail in the other plotline as well, as they are interconnected. This obviously connects the double plotlines and their causality in the specific way Bordwell describes it, rather than making it two parallel plots. He writes: “Classical Hollywood cinema, however, makes the second line of action causally related to the romantic action. Instead of putting many characters through parallel lines of action, the Hollywood film involves few characters in several interdependent actions” (Bordwell 16).

To conclude this discussion I will give a few brief examples of double plotlines in science fiction by displaying and analysing the use of the romantic (and potentially sexual) plotline in those narratives. I will give some examples from Hollywood films which would fit into any given science fiction canon: *Star Wars, Alien, Blade Runner, Terminator*, and *Independence Day* (1996). The examples chosen aim to display a variety of uses of the double plotline in science fiction as to exemplify not only how these films use this storytelling technique but also to display the multiple ways in which it can be used. The double plotline looks different depending on what type of narrative it is, and the biggest difference is due to whether the films have single or multi-protagonist(s) so this has directed my selection of examples. Single or parallel protagonist films seem to have a more prominent romantic plotline compared to multi-protagonist films. The examples include two films with female protagonists: *Alien* and *Terminator* and three with male protagonists: *Star Wars, Blade Runner* and *Independence Day*. All of the examples have heterosexual romantic plots if any, and while queer (re)readings of these could be done they all remain quite bound to the normative.
Star Wars (1977)

*Star Wars* represents a potent example of the double plotline in Hollywood film as well as in science fiction. *Star Wars* is a single-protagonist film with Luke Skywalker as the protagonist. He is the one who goes through changes in the film and the character whose goals are pursued (cf. Vogler). The film has a dominant romantic plotline represented by the desire towards Leia Organa. Throughout episodes IV-VI (1977,-80,-83) the plotline of Luke and Leia’s romance dissolves as the plotline of the Skywalker family relationships is unravelled. Both plotlines create interdependent actions for Luke and Leia and would not be able to be separated. Luke soon abandons his romantic goals as he finds out that Leia is his twin sister, however the plotline remains through Han Solo who - in contrast to Luke - can fulfill the romantic plotline of the story. Luke is by proxy freed from the plotline and able to commit to the Jedi Order in which celibacy is the only option. Since Leia is the only female character there are no other obstacles for Luke to encounter in order to achieve his goals. Both Leia and Han can be understood as representatives of different parts of Luke in their roles as allies - so they can successfully achieve the romantic goals in his place.\(^\text{85}\)

Alien (1979)

*Alien* serves as an exception, partly due to its appearance as a multi-protagonist film. Thompson displays in her chapter on *Alien* in *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* that no romantic secondary plotline appears, although expected due to the inclusion of female characters. The second plotline is instead connected to the Corporation’s hidden agenda to acquire the alien. When Thompson analyses *Alien* from the point of view of the classical narrative technique she underlines the uncertainty of the spectator as regards to who is the hero. This uncertainty allows for suspense in “the shooting-gallery narrative” as Thompson points out, so that the audience does not know who – if anyone – will survive. Since the film is a multi-protagonist film to use Thompson’s categorisation, it positions several characters as protagonists who attempt to achieve a similar goal, they do not however need to agree on the way to achieve this goal (*Storytelling in the New Hollywood* 48).

Although there are no romantic plotlines in *Alien* for any of the protagonists, I suggest that they could have been introduced as a way to motivate a specific protagonist’s actions – but unlikely as the second plotline – because all characters have to work towards the same goal; in this case surviving. However, as it becomes apparent that Ripley is the hero a secondary romantic

\(^{85}\text{Vogler writes that allies can “bring out human feelings [...] adding extra dimensions to their personalities” (71).}\)
plotline would have, traditionally, been introduced – giving her the extra motivation not only to survive but to return home – this however does not happen and her lack of romantic entanglements is what makes it possible for her to go on to “the frontier”.

I argue that the exclusion of the romantic heterosexual plotline in *Alien* is part of the reason Ripley has become one of the seminal female heroes of the genre. She is not only a female character whom unexpectedly turns out to be the hero of the film, but additionally her primary motivations are not romantic or in relation to men. However, though a depiction of female masculinity she is still assigned traits, such as caring, caution, and empathy, traditionally associated with femininity. Though associated with motherhood in the sequels, the primary difference between the original film and its sequels in storytelling terms is that they are mainly single-protagonist films. After *Alien* the audience expect Ripley to be the hero and the single-protagonist storytelling allows for more elaborate double plotlines which are directly connected to Ripley’s goals and motivations. While not romantic per se in *Aliens* (1986) her maternal struggle to save the life of Newt (Carrie Henn) is entirely intertwined with the main plot and can be considered a type of double plotline. In *Alien*³ (1992) Ripley carries an alien queen embryo which becomes her primary motivation and leads to her killing herself and the alien at the end of the film. This once again connects Ripley to a maternal plotline which comes to its peak in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) in which Ripley both becomes part alien and mother to the new alien. These narratives could in one way be considered a substitute for the heterosexual narrative which emphasises her only available option as a women (to have children) or as a queer narrative of sorts in which she can step outside of reproductive/heteronormative time and become a hero.

*Blade Runner* (1982)

*Blade Runner* relies on the double plotline, but even to a greater extent and more of a text book example than *Star Wars*. It is clearly a single-protagonist film with blade runner Deckard (Harrison Ford) as the lone protagonist. The

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86 This focus on the maternal is a well-researched topic in science fiction. Feminist scholars have approached science fiction by theorising reproduction and maternity (see e.g. Creed “Gynesis” and “Alien”). For example, film theorist Mary Ann Doane argues in her essay *Technophilia: Technology, Representation and the Feminine*: “it is not so much the production that is at stake in these representations as reproduction” (182). She notices how strikingly frequent it is for a woman to become “the model of the perfect machine”, and argues “when technology intersects with the body in the realm of representation, the question of sexual difference is inevitably involved” (182). The woman-machine is a product of the desire to reproduce but is limited by her inability to reproduce and films like *Alien* are, according to Doane, highly concerned with mechanical and biological reproduction, “the technological is insistently linked to the maternal” (185). Science fiction for Doane is as a genre that is preoccupied with reproduction (189). The forceful mystical or technological insemination of women and/or pregnancy/birth was and still is a common trope in science fiction for example in: *Star Trek TNG, Battlestar Galactica, Torchwood, Angel, Prometheus* and *Doctor Who*. 
plot revolves around his retirement of replicants and at first his goal is to do his job. As time passes Deckard’s goal changes as he not only realises the value of replicants but also that he might be a replicant himself. The plot is intrinsically connected to a romantic plotline between Deckard and replicant Rachel (Sean Young), it is through her that he learns the value of replicants which directly influences his motivations towards his goals. Throughout the film the plotlines are interwoven and become causally linked – all versions of the film end with Deckard sparing Rachel’s life and running away with her in order to find safety.

Since there are a number of versions of the film, it is especially intriguing to note that the “happy ending” of the film in which Deckard and Rachel drive off into the countryside was added by the studio. This is a testament to the double plotline formula as well as the issue of narrative clarity in the Hollywood film’s aim to be easily understood. This ending is not in either of the director’s cuts, which leave more ambiguous endings to the film.

The romantic plotline in the film is typical of the Hollywood film. Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) is the protagonist of *Terminator* - it is her goal to stay alive in order to save her unborn child and stop the coming war. If Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn) was not sent back in time by John Connor to save his mother, he would not have been born and able to fight the machines. So, the development of the romantic plot between Sarah and Kyle is as much a necessity to stop the war as is Sarah’s survival. Since Kyle is John’s father, the only way he is to be born is by a romantic plotline between the two. That is why *Terminator*, unlike much science fiction film, has quite an emphasis on this plotline – at least until John comes into existence. In addition, there is a quite graphic sex scene, with Sarah and Reese, quite unusual to science fiction. However, the use of slasher-film conventions in the film makes this scene less of a surprise.

It is, like in *Alien*, the reproductive part of the romantic plotline that is highlighted. While *Alien*, like many other science fiction films, could avoid the romantic plotline through reproduction without love or sex and instead rely on mystical (alien) or technological devices to impregnate women, *Terminator* actually introduces a quite elaborate plot which is visualised as a sexual encounter. The unhappy ending in which Reese sacrifices himself for not only his commander but also his unborn child is also based on narrative logic – he cannot live through his mission because he cannot exist in two places at the same time in his future.
Independence Day (1996)

*Independence Day* is an example that displays a parallel-protagonist narrative highly reliant on the double plotline. The film introduces what Thompson calls a “parallel-protagonist film” (*Storytelling in the New Hollywood* 45-6). Both protagonists are presented in relation to their romantic plotline in Act I. Steven (Will Smith) in bed, David (Jeff Goldblum) in discussion about his divorce though they have different goals and different traits they eventually find each other and save the world together. The film then ends with, for Steven a return to heterosexuality and for David a reestablishment of his failed relationship – it is through his development in the alien plotline that he is deemed appropriate to achieve his romantic goal. The achievement of the romantic goal as much represents the success of the protagonists as does the alien-goal. The final scene in the desert, after the defeat of the alien, serves as a good example of this; a crashed alien spaceship as a backdrop for heterosexual (re)union on the 4th of July – the visual representation of the successful male, American hero.

As I aimed to display by these brief examples, not surprisingly the double plotline can be found in science fiction in different ways, this however does not suggest that this plotline is as dominant as in other genres. Instead it clearly marks the dramaturgy as dependent on heteronormativity, which could explain the token presence of women as an alibi for maintaining heterosexual plotlines. Sobchack wrote that women characters fill a purpose “to answer the unspoken charges of homosexuality which echoes around the edges of the genre” (“Virginity” 105). Female characters then, can with their presence both maintain a storytelling convention (the double plotline) and serve as an alibi for homosexual desire. I argue that the romantic plotline is downplayed in science fiction to the extent that it appears neutralised and invisible - characteristics of normativity. The plotline is desexualised and placed in a peripheral position. In fact it is mainly present as a need for formula and functions mostly as a token presence – without any narrative power – except that of supporting the main plotline. But it is still present as a normalising formula in which heteronormative relationships are hidden in plain sight as the only available option.

**Searching for Subversive Storytelling**

In what follows I will focus on, in relation to subversion, issues of intention and creative power, New Queer Cinema as an example of queer interventions into film and finally an analysis of David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* as a science fiction film with queer potential. While Hollywood dramaturgy in its
use and tradition has a heteronormative foundation the question remains whether it is possible to tell subversive stories or create subversive characters in a normative use of dramaturgy. I believe that storytelling, like all normative systems, cannot simply be stepped outside, but instead, needs to be changed from within. Though it seems easy to propose abandoning traditional storytelling all together in order to bring forth more subversive storytelling, it is a utopian dream. In order for a film to actually have the potential to be a subversive element in regards to its genre or the storytelling techniques of classical Hollywood, it has to work within that same system. Blatantly put; you cannot subvert science fiction by making a crime film. Once again it is intelligibility that is at stake, for Judith Butler it was gender intelligibility and for stories it is narrative intelligibility. Abandoning the traditional dramaturgy entirely or even partly might render the story incomprehensible, and for a genre such as science fiction as I displayed in Chapter 2 this might prove difficult. Furthermore, science fiction’s affinity to both popular and even mainstream audiences, its big budgets and high grossing box-office successes leaves much at stake.87

First of all, it is not a question about “The Grand Subversion”; it is the subversion of specific norms or systems – heteronormativity and classical dramaturgy in this case - in a specific context. It is a specific example that aims to display these issues and begins to consider in what way dramaturgy affects the type of story being told as regards to heteronormativity. Secondly, when subversion is used in this context it suggests stories or characters that, in the way they are told and/or depicted, try to damage, destroy, or disrupt heteronormativity or the norms of Hollywood storytelling. To suggest that a film or a character tries to do something implies that it is required to have an intention to subvert. However, a creator can have the intention to try, but that does not equate something subversive, and in contrast, a creator can be without specific intent and still create a subversive text. Certain creators aim towards specific themes and motifs, storytelling techniques etc. which have an ideological and/or artistic intent which more often results in stories that might be subversive.

Dependent on what amount of creative power the creator has there are a number of both people and institutions that all co-create the finished product. The possibility for subversion can lie in the hands of a director, a producer, an actress or a scriptwriter, and similarly be countered by issues such as financial stakes, normative discourses, regulations and marketability. While such issues can dictate the premises for the story and its outcome, there are certain

87 Consider for example how Wyatt sees the development of high concept as one of the central developments of the post-classical cinema as discussed earlier.
positions in both film and television that creators can achieve in order to secure some type of artistic freedom. I am referring here to what became known as the auteur in cinema studies, characterised by the independent, creative locus of the film (Truffaut, Godard, Bergman, Fellini etc.) who directed, wrote scripts and edited and attained artistic control over the cinematic production. However, this is seldom the case in film production.

When discussing the notion of the auteur in relation to blockbusters, Warren Buckland uses director Steven Spielberg as an example and argues that he

is an auteur, not because he is working against the Hollywood industry (as were the auteurs in classical Hollywood), [...]. Instead Spielberg is an auteur because he occupies key positions in the industry (producer, director, studio co-owner, franchise licensee). (“The Role” 87)

A potential auteur in the contemporary film industry not only has control over the film production but s/he “is a director who gains control over all stages of filmmaking: not just film production, but also distribution and exhibition” (Buckland, “The Role” 84). As both internal and external auteurship is balanced the creative control can be retained, for some at least. Buckland argues that George Lucas for example “is a successful external auteur, but not internal” based on narrative flaws and mise-en-scène of Star Wars: Episode I “a film that succeeded on the basis of Lucas’s control of external authorship processes” (“The Role” 87). While I believe that Buckland is correct in adding the external issues as part of the contemporary auteur it further stresses the major role that these external forces play in creating film.88 While few creators can be said to have this type of auteurship and the possibility for both internal and external control over the production, not all are as driven by the external and the commercial aspects.

I do consider the creators to be one of the keys to subversive storytelling, it is clear that even a creator that evidently know the rules and how to break them is not isolated from all the structuring aspects of both industry and conventions. If there is anyone that is frequently associated with the role of television auteur it is Joss Whedon (J.G Butler 214, 268; Prys 24; Mittell, Complex TV 87). Though mostly seen as a television auteur Whedon did also write films such as Alien: Resurrection, Cabin in the Woods (2012) and eventually both wrote and directed high budget blockbusters Avengers (2012) and Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015).

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88 Buckland uses the concepts of internal and external as based on how literature scholar Susan Gillman describes authorship and mass publishing through internal authorship “mastery of the writing process” and external control “of the immediate organizational and economic environment” (“The Role” 86).
Both films, from a feminist point of view, display a lack of female agency. While certain actions and scenes have traces of Whedon’s feminist approach, there are few female characters included in the films and despite attempts to depict for example Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) as an integral and equal part of the team, her presence instead highlights gender differences. In the first film, her primary motivation is connected to saving Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner). Black Widow is also, despite her own super abilities, in fact used dramatically as a damsel in distress. For example, in *Avengers*, the scene where Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo) is turned into the Hulk plays at the vulnerability of Black Widow and she is then saved by Thor (Chris Hemsworth). Likewise in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, her interactions with the other characters is primary in terms of romantic engagement with Bruce Banner. Additionally, the issue of gender resurfaces as her traumatising upbringing is investigated and her inability to have children is revealed. I see this as an example of the negotiations and power struggles of creators, budget, and high stake blockbusters.

It is an interesting development to see how someone like Whedon, a storyteller who does not conform to rules and a self-proclaimed feminist is ultimately tied down to very conventional storytelling in *Avengers*. It might be the case that the big budgets and the high stakes aim, in fact, to create films that do not queerly experiment in form or content. Television scholar Catrin Prys also discusses the relationship between auteurs and “brand names” (24). Using terms like brand actually highlights issues of market as part of the idea of the television auteur. Frankly a way to sell a television series is through the brand of the auteur. Bordwell and Thompson “suggested that independents were not expected to break many rules when they were given big-budget projects” (701). Thus, issues of budget, storytelling conventions and issues of normativity affect the representations that are possible at a certain time.

**New Queer Cinema**

While the production of high concept blockbusters is extremely expensive both in production and marketing (see e.g. Bordwell and Thompson 684) distribution through video and film festivals makes it possible for independent companies to produce films as well (694). During the 1990s a cinematic wave of independent films commonly called New Queer Cinema developed, which represents films in obvious opposition towards heteronormativity. These queer films were - like queer theory – partly aimed at subverting sexual and gender categories (see e.g. Aaron 5; Doty, “Queer” 148). They developed partly

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89 This de-emphasis on female characters could of course be considered otherwise in terms of the film as an “old-fashioned war film” as suggested by Ensley F. Guffey (292).

90 For a discussion about Whedon as feminist see e.g. Lauren Schultz, “‘Hot Chicks with Superpowers” or Jowett, *Sex and the Slayer* (18).
in contrast to the history of lgbt-characters in cinema in which, after the abandonment of the Production Code, depictions of gay or lesbian characters relied on positive images in order to promote equal rights, tolerance and acceptance in society. In contrast, the films of the New Queer Wave did not necessarily concern themselves with positive images of lgbt-characters (Doty, “Queer” 146; Aaron 3). Alexander Doty suggests that queer cinema can be considered as a way to describe alternative venues and storytelling modes for queer filmmaking which include: independent productions, films addressing a non-straight audience, often depicting sexually explicit material (“Queer” 146). Film scholar Michele Aaron argues that defiance is what unites and similarly best describes the characteristics of the films of The New Queer Cinema (3-5).

The New Queer Cinema often commits itself to alternative storytelling techniques. In addition to defiance towards history, positive imagery, possible subjects and even death, Aaron states that the films “frequently defy cinemactic conventions in terms of form, content and genre” (4). Doty further writes that some

film- and videomakers feel that expressing and representing queerness – as opposed to gayness, lesbianism, and bisexuality – is most (or only) possible within non-mainstream production and formal contexts, that is within avant-garde, documentary, and other independently produced alternative-to-traditional narrative forms. (“Queer” 147)

Aaron even suggests that it defies “the sanctity of mainstream cinema history”, and “reappropriates mainstream genres and formats” (4). She continues to argue that the New Queer Cinema had a “lack of respect for the governing codes of form or content, linearity or coherence, indeed, for Hollywood itself” (5). What is implied here is that the New Queer Cinema indeed offered a critique of the normative storytelling technique dominating American cinema.

The use of pastiche, camp, satire, and parody are all common to films attempting queer critique (see e.g. Benshoff and Griffin, “Part Three: Camp”). While there are science fiction examples such as Gay Nigger from Outer Space (1992) it provides little to subvert an entire genre, especially due to its short experimental format and independent status. Science fiction parodies such as Galaxy Quest (1999) and Iron Sky (2012), though partly dealing with the sexism of the genre, do not, unsurprisingly, offer any criticism of heteronormativity.
Defying Conventions: Videodrome

David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983) is an independent science fiction film that I will analyse in order to further investigate storytelling conventions of science fiction, the Hollywood style and a film with queer potential. By choosing an independent film to analyse in this context I hope to reflect further on some of the science fiction films described in this chapter, all more or less moulded in the Hollywood style. In this analysis I will investigate how *Videodrome* relates to the classical Hollywood style and display how Cronenberg partly uses this dramaturgy in order to tell a story but simultaneously subverts storytelling and genre conventions, more precisely depictions of (queer) sexuality. I will in fact display how the subversive potential in *Videodrome* is connected to an active awareness and use of conventions and normativity.

In comparison to the science fiction canon as discussed above *Videodrome* is a film depicting overt sexuality. I suggest that the sexualised body and machine in the film can be interpreted as queer. The plot is centered on protagonist Max Renn (James Woods), owner of a television network airing erotic and violent programming who, in his search for programmes finds Videodrome – a real snuff show with unexpected side effects for its viewers.

*Videodrome* presents a horror/science fiction hybrid narrative which in its generic connections to the horror film allows it more visual and narrative freedom as regards to its intentions as horror. As I suggested in Chapter 1 the
horror film – unlike science fiction – has its foundation in an adult address to its spectators which becomes visible both in the use of gore and violence, but can also include scenes of a sexual nature. However I consider this a good analytical example for several reasons; the issue of sexuality and sex is key to the narrative, its - though only partly - generic identity as science fiction, and its location inbetween independent and mainstream.

Though independently produced, it still relates to a mainstream cinema according to Cronenberg scholar William Beard:

The hallucination-controlled narrative of *Videodrome* is highly unusual in mainstream cinema, [...] *Videodrome* exemplifies perhaps better than any of his other films Cronenberg’s often anomalous position between ‘serious’ art-cinema and ‘shallow’ commercial genre-cinema. (153)

Connecting *Videodrome* to both art-cinema and genre film (possible Hollywood film) displays two different focal points for the two modes of expressions: One primarily concerned with narrative clarity, comprehension and meaning while the other not necessarily dedicating itself to those purposes. *Videodrome* finds a way inbetween these two cultural expressions.

First of all let us investigate the dramaturgy of *Videodrome*. It does not stray from a classical dramaturgy in any revolutionary way and it is not a fragmented dramaturgy that brings forth the confusion and uncertainty of the spectators but rather the narrative: The postmodern paranoia, unstable identities and lack of consistent and reliable meta-narratives is part of an explanation. Cronenberg himself suggested that “*Videodrome* is ‘a first person film’” and Beard sees this as key to understanding the film (qtd. in Beard 121). This suggests that the entire narrative pivots around protagonist Max who is present in all scenes of the film as well as the only source of knowledge for the audience.

Beard continues:

The film moves far beyond the conventions of identificatory protagonist-oriented narrative to a submersion in the central character’s increasingly fevered and disconnected hallucinations. It is not just Max Renn who becomes delirious, boundryless, fantastically beset – it is the film. (123)

The conventions Beard is talking about are of course related to the classical Hollywood style of storytelling. In *Videodrome*, the narrative is so closely connected to the protagonist that the two are made inseparable. It is through this narrative that sexuality can surface uncensored. As we, from the outside, follow the inner workings of Max, not by *listening in* on his mind but by
looking at his reality, the visual representation of desire and the urge to look is highly present. Bodies and technology merge in different constellations all more or less coded sexually. Locating the sexual transgression (the sadism) in the male protagonist is according to Beard new for Cronenberg in *Videodrome* (137). I would argue the fact that the film demonstrates Max’s sexual transgression or even sexuality is what makes it a believable narrative despite it being incoherent.

However deeply submerged the narrative is into Max’s mind, the narrative still aims for a goal-oriented protagonist. Max’s goal as I understand it is knowledge and the way to achieve this knowledge is through the body. Act I begins to explain this thirst for knowledge through the introduction of the Videodrome-signal. Max works at a morally questionable TV station and is looking for the next new thing – and finds Videodrome; a torture pornography show. His fascination with the show drives him to find where it comes from and to investigate his own sexuality. This is embodied by Nicki (Debbie Harry) who first appears as his lover and then disappears into Videodrome. She is then incorporated into the television and follows Max right to the finish in which his search for knowledge is at an end, there is nothing more to experience and in order to fulfil his goal he kills himself and becomes the New Flesh.

Even though Nicki plays a central role in *Videodrome* I would suggest that it is not strictly a double plotline in the film. Although it appears that Max’s relationship to Nicki is intertwined with his goals, this rather seems to be an illusion. As we cannot be sure of Nicki’s existence outside of Max’s mind it seems more likely that Max is creating his own double plotline in order to make sense of his reality. He has, like all of us, seen it on film. By projecting Nicki into Videodrome he can further motivate his actions as causal.

Sexuality, in the film, is constantly connected to technology and the television in particular; it is within this techno-centered narrative and fascination of the technological that *Videodrome* owes most of its science fiction heritage. The object of sexual desire (Nicki) is for the most part without physical body and inside the television – making the technology itself an object of desire. What Cronenberg does in *Videodrome* is to make this science fiction trope mature into an adult depiction of explicit sexual objectification. According to Beard, Cronenberg’s entire filmography deals with “the sexualization of science” (134). While implicitly suggested in most science fiction the male obsession with technological artefacts constantly borders on sexual attraction.
The step between the visual pleasure of women and the visual pleasure of technology is small in Videodrome. It is the pleasure of looking (Mulvey) that is at the centre of the narrative and the dangers connected to this pleasure when it becomes reality and infects the body. It is not only the television as a sexual object, but the gun that Max inserts into his stomach (through what Beard calls a vagina), the videotapes and the flesh gun. Max becomes a projector of images through insertions of videotapes into his body and we closely follow his inner journey. Sexuality in Videodrome remains primarily heterosexual, however not necessarily heteronormative. The technocentricity, the reversal of gender and traditional sexual behaviours suggest a queer depiction of sexuality in which the potential of a science fiction trope is displayed. Videodrome is a subversive narrative in the way it inserts itself both into a genre identity and a storytelling convention and critically uses these.

**Closure and Open Ended Narratives**

As displayed in this chapter the confines of the Hollywood style both uphold and normalise heterosexual relationships as integral parts of its structure. Both the New Queer Cinema and the Videodrome example point toward the direction of narratives and structures that in some ways defy these normative storytelling techniques. I argue that while both require an active creator that can subvert these norms, it does not necessitate a total abandonment of these norms; in fact I see that as counterproductive, for popular science fiction at least. In that way I suggest that the Videodrome example represents a possible
way to create a science fiction film with more explicit use of queer potential precisely because it uses generic and storytelling norms and from the inside deconstructs these and in that way provides a norm critical film which highlights the properties of an elusive norm.

The Hollywood film relies heavily on causality and closure and defiance towards this compulsive need to wrap things up in an appropriate order might prove to be one dramatic strategy for subversive storytelling. Feminist film and science fiction theorist Annette Kuhn uses the concept of closure in feminist film theory as “[r]estriiction of the range of meanings potentially available from a text” (Women’s 258) and separates it from narrative closure: “[t]he resolution of the disruption or question set up by a narrative, which usually takes place at the end of a plot” (260). While Videodrome on the one hand presents a definite plot resolution - or to use Kuhn, narrative closure - through the death of the protagonist it somewhat lacks closure. It remains unclear what was true and false, real and unreal in the film when it ends since it lacks certain parts of a complete causality. The film does not restrict the meanings of the text.

In feminist film theory the issue of closure has been subject to challenge in terms of laying bare the patriarchal structures of cinema. Kuhn displays the connection between “feminist intervention in culture” (Women’s 14) and closure in dominant patriarchal cinematic language. “It has been argued, […] that closure is a feature of certain types of textual organisation, such as that of ‘classic’ narratives” (Kuhn, Women’s 16). She argues that the way films create meaning cannot be taken for granted in order to make such a feminist intervention. This production of meaning needs to be challenged, according to Kuhn, due to “the ideological character of the signification process” (17). She further argues “that dominant modes of representation constitute forms of subjectivity – the subject fixed by closure, for example – characteristic of a masculinist or patriarchal culture” (Women’s 17-8). In one aspect this could be understood as a way to open for additional interpretations of the meanings of films, instead of using the classical style which closes possibilities through a tight causal and closed chain of events. Kuhn argues that the “new women’s cinema is particularly prone to such openness” and that this storytelling structure “opens up rather than restricts potential readings” (Women’s 135). This is of course based on the view that meaning is created inbetween creators, texts, and audience.

From another point of view, Gwenllian-Jones argues that cult television allows fans to repetitively view and “facilitate the series’ lack of closure” (83). This allows the fans to move beyond causality and allows for a consideration of “what possibilities are opened up for future storylines, and what other stories
haunt the hinterlands of the text” (83). In a way this is a storytelling structure and a spectator position which invites an open text rather than that which provides closure. The writing of fan fiction also suggest that the openness of the text is not necessarily located at the end of the narrative, but also inside, vertically so to speak, as for example the development of characters.

The issue of closure can also be connected to the idea of what stories do. Vogler introduces an ideological idea of the purpose and power of storytelling and states that “[u]sed wisely, these ancient tools of the storyteller’s craft still have tremendous power to heal our people and make the world a better place” (xxvii). This somewhat utopian restatement of the idea of catharsis does imply that stories told in the right way have a lasting impact on their spectators. The hero whose journey we are to follow embodies the saviour who makes a better world possible. As this hero is highly influential in the way s/he invites identification (cf. Vogler 30-1) the audience watch the hero make the world a better place and our potential to do so. This could also be considered as “healing” to use Vogler’s words, to be able to identify oneself with an active hero who, despite his troubles and doubts, succeeds in his endeavours. This power of the mythic structure corresponds well with the idea of science fiction as a response to or commentary on cultural anxieties. The depiction of the alien Other and other metaphorical and unstoppable forces beyond our control requires a hero to help deal with the reality of these threats. Whether it is a response to nuclear threats, communism, terrorists, environmental disaster, disease and epidemics, or the loss of humanity in favour of technology the potential to save the world or at least change it for the better could potentially induce the healing power Vogler suggests. However I also understand Vogler’s concept of healing in terms of storytelling techniques. The healing power of stories lies in cohesive, comprehensible cause and effect-chains without unintentional loose ends - a catharsis. The defiance towards narrative resolutions and closure is something that for film might be troublesome due to this formula but, as I will return to in the next chapter, this is part of the foundation of television storytelling.

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In this chapter I have showed how science fiction film owes much of its storytelling techniques to the classical Hollywood cinema. In addition I have argued that the dramaturgy of Hollywood cinema is heteronormative. The (hetero)sexuality of characters is presumed, unspoken, and at the same time, pivotal to the Hollywood story in a number of ways. Firstly, to ensure the unity, consistency and probability of its characters and combining appropriate traits and types which are, as I suggested above, expressions of the
heterosexual matrix. Secondly, in order to ensure the causality of the story since character goals are intimately connected to the plot. Thirdly, to focus the character’s motivation toward its goal(s) which in turn relates to the first (and second). For example, to save the world can be reasonable motivation for a hero, but to save the girl is an even stronger motive to reach his goal.

In addition I have analysed some examples of this heterosexual plotline in science fiction and argued that though present, it is peripheral to the narrative but still often remains as an unquestioned formula. Since the Hollywood style presupposes heterosexuality in its very dramaturgy and science fiction relies on that same dramaturgy, it creates narratives in which these storytelling norms are predominant. However, even though this normativity is the basis for the dramatic structure central to the Hollywood film it cannot prevail without the constant reaffirming of itself as norm, and that is done through people. Similarly people, like David Cronenberg, can make use of the norms and subvert or disrupt them, and at the same time display their status as constructions. The chapter ended with a discussion of subversive storytelling and how it relates to these storytelling norms and begins to consider whether it is possible to tell a subversive story in a normative use of dramaturgy. This was done by an analysis of Cronenberg’s Videodrome. In the next chapter I will continue to investigate to what extent the storytelling formats affect the types of stories being told and specifically how television dramaturgy allow for deviation from these norms.
Chapter 4: Stay Tuned for the Future of Science Fiction

“You’re not going to see that on TV”.

The previous chapter dealt with science fiction cinema with focus on the classical Hollywood style and this chapter will use that background for an analysis of television storytelling. I argue that in terms of depictions of sexuality and disruptions of heteronormativity science fiction television has been far more progressive than its film counterparts. A majority of the examples of science fiction that I consider to use their queer potential can be found in television. In cinema however, the progression is remarkably slow. Therefore in this chapter I will compare television and film to consider the specific storytelling techniques of television drama in relation to the Hollywood film. In addition, I examine how television differs from cinema in aspects such as viewing practices, production, exhibition, and economic conditions and how these affect storytelling. On the basis of this comparison I argue that science fiction television has a greater potential for subversive storytelling than science fiction film and that this has to do with both storytelling conventions and the production and technology of the two media.

The chapter presents a continuation of the discussion from the previous chapter about subversive storytelling and how issues such as seriality, deferred narratives and character emphasis in television dramaturgy can present more opportunities for television in terms of narrative and story. The chapter then ends with an analytical example of Joss Whedon’s television series Firefly and the feature film sequel Serenity. They present an opportunity to consider the adaptation of a television series into film, and to investigate how the different formats affect the story being told, in terms of the storytelling conventions of the medium, the genre, and issues of heteronormativity.

91 Jonathan Frakes (qtd. in Pearson and Messenger-Davies 103).
Science Fiction Television

Though there are examples of films that overtly deal with issues of sexuality, such as the films of Cronenberg, the development towards more mature narratives is, I would argue, primarily taking place in science fiction television. I argue that, partly due to the storytelling conventions of television and partly due to issues of production, sexuality, both queer and heteronormative are more dominantly depicted in science fiction television than in science fiction film. It has been suggest that “[science fiction] TV has been more adventurous [in comparison to film] with the sexual orientation of its characters over the last few years” (Grant 53). Prominent examples of this that I can point to are Buffy The Vampire Slayer (1997-2003), Firefly, Dark Angel (2000-2002), Doctor Who, Torchwood, Orphan Black (2013–), Caprica (2009-2010), Battlestar Galactica (2004-2009), and Stargate Universe (2009-2011). In comparison, of the big Hollywood films from the same time period very few deal with non-heterosexual characters. Secondary characters from The Stepford Wives (2004) and Independence Day, lesbian subtext in Alien: Resurrection, the queer allegory of V for Vendetta (2005), and a gay character in Cloud Atlas (2012), to mention a couple. There is still as far as I know no Hollywood science fiction film that has had a queer hero, which, as displayed in Chapter 1, a television series has had.

The reasons behind either the Hollywood film’s conservative and slow development or television drama’s more progressive and fast-paced development towards narratives with queer potential are plentiful. In addition to the heteronormativity of the Hollywood style as described in the previous chapter there are issues of production, distribution and exhibition that differ between the media that I consider pivotal to this condition. However, certain aspects are of more importance to science fiction narratives in particular.

Although science fiction film and television can rely on certain shared generic traits and identity there are things that can set them apart. Booker states that “science fiction film was an important predecessor to science fiction television, and the two forms carry a close generic kinship” (3). But, one of the main differences is their relationship to the visual and especially special effects. The small screen of television has throughout history been unable to compete with cinema as regards special effects, as the striking effect of the spectacle is limited by the screen size (Booker 89). The issues of cost and the technological limitations of the television screen become especially important for science fiction since spectacle and special effects is a big budget item as well as an important genre convention.
Science fiction television was, to a certain point, restrained in the use of special effects by its low budgets and limited technology. The limited budgets and possibilities for special effects made certain narratives difficult to handle, for example depicting space travel (Booker 19). A counter-example was *Battlestar Galactica* (1978-1979) which contained the best special effects on television to that point. Partly due to the success of *Star Wars* the series focused on elaborate special effects supervised by John Dykstra who had made the special effects of *Star Wars* (Booker 88). The impressive special effects of *Battlestar Galactica* initially afforded the series a large audience, but ultimately it was not enough. The special effects were not as impressive as they were on the large screens of the movie theatres (Booker 89). This example shows the problem facing science fiction television at the time and suggests a difference between science fiction television and film.

Television scholars Roberta E. Pearson and Màire Messenger-Davies display when discussing *Star Trek: TNG* and the film *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996) how issues such as budget and size of the screen result in production differences as regards spectacle or narrative. They also argue that due to the short timeslot and commercial breaks in television episodes there is actually “[n]ot textual time [...] available for extended space battles, even were the production time and money available to shoot them” (108). They in fact argue that the “longer production schedules and larger budgets also encourage the inclusion of greater spectacle [in cinema] than in television” (107). This is bound to affect the storytelling and genre as it resurfaces the arguments of Chapter 1 in which I discussed how the techno-centrism of science fiction and its focus on spectacle and special effects produces narratives that downplay issues of character. Science fiction television has, like the low-budget film, also been restrained from the use of special effects and had to locate its “sense of wonder” elsewhere (Sobchack, *Screening Space* 107-10). Although not necessarily the case, this could open up space for narrative and character development.92

**Behind the Scenes: Production, Distribution, and Exhibition**

Leaving specifically science fiction for a while and turning to a more general discussion about television might prove to illuminate some further issues of television storytelling and its creation in relation to film. Film and television depend on moving images and audiovisual storytelling; similarities that exemplify the connections between the media and simultaneously distinguish

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92 Needless to say, far from every science fiction television series could be awarded praise for its narrative or characters.
them from other media or art forms such as literature, theatre and radio. Thompson suggested in her 2003 book *Storytelling in Film and Television* that

[p]erhaps someday film and television will be largely indistinguishable, converging into a single ‘moving-image’ medium. [...] they certainly share the ability to tell stories with moving images, using photography, editing, staging, and so on. These common technical means offer some of the same possibilities and limitations to both media. (1)

Retrospectively, Thompson’s prediction over ten years ago has in many ways come true since television and film in several respects have moved closer to each other both in terms of viewing practices but also in the critical examination of the two media.

Thompson argued for a methodological shift in television studies towards a textual/structural analysis of television rather than the at the time dominant analysis of its *flow*. The concept suggests the fragmented bits of texts that continuously change and keep coming from the television in the form of series, commercials etc. (see Ellis, “Defining” 14-6). Television scholar John Ellis writes: “[Raymond] William’s notion of flow remains a key concept that has been built on by others. It emphasises the newness and the fragmented nature of television experience, and its serial nature: one thing follows another in a seemingly endless stream” (“Defining” 16; bold in original removed). Thompson called for another approach to television more in terms of the analytical tools of cinema studies (*Storytelling in Film and Television*, chapter 1). She argued that television, even though characterised by its flow, needed a dramaturgy that in turn can be analysed using methods from film studies. By displaying the similarities between classical Hollywood storytelling and television storytelling Thompson showed how these media could be critically examined in similar ways. In the context Thompson had to stress the similarities to suggest the common ground for cinema studies and television studies and propose a way for scholars to engage with television in a new way that would lead to critical examination of television storytelling (*Storytelling in Film and Television*).

The viewing practices of film and television have traditionally been different: films were watched on large screens in theatres and television on small screens at home. 93 This is taken into account by Ellis who points toward three characteristics of television that distinguish it from cinema: The degree of concentration (glance instead of gaze), the viewing practices (at home, dim

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93 For a detailed study of the complex and multi-layered contexts of television series, and “telefantasy”, in particular, see Johnson.
light at best/in cinemas, darkness) and the size and quality of the image (“Defining” 16-7). While the film industry is usually divided into production, distribution and exhibition, “there is no television counterpart to the exhibition sector of the film industry – no place [...] separate of our homes that is dedicated to ‘presenting’ television” (Allen and Hill 267-8). Watching television is generally an activity in the home, which creates a certain kind of relationship between the text and its audience. It allows for a certain kind of intimacy to be able to watch something at home, alone or with selected people in contrast to the public space characterising theatres.

While films, through this setting, can rely on their audience to sit through the story without interruptions, television on the other hand is required to “hook” the viewer (see e.g. Smethurst 39-41). At the very least, television programmes need to keep the audience from changing the channel or simply doing something else during commercials, but also bring the audience back for the next episodes and even seasons. This inevitably creates a storytelling structure that has more in common with the film serials than with feature film - a sort of cliffhanger-dramaturgy (cf. Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television* 43-4). Television programming is also lengthwise controlled by timeslots and dramaturgically fitted in-between commercial, episodic, and seasonal breaks.94

This is the tradition within which television storytelling has developed, and while it for example assumes commercial television channels, the basic structure remains similar even though viewing circumstances change. In the case of commercial-free television, Thompson argues that the structure is still similar but has more leeway (*Storytelling in Film and Television* 48). For example, she displays how the act structure of the commercial free HBO series *Sex and the City*, and *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) “is somewhat more flexible [...] but that it is not abandoned or radically altered” (51). A similar argument might be made in relation to the ways in which television is watched in the 2010s, which is not necessarily on pre-set scheduled television. Though television consumption is not limited, as it was, to a schedule but can be watched on DVD/Blu-Ray collections or VoD at any given time, at any speed and in any order affects the way we watch television, but not necessarily the structure of storytelling. In the 2000s-10s we watch films on our television sets, and television on cinema screens (for example *Doctor Who* 50th Anniversary episode “The Day of the Doctor”) or other available screens which also signals a convergence of the two media.

94 The issue of timeslots might look different on premium cable channels as J. G. Butler illustrates (31).
But even though issues of production, distribution and exhibition change, television and film still have some different preconditions such as the scope of audience and production costs. While more advanced audiovisual technology is made available in the home, cinema tries more intensely to sell the experience of going to the theatre by for example 3D and IMAX theatres, this in turn raises the cost of making films and the risk of possible losses if not enough people see the film.

**Market and Costs**

I argue that the fact that the cost of making film is higher than television, and similarly the possible profit is substantially higher is a contributing factor in the more conservative way cinema is upholding certain norms. Television is generally cheaper to produce than film, even if taking into account recent big budget television shows such as *Game of Thrones* that cost approximately $6 million per episode and a total of $60 million for season one, or *Rome* (2005-2007) approximately $9-10 million per episode and a total of $110 million for season one (Alexander). The budget for the most expensive Hollywood film up till 2015; *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* (2011) had a budget of $378.5 million (Gibson). So even when comparing the most expensive productions there is a significant difference in cost, especially if counting cost per hour produced. One hour of *Rome* season 1, which is 10h total (12 episodes approx. 50 min) would then cost $11 million. *Pirates of the Caribbean* by the same calculation (136 min total) would cost approx. $167 million per hour. That is more than ten times the amount of money spent on the up-till-today most expensive television series. If a Hollywood film would cost only $11 million per hour then a 3 hour film would only cost $33 million, which by today's standards is quite a low budget for a film. For example, in 2005 *Serenity* had a budget of $40 million and the same year *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* had a comparable $113 million budget.

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95 These numbers are not directly derived from series creators but from secondary sources on my part (Alexander; IMDb; Gibson). However, in general they work to suggest a difference in costs between television and film production regardless of the accuracy of the numbers themselves.

96 Though this article suggests that *On Stranger Tides* is the most expensive film, IMDb only states that it had a budget of $250 million. Depending on how the calculation for the estimated budget for the film is made and what parts are actually included in the final cost of a film the numbers can differ. For example, if the budget include marketing costs or not.

97 All estimated film budgets are taken from IMDb. Other examples from 2005 include: *War of the Worlds* ($132 mil.), *The Island* ($126 mil.) and *V for Vendetta* ($54 mil.). The trend continues and almost ten years later in 2014: *Interstellar* ($165 mil.), *Guardians of the Galaxy* ($170 mil.), *Edge of Tomorrow* ($178 mil.), *Transformers: Age of Extinction* ($210 mil.), *Divergent* ($85 mil.) and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* ($170 mil.). As these examples illustrate, a film made in the 2010s with a budget of $33 million would be a quite low budget film, especially if it is a speculative or historical genre film.
Hollywood cinema has different requirements for mainstream audience appeal, than does much television. Since the Hollywood film is aimed at a large mainstream market its marketability and its content is highly dependent on selling, since at least the 1980s when high concept films were starting to become common (Wyatt). Television however has, depending on where and when it is supposed to air, the opportunity to niche its content, direct its viewers through timeslots, and even base its scheduling on specific target groups. Jane Arthurs summarises the development of television as follows:

The first era was based on a very small number of networks addressing a relatively undifferentiated, mass audience within national boundaries. The second was an era of expanded ‘choice’, with multichannel systems [...]. Digital technology in the 1990s brought a new era of ‘abundance’ in which the number of channels has multiplied and extended their global reach. (3)

While the quotation illustrates the changes over time in relation to audience’s choice and possible interaction with television it also implies what types of stories could be made at a certain time. While the first era had an implied audience that was relatively homogenous, the programmes had to appeal to that demographic while programmes made post-1990s could specify their target audience more precisely. For example Booker suggests that the development of cable channels such as the Sci-Fi Channel made it possible to produce series which did not have to appeal to a mainstream audience but had a large fan base. This has, according to Booker,

opened vast new territories for programs, [...] that may not attract a huge mainstream viewership but do quite well with well-defined niche audiences, allowing them to explore more interesting and quirky possibilities without the necessity of widespread mass appeal. (Booker 2; my emphasis)

The requirement for a mainstream audience - partly due to the high cost of producing Hollywood films – is, I argue, an additional reason for the more normative narratives and the slower rate at which film seems to adapt to certain issues compared to television. The financial stakes for a Hollywood film are too high, and only in specific cases can directors be allowed to risk the profits of the blockbuster.98 Television’s cheaper productions, availability of more niched channels for exhibition and its more heterogeneous audience might prove to create a contextual setting for television that allows for an

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98 I am considering here the possibilities that certain directors have to develop their artistic freedom somewhat outside the safe and definitely profitable films. But this is connected to certain directors with previous success and reputation. (e.g. Ang Lee: Brokeback Mountain, 2005).
exploration of more narrative possibilities. However, the use of these possibilities is connected to a creator. As indicated in the Videodrome example of the previous chapter I do consider the creator(s) to be an important factor in the possibility for subversive storytelling. The question however is who to assign this role of creator to, and to what extent s/he can retain creative control over the production.

**Television Auteurship**

In cinema studies it has traditionally been the director that has been considered the auteur. The process of making television is, in contrast to film, as screenwriter Pamela Douglas noted a constant collaboration (11). Prys also writes that “television is primarily a collaborative media that frequently involves a large list of individuals in its construction” (20; bold in original removed). Television production can go on for years, have episodes at different stages of production simultaneously and thus be in need of extensive oversight (Mittell, *Complex TV* 88). This could suggest that television through this collaboration steps away from the auteur and claims to creative power. While as for film, the director often was assigned to be the auteur, what of television? Prys writes that in the television auteur debate historically it has usually been the writer rather than the director that critical attention has focused upon. [...] This tendency [...] may date back to the days when television still had strong ties with the theatre in the 1950s and 1960s, a period when theatre productions were adapted for the small screen or when theatre writers were employed to produce original scripts for television. (23)

Prys also observes how the small screen made television a medium that focused on dialogue rather than spectacle and writer, over director (23). The visual look of television has been affected by the technological advancements. Robin Nelson argues that “[i]n the very early days of television, the image was so small, so poor and, of course in black and white only, that the medium was more like radio with illustrative accompaniment and consequently words were privileged over visual images” (75-6). With the advent of digital technology and bigger screens came opportunities for more emphasis on the visual, television can now “approximate cinemas in its use of the visual image” (Nelson 75). However, television developed in this context as a more verbal than visual medium of storytelling and as such the emphasis on the writer is no surprise.

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99 However, filmmaking is of course not an individual process either, but television is considered to base its creative processes such as writing in so called “writers’ rooms”, where a large number of people work (see e.g. Mittell, *Complex TV* 90).

100 For a discussion about television production see e.g. Ellis, “Television Production”.

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While it is not as simple as to assign the writer the auteurship of a television series, examples such as David Lynch (Twin Peaks, 1990-1991) and Aaron Spelling (Starsky and Hutch, 1975-1979 and Charlie’s Angels, 1975-1981) show a director and producers that have also been considered television auteurs (Prys 24). Television scholar Jeremy G. Butler notes that “television auteurism has [...] focused [...] on the ‘vision’ of producers and so-called showrunners (producers who are responsible for the ongoing production of a program)” (368; bold in original removed). Television scholar Jason Mittell notes that “the primary job that has emerged as the typical managerial role for executive producers within the organizational framework of an ongoing series is the head writer (Complex TV 89). He continues, “the creator steps into the role of executive producer to function as head writer via the unofficial title of ‘showrunner’. [...] Showrunners perform similar roles of authorship by responsibility as a film’s director does” (Complex TV 90). J.G Butler also notes that many successful showrunners began their career as writers (214). He also points out that to assign someone creative control in the structure of production is not an easy task, and argues that it might not be necessary. However, I do not agree with him as he argues that “the auteur theory is not just wrong, it is also unnecessary when it comes to understanding television” (370). While the problem of the creative, male genius that the auteur signals could be highlighted through this theory, I still find it helpful, in part, to understand television. That however, is not to ignore that other collaborations within or outside the production have affected the outcome of a series. That is why I also consider the contextual development as part of structuring storytelling.

As the creative power over television series has been considered to come from writers rather than directors, combined with the technology of the small screen, the private exhibition and the viewing practices of the audience, the budgets and the market into which all combined have made television more focused on narrative than visual spectacle. All of these circumstances have also affected the type of storytelling that is employed by television.

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101 Mittell differentiates between authorship by origination and authorship by responsibility. The first indicates one creator such as a writer that has the ability to create every part of the text. The second instead suggests creators such as directors, who are not the sole source of the text but instead is responsible “for collective creativity” (Complex TV 87-8).
Television Storytelling

The dramatic structure of the single episode of a television series or serial depends on what type of television genre it is. For the purposes of this discussion I will focus on the one-hour drama, because science fiction television usually uses this dramatic formula (see e.g. Finer and Pearlman 35; Goldberg and Rabkin). Showrunners and scriptwriters Lee Goldberg and William Rabkin state “[e]very TV drama series is the same” (13), suggesting that they all, regardless of genre, use the same basic structure: four acts with a separate end and beginning called a teaser and a tag (see e.g. Finer and Pearlman 36; Goldberg and Rabkin 20). While this dramatic structure and especially the relationship between seriality and episode is subject to change depending on when and where the series is made, a single episode of television drama for the most part remains quite similar in its structure. For example, an entire series made in 2015 has a somewhat different structure than a series from the 1960s but comparing single episodes they often conform to a basic beginning, middle, and end structure. However, newer series often use more plotlines that arc over entire seasons which influence the single episode as well (cf. Mittell, Complex TV). According to television writers and producers Abby Finer and Deborah Pearlman “most shows utilize at least three plotlines” the A, B and C story (37). The A story is the main story of the episode, the B story is related to character relationships and the C story is commonly used for comic relief or a story arc that balances the episode’s dramatic intensity.

Overall, the single episode of television drama is quite similar to the Hollywood film in its construction. Thompson suggested that television storytelling had adapted the easily comprehensible storytelling techniques of classical Hollywood cinema precisely because of how suited they are to tell entertaining and straightforward stories (Storytelling in Film and Television 19). Television makes use of the primary features of popular narratives and its high level of comprehensibility and continuity, which I discussed previously as storytelling intelligibility.

But instead of the three act structure proclaimed by seminal voices of the Hollywood style (see e.g. Fields; Vogler) television drama uses a four act structure. Finer and Pearlman as well as Goldberg and Rabkin describe a character centred, goal driven narrative very much like the Hollywood style. If compared to Thompson’s division of Hollywood cinema into four acts instead of the traditional three, few differences appear. Most differences can

102 For example the sit-com is built upon a somewhat different dramaturgy than the one-hour drama. Another construction can be found in the soap-opera.
be put down to different vocabulary, Finer and Pearlman describe the acts through their turning points rather than their content, which is the focus for Thompson. For example Act IV is described through the resolving of the crisis while the Climax described by Thompson refers to the action leading up to the resolution. However, they are built upon the same principle, a goal oriented narrative divided into four parts with three turning points all related to the characters’ goal(s). The fitting into distinct time-slots actually highlights the act structure.

**Seriality, Deferred Narratives, and Complex TV**

While the individual episode of a television drama as described above seems very similar in its structure to film there are aspects of its serial format that mark crucial differences in storytelling terms. Douglas identifies three qualities that distinguish primetime television series from other types of scriptwriting: constant collaboration with others (as discussed above), the episodic character of television and the “long narrative” (8). Douglas suggests that the *long narrative* is related to the form of television known as serials:

A serial is any drama whose stories continue across many episodes in which the main cast develops over time. It’s called the ‘long narrative,’ the epitome of what episodic television can offer: not one tale that ties up in an hour or two but lives that play out over hundreds of hours. (11)

The serial is characterised by an ongoing narrative in which each episode is a continuation from the other, in contrast to the series which is episodic with self-contained episodes with little cross-over narratives (cf. J.G Butler 33-47). “The serial expects us to make specific and substantial narrative connections between one episode and the next. [...] In the serial, the connection is fundamental to its narrative pleasures” (J.G Butler 41). Thus the seriality of the television drama, the narrative development and its continuation is part of its characteristics. J.G Butler also notes how “in serials, the resolution of one storyline opens up new questions, new enigmas” (47). 103

A similar focus on the role of narrative in television is presented by Hills who argues that the narrative structure of cult television is defined by an “endlessly deferred narrative”. He suggests that the primary narrative questions are not resolved in cult television, for example we do not find out who the Doctor is in *Doctor Who* (“Defining Cult TV” 512-3). I understand the term deferred narrative in similar ways as the long narrative but as an even more productive term as it suggests that the narrative is not only long but it stresses the fact

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103 He focuses his points on the serial using soap operas as the primary example, which in certain ways can be misrepresentative or - at the very least – over-exaggerate certain aspects that are genre specific to the soap opera rather than serials generally.
that its resolution is constantly postponed. In that same article Hills shows how a combination of fans, intertexts, and texts best defines cult television (“Defining Cult TV”). Although I agree with Hills that cult television can only be defined through their relationship my focus here is the text and how Hills describes its storytelling properties. According to Hills if there are certain textual attributes shared by cult television, they would be what he labels “hyperdiegesis”; “it constructs immensely detailed, often fantastic, narrative worlds which we as viewers can never fully encounter” (“Defining Cult TV” 511).

This resurfaces the issue of closure and narrative resolution as discussed at the end of the previous chapter, as a characteristic of the serial drama storytelling. Not only has the television series, though its extended time for narrative, the textual time to investigate characters, but through its serial format that requires deferred narratives, the television serial is built upon denying closure. As Hills’s cult television example above and Gwenllian-Jones from the previous chapters show, a cult television narrative is detailed and not fully accessible or, to use another vocabulary, it does not provide closure and opens up for multiple readings and understandings.

Serialised storytelling of television drama was popularised in the 1980s with the move from single episodes that could be watched in any order with few story arcs stretching across episodes (see e.g. Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television* 59). In the decades that followed, a television series typically intertwines the long narrative stretching over the entire series or season with A, B, and C stories. “This conceptual juggling of levels of narrative would seem to be one of the distinctive qualities of storytelling in series television,” argues Thompson (*Storytelling in Film and Television* 63). An entire season of a series must have “twenty-two stories that are fresh, new, and different – and at the same time are all exactly the same” (Goldberg and Rabkin 26). One of the challenges for serial television storytelling is balancing the separate episodes with the returning format or franchise, the framework for the entire series – the “continuing adventures of [...] a group of characters, setting out each week to achieve a predetermined goal” such as fighting evil, exploring space or saving lives (Goldberg and Rabkin 14).

While both Hollywood and television protagonists are goal oriented, the construction and development of the plot differs between the media. Douglas states that in contrast to feature writing where the story arc often includes an ending for the protagonist, a change of state or the achievement of a goal, the

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104 Notably, the standardised number of episodes differs depending on country of production, network etc.
story arc of a protagonist in a TV series cannot end in the same way due to the episodic character of television series. Then how, Douglas asks, “do you progress a narrative without an arc?” (8). The solution, she continues, is to develop another kind of arc; an arc that does not primarily work horizontally but rather vertically. That is, the protagonist’s story arc should be developed vertically with depth and internal struggle rather than horizontally towards a goal (Douglas 8). This, as I see it, does not suggest that films cannot develop their characters vertically but that the dramaturgy in which the character is placed is dependent on the closure of the film in which the horizontal and vertical goal(s) of the character are intertwined and also reduced. In television however, goals can take a longer time to achieve (entire seasons) and the B stories can instead develop the characters vertically while A stories present shorter closed narratives. In film however, all this must happen within a few hours. The deferred narrative however, prolongs or denies this closure. Edwina Bartlem argues in relation to Buffy the Vampire Slayer that its status as television serial allows a “focus on character development and flux [which] is an effective strategy for dealing with storylines to do with sexuality […] because it allows for these narratives to unfold in complex, fragmented and sometime contradictory ways” (n. pag.).

However, television storytelling has continued to develop. Mittell argues that “a new mode of television storytelling that I term complex TV” has developed since the 1990s (Complex TV 3). This narrative mode of television is characterised by narrative complexity, unconventionality, and self-consciousness. Mittell argues that

narrative complexity redefines episodic forms under the influence of serial narration […]. Rejecting the need for plot closure within every episode that typifies conventional episodic form, narrative complexity foregrounds ongoing stories across a range of genres. Complex television employs a range of serial techniques, with the underlying assumption that a series is a cumulative narrative that builds over time, (Complex TV 18)

Mittell convincingly displays a narrative mode that combines the episodic with the seriality of television in an active fashion, in fact he argues that these series “work against the convention of episodic and serial traditions” (Complex TV 18) and that “many programs actively work against serial norms but also embrace narrative strategies to rebel against episodic conventionality” in for example sitcoms such as Seinfeld (1989-1998) (20). It is also in this respect that it is self-conscious, as it draws attention to the properties of storytelling
Mittell suggests that the prototypes for these series emerged in the 1990s with series such as *The X-Files, Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* (1999-2004) (Complex TV 19). In fact, he considers this technique as a type of “narrative special effect”, as a way of using storytelling to amaze the audience, for example when the backstory of new main character Dawn in season five of *Buffy* is revealed (Complex TV 43).

The notion of complex TV is by its definition subversive, in terms of storytelling convention. As such it presents a way of understanding certain contemporary television storytelling as constructed in contrast to, and with awareness of, conventions and traditions. I consider the seriality, the deferred narratives and thus the relationship to closure to be the primary difference between the storytelling formats and that it might be through this type of storytelling that the opportunities for subversive character portrayals or telling subversive stories arise.

### Heteronormativity and Television

The final question here is then what consequences these television storytelling techniques have for the heteronormative dramaturgy of the Hollywood film. Firstly, what is the relationship between the A and B story in television since it, as displayed in Chapter 3, is intertwined in Hollywood storytelling. Thompson in fact suggests that “[a]s is characteristic of a classical film, the two narrative lines are causally connected” (*Storytelling in Film and Television* 32). However, Thompson characterises the A, B, C stories in terms of their importance and not theme - so the A story for her is the main story and all others are subsidiary (31).

If instead of considering the A story as the story of the film and the B story as the romantic plotline and, rather, examine how they are related to each other in television it is possible to examine in what way the double plotline of Hollywood storytelling has followed into television storytelling. While the Hollywood film focuses on few characters and intertwined narratives, television series instead often focus on a larger cast, and more relationships. These stories are not necessarily causally connected. Finer and Pearlman for example simply write that the A, B, C stories all have to be broken into the four act structure, without any mention of connections between the stories, the

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105 This is also connected to the pleasures of the viewer who “not only focuses on the diegetic world […] but also revel in the creative mechanics involved in the producers’ abilities to pull off such complex plot structures” (Mittell, Complex TV 42).

106 For discussions about the intersection between television studies and queer theory, see Davis and Needham, *Queer TV*. 

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important aspect for them is the progression of all these stories (37). Screenwriter William Smethurst instead suggests that the different stories are used for pacing the episode, that “[a] story that needs a lot of explaining, a lot of dialogue, [...] needs to be contrasted with a story that is basically simple and has action” (43). Since television more often has multi- rather than single-protagonists narratives (cf. J.G Butler 34-5; 41-2) there is a possibility to divide the different stories between different characters, in contrast to the classical Hollywood film which incorporated these into fewer characters. The A story can of course be connected to the B story, but the B story is not necessarily a romantic story but a story about relationships, and this in turn can be separated into two parallel stories. This however, will have to be examined in particular narratives.

Thus a romantic plotline is not necessarily causally connected to the structure of the story, but can instead either be part of a deferred narrative or the seriality. I argue that the potential for television storytelling in contrast to film can be found in multiple representations (through the use of more characters), more developed characters (vertically), longer story arcs (long narrative/deferred narrative), and more story arcs (Episodic, A, B, C). This does not suggest that all television series are using these storytelling tools to create more dynamic, less heteronormative characters but rather that these possibilities are more prominent in television than in film. As Mittell suggests, complex TV is a large part of contemporary television storytelling, and it is characterised by a self-conscious storytelling.

**Adapting to Normality**

Adaptations from one medium to another serve as good examples of how the storytelling of the respective medium work and can bring to light general characteristics of the media, or as director of *Star Trek VIII: First Contact* Jonathan Frakes said: “You’re not going to see that on TV” (qtd. in Pearson and Messenger-Davies 103). As indicated by Frakes the film had to promise something more in terms of what cinema could do that television could not, spectacle being one of them, which inevitably has some effect on narrative and characters. The film had to balance its history as a television franchise and its previous fans and at the same time attract a new audience in order to be successful as a feature film. Pearson and Messenger-Davies explore episodes of *Star Trek: TNG* and the film *First Contact* in order to “illuminate the historically specific characteristics of both media formats, the big-screen sci-fi blockbuster and the small-screen continuing-series television drama” (105). The film must not only commit to a one-shot science fiction blockbuster, but also relate to the seriality of the television series. They argue that the specific
challenge for the producers is that they “must not only provide spectacle, they must match this spectacle by ‘turning up the volume’ on the characters, while at the same time maintaining a consistency with the characters’ previously established traits and backstory” (104). They have to “[b]alance delicately between spectacle and narrative in a manner required neither of producers of one-off sci-fi films or producers of other cult television programmes” (104-5).

They consider specifically the depiction of Captain Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) in the film and corresponding episodes of the series arguing that he, because of the transition into film, becomes an action hero instead of the cerebral hero he was in the series.

Pearson and Messenger-Davies convincingly show how the serial structure, which requires a return to the consequences of the previous week’s episode, affects the intensity of the story as well as the consistency and depth of the character. For example, “[t]he one-off feature film has to rapidly establish a character’s defining traits. Television can accumulate defining traits in a more leisurely way across episodes” (114). If a character is not reoccurring, no one has to deal with the consequences of a particular action. In addition, the intensity of the action for a film or a television episode is often different. If a character is to be maintained over several episodes “the average episode of a television series does not deal with the most important event in a character’s life. […] By contrast, films often center precisely on the most important events” (114). For Picard then to be transformed into an action hero has, for Pearson and Messenger-Davies, to do with both a more suitable heroic role for feature films and the lack of seriality of the films; you had to wait two years to watch the next one and thereby lost the same need for closure and consequence that a weekly drama has (cf. 115).

In what follows I will consider the adaptation of Firefly into feature film Serenity and consider how the changed format from television to cinema affects the way the story is being told.107 Firefly and Serenity, like the Star Trek example above, are suitable materials to analyse when it comes to differences between film and television for several reasons. They are part of the same ‘verse, made by the same creator and include the same actors and parts of the production team and offer a valuable opportunity to consider the two forms. Not to mention, an investigation into their queer potential.

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107 For further insights into science fiction and adaptations see Telotte and Duchovnay, Science Fiction Film, Television, and Adaptation
Firefly

The television series Firefly consists of 14 episodes and was – as mentioned - later continued by a film sequel called Serenity.¹⁰⁸ The film is written and directed by series creator Joss Whedon who directed three episodes and co-wrote Firefly.¹⁰⁹ Firefly was produced by Whedon’s production company Mutant Enemy Productions and 20th Century Fox Television to be aired on Fox and the film was produced by Universal Pictures and Barry Mendel Productions to be screened at cinemas and later on DVD. This allows for an opportunity to compare these narratives in their respective medium. By comparing the television series and the film I aim to investigate what impact media-specific storytelling norms have on (hetero)normativity. I argue that Firefly uses certain storytelling techniques that disrupt normative storytelling and genre but that Serenity instead conforms to many of these norms and that the storytelling mode of the film plays a central part in this.

In what follows I will carry out a comparative dramaturgical analysis of Firefly and Serenity. In order to do this I will begin with a description and analysis of the series which focuses on it as a television drama. While I show that it conforms to a quite standardised television drama format, I argue that it presents an active use of certain storytelling conventions that disrupt issues of

¹⁰⁸ In addition to the series and the film there are a growing number of graphic novels available.

¹⁰⁹ All episodes are 44 minutes long except the original pilot episode “Serenity”, giving it a total run time of approximately 10.5 hours and the film is 1 hr 54 minutes long.
normativity. I will also show how the film differs from the series in its storytelling and what consequences are brought about due to the change of media. I argue that most of the potential and the playing with storytelling prominent in the series is lost in the film. When I, in this manner, suggest that Firefly uses a type of subversive storytelling I do not suggest that the entirety of the series in all its parts (and over 10 hours) live up to that claim. The examples however will focus on specific examples where this potential is used in order to exemplify how it is done in the series. I argue that the series uses both storytelling and generic conventions in order to, at the very least, disrupt predominant ideas of normativity. As such Firefly uses its queer potential.

Firefly is set 500 years into the future, and the plot revolves around a firefly-classed spaceship called Serenity. The setting is a mix between science fiction and several elements from the western genre and American Civil War aesthetics. The plot(s) revolves around the crew onboard Serenity (see image above). Positioned in-between the controlling forces of the government called the Alliance and the mythical and savage Reavers, the crew of Serenity live outside the law and travel across the skies to do more or less illegal work.

Due to the cancellation of the show it has several unfinished story arcs. The episodes of the series were aired out of order, and only 11 of them were aired on Fox before the series’ cancellation (cf. Wilcox and Cochran 11-6). The series was later aired with all episodes in the intended order on the Sci-fi Channel and subsequently released on DVD and Blu-Ray. This is the episode order I will use in my analysis because I want to investigate the way the story is told, and at the very least the order in which it was intended to be told. The deferred narrative is, by the cancellation of Firefly, forced upon it, but still present in the series. Primary narrative questions such as the motivations of some of the characters or the disclosure of major plotlines are left unintentionally unanswered. This forced ending creates a narrative situation that cannot be allocated to the creator, as it was intended to go on. The series is not written as a mini-series or any likewise short format but as a serial intended to continue beyond its 14 episodes, which is noticeable in its structure.

Apart from being cancelled and having a number of unresolved narratives Firefly as a television drama is not in any major way unique in its structure. Almost all episodes are told chronologically, except “Out of Gas” (1.8) which is a series of flashbacks and “Trash” (1.11) that begins with a glimpse at the end of the story but then is told chronologically. The dramatic structure of the television drama allows episodes to move between different characters and temporarily put them at the centre of the narrative. For example, “Out of Gas” features the ship Serenity itself as the main character, in “Jaynestown” (1.7) Jayne (Adam Baldwin) is the central character, “Heart of Gold” (1.13) focuses
on Inara (Morena Baccarin) and Mal, and “Safe” (1.5) on Simon (Sean Maher) and River. All of the episodes have clear causal chains except “Objects in Space” (1.14) in which the audience is temporarily inserted into River’s gaze and presented with a type of alternative reality: people speaking incoherently, non-diegetic sound presented as diegetic, and a twig on the cargo bay floor that turns out to be a loaded gun. While these different storytelling techniques are present in the series the overall structure is quite traditional.

All episodes except the original 98 minute pilot episode “Serenity” (1.1) are divided into a teaser and four acts (cf. Firefly: A Celebration). “Serenity” instead consists of a teaser and seven acts. The teasers before the credits introduce the story arcs of the episode (typically both A and B plots) in addition to themes and motifs of the A story and the serial narrative. In “Serenity” the main theme of the entire series is introduced through Mal (Nathan Fillion) and Zoë (Gina Torres) fighting (and losing) the Unification War in the battle of Serenity Valley. This becomes a recurring theme which motivates the characters. The teaser also introduces the A plot of the episode with the stolen cargo they have to get rid of. As a pilot episode it introduces the types and traits of the characters and the series’ theme and motif: The fight for freedom and the importance of the need to “keep flying”.

All episodes after this have a similar teaser before the credits which sets up the A and often the B story of the episode. While being episodic in the way the series focuses each episode on its A story, which is typically a job the crew is trying to do or get, these episodes are intertwined through the B stories as a serial. Firefly can be considered complex TV to use Mittell’s words, who in fact mentions the series as an example of narrative complexity (Complex TV 17). While there are several dangling causes and unfinished plots between episodes all episodes resolve their A plots at the end of the episode and relate to different extent to the major theme of the series. While episodes such as “Shindig” (1.4) and “Safe” have interdependent A stories – the job that the crew acquires at the end of “Shindig” is delivered at the beginning of “Safe” – the A stories are quite contained to single episodes dramatically speaking though still affecting the characters in later episodes. More prominently however, are the seriality of the B stories.

There are several ongoing relationships and issues of character background that are central to the seriality of the series. As the nine characters all have

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110 In order to make sense of the fact that there are three different things called Serenity I will in what follows write Serenity when referring to the spaceship which bears that name; “Serenity” for the pilot episode and; Serenity for the film.

111 The episode “The Train Job” was aired as the pilot after a discussion with the network. It also introduces the characters and the world but is a four act 44 minute episode.
individual backstories, relationships to each other and others there is a major potential for serial B stories. For the 14 episodes available however there are some that have been given more prominence: the backstory of River and the Academy; Shepherd Book (Ron Glass) and his past; the relationship between Inara and Mal; and Kaylee (Jewel Staite) and Simon. While all of these B stories are returned to throughout the series and slowly progress, the River-plotline and the Inara/Mal-plotline are also furthered by the A plot of single episodes.

After the set-up in the pilot episodes, three episodes have an A story that actively progresses the story of River: “Safe”, “Ariel” (1.9), and “Objects in Space” and dramatically ties the episodic A story to Firefly’s overall seriality. Likewise the episodes “Shindig”, “Our Mrs. Reynolds” (1.6), “Trash”, and “Heart of Gold” progress the potential romantic relationship between Inara and Mal. In contrast, the Kaylee/Simon and Book-stories are present in several episodes but as B or C stories or even only as brief hints. Thus I consider the central deferred narratives of the series as those with River, and Inara and Mal’s relationship.

While the River-plotline is quite typical for a science fiction show (the abduction and secret government experiments) the relationship between Mal and Inara is not however. As such it presents a central romantic relationship as part of a science fiction series, though not acted upon and still far from the domesticity of heterosexual partnership (cf. Gwenllian-Jones) it still has a central dramatic position unusual for science fiction. Combined with several other romantic and sexual relationships (Zoë and Wash, Kaylee and Simon, Inara and her Clients, Mal and Nandi, Jayne and prostitutes etc.) that are prominent to the series it presents a narrative in which sexuality is a part of human life and the future. There are issues of love, relationships, and sexuality that are central to the series and that go against the dominant Star’verses. For example the theme song “Ballad of Serenity” not only highlights issues of colonialism and the loss of space but also emphasises love. In contrast to much science fiction, the emotional aspects are highlighted in the series. I consider the A stories of the series as secondary to the B stories about the relationship between the characters which is common to television drama, but not primarily to science fiction.

112 Take my love / Take my land / Take me where I cannot stand / I don’t care / I’m still free / You can’t take the sky from me // Take me out /To the black / Tell’ em I ain’t coming back / Burn the land / And boil the sea / You can’t take the sky from me // Have no place / I can be / Since I found Serenity // But you can’t take the sky from me (Firefly: A Celebration 213).
Issues of sex and sexuality are constantly addressed in the series, and not only heterosexuality. Inara meets at least one female client (“War Stories” 1.10), Mal is in passing asked if he is “sly” and wants to meet a male prostitute in “Heart of Gold”, and there is a possible queer B story between Inara and Kaylee. There are a few moments of sexual or romantic tension between Kaylee and Inara, especially in the pilot which presents this from Kaylee’s point of view. For example, the glances in “Serenity” and the hairbrush scene in “The Train Job” (1.2) in which Inara brushes Kaylee’s hair and she asks whether she does this for her clients. When Inara meets a female client in “War Stories”, Kaylee watches them as they walk off and comments with a dreamlike look: “I knew she took female clients but… They look so glamorous together”. This queer B story is however left unresolved and becomes more and more peripheral as Kaylee develops her relationship with Simon.

Although Firefly has incorporated many archetypical characters of science fiction: the captain, the doctor, the engineer (cf. Battis) it uses these in an active way, as attributed to the Complex TV into which it could be fitted (cf. Mittell 17). The A story is the peril that allows the characters to develop and interact. The smuggling and the train jobs are mainly situations in which characters are made visible in contrast to characters as tools to move the plot along. This however is an attribute of television drama, and Goldberg and Rabkin suggest that “[n]o one watches their favorite show for the stories. [...] They watch to see what happens to the characters they love” (23). The function of the story is to position the characters in a context, putting them through challenges or peril (Goldberg and Rabkin 24). This relationship between story and character is acknowledged by series creator Whedon:

*You take people, you put them on a journey, you give them peril, you find out who they really are. If there’s any kind of fiction better than that, I don’t know what it is.* (qtd. in Espenson, back cover)

In the quotation Whedon gives the direction of Firefly; it is about people on a journey. It is about an investigation into those people, to find out who they really are. The best kind of fiction, if we believe Whedon in this, is that which deals with people – the character centred narrative. In other words, the B story is premiered and causally linked to the A story. For example it is through the A story that the B story can be resolved, not the other way around, uncharacteristic of science fiction.

Although I consider Firefly a multi-protagonist series the characters are allocated different amount of narrative space making certain characters more central while some are more peripheral depending on the episode. Mal however often takes centre-stage, both as the captain who is in charge, but also
as the character with whom the audience are invited to identify. While being a multi-protagonist narrative it still has a central hero. It is through Mal that the main theme of the series is made most apparent and his actions and causality is what drives the narrative forward, parallel to the other characters. While it can be argued that it is a single-protagonist series, with Malcom Reynolds as the hero and the other characters as supporting allies I consider it to be a multi-protagonist narrative like much television drama is. This is inspired by the way Thompson described Alien as a type of multi-protagonist narrative in which several protagonists strive toward the same goal, though not necessarily through the same means (Storytelling in the New Hollywood). This allows for a consideration of the separate goals of the characters in the light of the primary goal. This common goal is expressed by Mal when showing Zoë Serenity for the first time in a flashback in “Out of Gas”: “Small crew, them as feel the need to be free. Take the jobs as they come – and we’ll never be under the heel of nobody ever again. No matter how long the arm of the Alliance might get... we’ll just get us a little further”. All characters have their own motivations for trying to achieve the freedom goal: Zoë as a soldier follows Mal, Wash (Alan Tudyk) wants to start a family, Kaylee likes engines and wants to find love, Jayne wants to be rich, and Simon wants to save River. The motivation of Book, Inara and River remain more or less unknown and these narratives are continuously deferred throughout the series.\textsuperscript{113}

The main motifs of the series, freedom and the “keep flying” allegory are returned to constantly both thematically and dramaturgically. The representation of Serenity as a site of freedom, a vehicle for liberation, flight and its ability to stay off the radar makes it a sanctuary for all its inhabitants, all of whom flee from something or wish for freedom. Dramaturgically all episodes except “The Message” (1.12) end with Serenity flying off, leaving behind the A story of the episode and dramatically highlighting the freedom theme and the “keep flying” motif of the series. As long as Serenity is flying all is well for the protagonists. As the next episode begins a new threat to this freedom is introduced, either for the entire crew or for a single character. The episodes end with the continued journey of the characters and of Serenity and the everyday life for those living on a spaceship 500 years in the future.

“The Message” instead ends uncharacteristically with the deliverance of the dead body and its message.\textsuperscript{114} The crew stays for a funeral and a momentary break in diegetic continuity and style ends the episode with Mal looking straight into the camera at the spectators. In addition, some narrative closure

\textsuperscript{113} While the series leaves these narratives open, there are available sources that continue these narratives.

\textsuperscript{114} See Elizabeth L. Rambo’s “Metaphoric Unity and Ending” for an elaborate discussion about the episode.
and discrepancy is also introduced with a close up of Kaylee and Simon taking each other’s hands. This discontinuity in the style and form of the episode finds its explanation in the production process and presents a metanarrative funeral of the series. The scene, even though not the final episode of the series, becomes a final farewell. Whedon states that “It was the last episode we filmed and therefore the funeral scene was incredibly funereal. [...] I was told we were cancelled. [...] Tim [Minear] was directing ‘The Message’ and I came on the set and told the crew” (Firefly. A Celebration 318). Thus the final scene produced marks a stop in the continuity of the series, in this episode there is no going on, they are not able to “keep flying”. The ending of “The Message” displays this typical awareness of storytelling conventions that Mittell describes. It draws attention to itself as a story and its mode of production. However, while its “keep flying” motif serves both the narrative and as a metatextual reference to the continuation of the series after it was cancelled, I still consider its storytelling structure as quite traditional, with some innovative use of conventions which signals the self-consciousness that Mittell calls for in Complex TV.

While the series depicts relationships that conform to conventions (cf. Gwenllian-Jones), not all of them do. In terms of subversive storytelling the possibility lies not in the overall structure but rather in specific use of certain storytelling elements. One being the focus on relationships and sexuality in a science fiction series, the other the active playing with conventions. For the purpose of this chapter I will focus on two examples of this playing with conventions that I see characterise the storytelling of the series; the relationship between Zoë and Mal and the dismemberment of the hero archetype.

The depiction of the relationship between Zoë and Mal presents an example where Firefly plays with conventions. Author Tanya Huff notes “Zoe’s relationship with Mal also helps to set her apart from the standard television woman. They’re friends and comrades; two gorgeous, sensual, ostensibly heterosexual people with absolutely nothing sexual happening between them” (108). The series uses these conventions when introducing a primary relationship between a man and a woman who do not have a sexual or romantic relationship. Zoë instead is married to Wash, a relationship that presents itself as a successful heterosexual relationship, unusual to science fiction that I will return to at length in the Conclusion. By making a friendship between a black woman and a white man who are both depicted as attractive, sexually active and heterosexual into one of the primary relationships of the series is not only uncommon in science fiction, but in television and film altogether.
For example, the B story of the episode “War Stories” is a dispute between married couple Zoë and Wash. Jealous and uncertain of the relationship between Zoë and Mal, as well as his position as the man in the relationship, Wash takes Zoë’s place on a job. In fact he temporarily rearranges the dynamic of the series into a more traditional division of labour and gender roles – this however proves devastating as they are captured by the villain Niska (Michael Fairman) which is the A story of the episode. During the torture in the A story, the main focus is that of the B story: Wash’s jealousy towards the relationship between Mal and Zoë and whether there is, or has been, a possible sexual or romantic relationship between the two. This functions as a type of self-aware narrative that takes storytelling conventions and puts them right at the centre of the narrative.

When analysing Zoë as a warrior woman, Huff notes that “they turned all that subtext into text, acknowledged the television elephant in the room (the potential for Mal and Zoe to be attracted to each other) and dealt with it” (110). What she touches upon is precisely the storytelling conventions of a heteronormative dramaturgy in which Zoë and Mal should be attracted to each other just because they are eligible as man and woman. In fact the B story of the episode is centred on this possibility, it is what instigates Wash’s jealousy as Zoë and Mal’s history as war buddies resurfaces.

At the end of the episode when all is well again this is returned to. The following exchange takes place:

Mal: Your husband demanded that we sleep together. [...] He seems to think it would get all this burning sexual tension out in the open. You know, make it a fair fight for your womanly affections – [...] Sergeant, it’s a difficult mission – but you and I have to get it on.
Zoë: I understand. We have no choice. Take me, sir. Take me hard.
Jayne: Now somethin’ about that is just downright unsettlin’.

The scene and the body language of the actors unmistakably draws attention to the absurdity of the dialogue and the situation. What the scene displays in this humorous way is that the formula into which the narrative is temporarily transformed is precisely that, a formula – it turns and tweaks audience expectations, which according to associate producer Lisa Lassek is “what Joss loves to do: switch things on your expectations” (Firefly. A Celebration 278). As it is made clear in this episode, they do not have a history and, as Jayne blatantly points out, the idea of it would be unsettling in the context of the storyworld. Instead Zoë and Mal’s relationship is that of old war buddies and primarily dictated by their business relationship as Sergeant/Soldier or
Captain/First Mate. Zoë for example, always calls Mal “sir”, in addition they are trusting friends and allies, but nothing more.

Enhancing the absurdity of the situation above is the depiction of Mal in the series. He is not depicted as a ladies man like science fiction heroes such as Captain Kirk, Commander Riker or Han Solo. Robert B. Taylor even writes: “What kind of rugged sci-fi ship captain doesn’t get any play with the opposite sex?” (133). This becomes especially notable in a series that features many opportunities for sexual encounters. Mal is instead quite awkward when pursued sexually by women outside the crew (Saffron and Nandi) and his relationship to the women onboard is more like that of a boss to Zoë and an older brother or father to Kaylee and River. Consider for example the scene in “Out of Gas” where Jayne during dinner makes an inappropriate joke about Kaylee and Mal sends him away from the dining table. Although Kaylee is presented as a sexually active woman there is likewise no suggestion in the series that she and Mal would ever have such a relationship. They instead kiss on the forehead, hug and exchange professional and friendly conversations. Mal is in fact not primarily driven by desire or sexual conquest but by love, which compared to the crude Jayne illuminates the conventions of the white, heterosexual and male hero.

David Magill states that “Firefly and Serenity remake manhood as a set of ‘mis-behaviors’ against hegemonic masculinity, offering a more progressive, justice-based vision of masculinity for men and women to claim” (86). I consider that this progressive masculinity as presented by the characters becomes more apparent as it is constantly mirrored by the presence of hegemonic masculinity in the character of Jayne. He is depicted as a large, muscular white heterosexual man whose traits include greed, opportunism, and slight stupidity. He has no problems with paying prostitutes or having sex with women under false pretences (“Heart of Gold”; “Jaynestown”). It is abundantly clear that Jayne’s main goal is to be rich and it is within his character to turn on his crew if he gets paid enough. This trait also puts him in direct opposition to Mal, who puts a high value on loyalty to the crew. Jayne functions as a contrast to the other characters and his presence reveals a heteronormative, sexist perspective.

Although Jayne could be the hero of any action-heavy science fiction film or television series as a representative of a hegemonic masculinity, in Firefly he is instead used as comic relief. Through Jayne’s comments and gaze the other characters, and especially Mal’s, “mis-behaviours” (cf. Magill), against the hero archetype and a patriarchal society become illuminated. As a storytelling technique, Jayne is depicted as a stereotype, and as he symbolises the white, heterosexual male it draws attention to both the conventions of masculinity
and to the construction and normativity of the storytelling conventions of the hero.

The storytelling conventions of the hero are actually allocated an entire episode in which the absurdity of Jayne being a hero provides the A story. In “Jaynestown” the crew arrives at a small moon where Jayne is a celebrated hero. As established in the previous episodes, Jayne is far from a hero, but he could still become one. As the reluctant hero who has not yet received the call (cf. Vogler 99-105) he only needs the right type of motivation in order to be transformed from a scoundrel into a hero like for example Han Solo in Star Wars. As the episode begins the possibility that Jayne in fact is “the hero of Canton” still exists. This might be the character revelation that transforms him from a stereotype to a hero, but instead his hero status is due to a misunderstanding which only highlights his role as a stereotype.

Jayne is depicted as hyper-masculine to the extent that he is made parodic and one dimensional. Since the other male protagonists are situated in opposition to him as regards their display of masculinity he stands out in his extreme performance of masculinity (cf. Magill 77). This is a recurring theme surrounding him, and a standing joke for both the audience and the other characters. His obsessions with weapons, profit and women, whereas they all stand in equal importance to him, make him a stereotypical character. His position in the narrative makes visible the cultural and historical constructions of a heterosexist society. The most obvious example is an instance when Jayne wants to trade his largest gun for Mal’s “wife” Saffron (Christina Hendricks) and gets called out for acting sexist:

Mal: She has a name! [Referring to Saffron]
Jayne: So, does this [the weapon], I call it Vera (“Our Mrs. Reynolds”)

I will use a scene in the episode “War Stories” to further exemplify his role is a caricature of the heterosexual male and the bearer of the male gaze which not only presents a play with heteronormativity but also with storytelling conventions. In the episode Inara meets the female client aboard Serenity, she has to greet her in the Cargo Bay and the entire crew, despite Inara’s wishes, are staying close in order to observe. The entire scene is constructed around the gaze and revelation of the client as female and when Jayne realises that the client is a woman he reacts by staring at her and Inara, freezes and grunts “I’ll be in my bunk”. Throughout the episode this is suggested to mean something sexual and for Jayne, in this case, masturbation. He has the same reaction the next time he sees them, and through this reaction the male gaze is both commented on and made a parody of through Jayne. He is in fact
unable to see two women together without needing to go to his bunk. This reaction could be interpreted as a prolongation of a heteronormative or male gaze positioning the two women as objects for the pleasure of heterosexual males.

The protagonists of Firefly could on the one hand be understood as representatives of different values, and even archetypes; the preacher, the hooker, the renegade, the hero, the healer, the tech, the romantic, the soldier, and the psychic. However I argue that these are used in the series as a backdrop for characterisation and in constant negotiation with the cultural practices from which they appear. As the two examples above illustrate, the use of archetypes such as the hero as well as hegemonic masculinity and the narrative limitation of conventions is called into question.

**Serenity**

The film could be considered a single longer closing episode of the series (cf. Thompson, Storytelling in Film and Television 93) in one respect. Considered as such a singularity it presents an A story about River, the alliance and the Reavers and a B story about River and her relationship to the crew. Whedon scholar Stacey Abbott argues that

> [w]hile a television series can operate with different character-based narrative strands that may occasionally interact but generally run alongside each other, a film needs to integrate its narrative strands towards a single conclusion – in this case, unlocking and revealing the secrets trapped within River. (231)

It begins with a series of flashbacks to Simon rescuing River from the Alliance Academy in which she has been held. The main plot of Serenity is centred on the flight from the Alliance and the attempt to keep River safe from them. In addition, it is intertwined with a second plot that reveals the secrets of the Reavers and likewise the corruption of the Alliance. Like the series, both plotlines relate to the theme of freedom and the film also continues the “keep flying” metaphor but with a science fiction twist: “Nothing can stop the signal”.

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115 Cf. Abbott’s discussion about how Whedon “blurs the distinction between cinematic and televisual forms in Serenity” (233-4). This observation of Whedon’s mix of televisual and cinematic storytelling and style in the film highlights the connection between the film and the television series.
In addition to the change of format from television to film, the adaptation of *Firefly* into *Serenity* displays a shift in genre. Telotte argues in “Serenity, Genre and Cinematization” that the successful transition from television to film is mainly due to a focus on the genre elements of science fiction in *Serenity* rather than the western genre characteristics which were more prominent in the series. I agree that the narrative focus of the film is based on more science fiction elements and conventions and what then becomes significant is how the “generic lineage in sf” that Telotte describes (“Serenity” 130), is part of the normalisation of the narrative in *Serenity*. The question is thus both of genre and of format.

The science fiction elements of the film and many of the visually spectacular scenes show the film focusing more on technology and special effects. Compare for example the space-battle between the Alliance and the Reavers and the multiple sets for the film, and the much smaller scale of the action in the series. Abbott suggests that Whedon in making *Serenity* took advantage of the “more visual form of story-telling but also […] of the specificity of the cinematic form to create a big-screen spectacle” (231). This “generic lineage” brought forward in *Serenity* by financial aspects, media specificity, and genre expectations displays the generic identity of science fiction and its connection to techno-centrism. In addition, the River-plotline as suggested above is in its theme not unusual for science fiction. So the selection of this plotline as the main focus of the film combined with the emphasis on science fiction is no surprise. While the series could move in-between protagonists in separate episodes the film instead has one central plot revolving around River. The story of the film pivots around whether the crew can keep River safe and in doing so find out what secret the authorities want to keep by getting her back.
This reading of the film can also explain the motivation behind the death of pilot Wash. Dramatically speaking it would not have been necessary as a motivation for his wife Zoe to stay and fight, she would have done it anyway as the soldier she is. But when considering the intertwined causality of River and the other plotline the death of Wash opens a space for River to claim on Serenity. At the end of the film, River is piloting Serenity and has finally become a part of the crew. Serenity, 2005. © Universal Studios. All Rights Reserved.

The exposition of the film presents a point where the continuity of the story is broken between the series and the film. A new villain, the Operative (Chiwetel Ejiofor), is introduced and those not familiar with the series can watch it without any interference. The scene showing the rescue of River differs from how it is described in the series – in which Simon does not know what they did to River – in the film however he is a direct witness to some of the things done to her. This is clearly a way to introduce the storyline to spectators not familiar with the series and create a premise fitted for the film format. If the series had continued into more seasons this quick resolution and revelation of the storyline would most probably have been stretched across a longer time. The reduction of the number of storylines is consequently the first evident difference between the series and the film with the result of a break in story continuity. However, it is still a multi-protagonist film. The film focuses on the storyline making River central to the plot but it is still the joint motivations of the crew and especially Mal that drive the narrative forward.

Instead of a heterosexual romantic plotline, common in Hollywood film, the second plotline in the film is the story of River and her returning to society and becoming a person again. In this way River could be seen as the protagonist of the film but she lacks goals right until the end when she reestablishes her personhood. Prior to which she is incoherent and

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116 For those already familiar with the series the graphic novel called *Serenity: Those left Behind* describes how the Operative gets the assignment to retrieve River.
disoriented and lacks agency to formulate goals. The saneness of River and her status as a person is constantly called into question in both the series and in the film, and not until they find out the truth about the failed experiment on the planet Miranda does River become a person again. She in fact says to her brother Simon: “I am alright”. This creates closure for the deferred narrative of River from the series.

The series focuses on her integration back into society (the crew) and she slowly begins to form a relationship with Simon, but also with Kaylee. They engage in a type of playful game in their encounters, like a big sister Kaylee teaches River how to interact with the world. River, partly due to this affiliation to childhood is remarkably asexual. But while she displays a separation between body and mind, the background of the character, the physical abuse she has been through and the penetration of her mind, metaphorically brings to light issues of rape and abuse. I consider her character as divided into a pure mind - rather than body - which she even becomes temporarily in the episode “Objects in Space”. In that same episode the issue of rape is made a real threat. Serenity has been forcefully penetrated by a bounty hunter, who threatens to rape Kaylee if she does not follow his instructions. Jayne is conveniently unaware of the situation and cannot help, Zoë and Wash are likewise indisposed. Inara is locked in her shuttle, well aware of the dangers the bounty hunter poses. Left to defend the ship and River, is River herself who orchestrates her own rescue with the help of Kaylee and Mal. This is also the moment in which River finally finds a home on Serenity and can begin to join the crew-family. Symbolically I see the subtext of River’s sexual violation and alienation from society becoming text and a moment of character development when she rescues herself and can begin to rejoin the world. This is later fully realised in the film.

If considering the plotting of the film in terms of a double-plotline combining River’s personal journey and the revelation of the corrupt government the structure of the film would look like this. Act one presents both plotlines and when it appears that Simon and River are leaving the ship, the first turning point appears. River is triggered by the Alliance and whispers the word Miranda. The crew now have to take her back onboard the ship. As things develop the characters run and hide as they have no motivation to continue their investigation into River’s mind and the secrets therein. Then the mid turning point appears at the dead centre of the film; Haven and other allies are attacked and Book dies, spurring Mal to convince the crew to go to Miranda. In one respect, Book is put in the archetypical role of the “Mentor” in the film, in fact, “[i]t’s often the energy of the Mentor archetype that gets a
hero past fear and sends her to the brink of adventure” (Vogler 124).117 The death of Book is, as described above, the action that motivates the crew to find the planet Miranda. On Miranda they find out that the Alliance made the Reavers and it is implied that River can begin to heal. The third and final turning point takes place on the ground when the crew is going to expose the secret of the Alliance to the world. As Mal fights the Operative the others hold off the Reavers, when all seems lost River finally becomes an agent of her own will, takes Simon’s place as protector and sacrifices herself for the others.

The fact that the film only has implied romantic plotlines that are secondary to River’s story makes it somewhat untraditional in its structure as a Hollywood film, but as a science fiction film this de-emphasis of romance and relationships is not surprising. However, even though science fiction film does not put the romantic heterosexual plotline at the centre of its narrative, for the most part the form still intertwines and causally links it to the primary plotline. The crew of Serenity “aim to misbehave” as the tagline for the film makes clear, this misbehaviour towards storytelling, genre and normativity is a large part of the series – but to what extent does this same misbehaviour translate into the film?

While the film, like all episodes of Firefly, resolves its main plot it leaves few open ends and instead provides a type of closure to the series. The A story is in this respect fully disclosed, and in turn it suggests that the major quest for freedom and the goal of all characters is achieved, when they manage (at least temporarily) to overthrow the Alliance and reveal its corruption. However, the film ends in a very similar way to the episodes: with an exterior shot on Serenity flying off into space and order restored once again with the possibility to “keep flying” both for the protagonists and for the Firefly’verse. Like the episodes the film, even though closing most plotlines, suggests an open end and a future for the narrative. The film actually in this respect provides less closure than does “The Message” through the end sequence that is structured like the end of the other episodes with a possible continuation. While creating a circular dramaturgy in which Mal’s first line of the film is repeated when a metal part of the ship comes loose and fly towards the camera, it ends with Mal’s off-screen question: “What was that?” – restating the situation aboard the ship again like the way it was introduced at the beginning of the film in the first action that provided the start of the narrative.

On a dramaturgical level, in contrast to the series, the A story or main plot of the film is given more space than the B stories that focus on the characters. This I consider as key in the two storytelling modes. In the film the B stories,

117 In fact Serenity would fit quite seamlessly into Vogler’s “The Hero’s Journey”.

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or the romantic relationship stories that provided an important part of the ongoing deferred narratives in the series are all closed in the film. Wash and Zoë’s marriage ends through Wash’s death and as River becomes part of the crew, Kaylee and Simon’s relationship can begin. The, from the series deferred, romantic narrative between Kaylee and Simon is given closure in the film. In the series Simon’s prime goal is to keep River safe, he is constantly in conflict with whether he should pursue Kaylee. In the film when Simon’s primary goal is achieved and he is able to commit to Kaylee they finally get together. This is also the only scene in the film with sexual content, at the very end of the film. In a quite typical Hollywood manner they start to kiss and then disappear off screen before anything actually happens.

The other major deferred romantic narrative left without closure in the series is that between Inara and Mal. The romantic plotline between Mal and Inara in the series could be understood as a type of relationship that Gwenllian-Jones calls “a mutual sexual attraction that is never fully realized” (89) as the series never allowed them to express their feelings for each other. The tension between the two and the implied feelings between them creates a collision of motivations and goals for the characters. Mal, as a representative of freedom, honesty and honour perfectly fits into Inara’s goal of achieving freedom, though her motivation remains obscure through the series, and it is not revealed until after the cancellation of the show that there was an intended plot in which the character was suffering from a terminal illness (Firefly 10th Anniversary: Browncoats Unite, 2012) as a suggestion of what she was running from. Inara on the other hand becomes an impossible romantic goal for Mal. She represents what Mal despises: the Alliance, a political and ideological counterpart to him. She engenders all that Mal wants to break free from which is displayed in for example “Shindig”, when the collision between their values and worlds is highlighted. The conflicts that appear in-between the characters represent a collision of goals and character motivations. In the series Mal also has a brief sexual encounter with one of Inara’s friends, Nandi (Melinda Clarke) a drop out companion and now owner of a brothel (“Heart of Gold”) and is also tricked into marriage by former companion Saffron who uses her sexuality to overtake the ship (“Our Mrs. Reynolds”). Both of these women represent different sides of Mal’s conflict with his romantic feelings toward Inara. Nandi, the indistinguishable difference for Mal between a companion and a prostitute and Saffron the corruption of the system.

In the film in contrast to the series their feelings for each other are made more explicit. For example, Mal is seen looking at a video of Inara, obviously missing her. Notably, in the film Inara’s profession is never discussed, in fact the complexity of her relationship to Mal due to her role as a registered companion and their separate world views remains obscured. The issue raised
by the series is whether it would be possible to have a relationship with someone working as a companion. Could Mal and Inara initiate a relationship while she still serviced clients? While the series posed questions about monogamy and love through the unspoken affection between the two, the film is less ambiguous about their relationship. The film closes this door by focusing on whether Inara is ready to go back to civilisation or if she is going to stay. When, in the final scenes of the film Inara implies that she is going to stay, a possible beginning for their relationship for the first time ever is suggested. Thus in one way, both Inara and Mal’s, and Kaylee and Simon’s relationships are part of the closure of the film, like for example Independence Day, Star Wars and Blade Runner discussed in Chapter 3 the heterosexual pairings are small parts in providing closure for the film – even though they are not primary plots. In this manner, Serenity is a quite typical science fiction film.

I argue that Serenity functions as a substitute for narrative closure when the series was cancelled. While the series can maintain its deferred narratives and work vertically towards character goals and instead allow the A story to provide closure of single episodes, the film needs to present all plots with the classical beginning, middle, and end within the same story. In order to create a coherent narrative nothing can be deferred. When the closure of the River—plotline is made the main plot in the film, and the B stories of the characters and their relationships are made secondary the story loses its subversive edge. Here the condensed format of film and its normalising structure is made visible and more importantly, the potential of seriality.

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In this chapter I have argued depictions are more progressive in general in science fiction television than in science fiction film – which remains within the Hollywood paradigm. I compared television storytelling and the classical Hollywood style in order to analyse the possibilities of characters and subversive stories. Further I have discussed other issues of the media and how production, distribution and exhibition affect storytelling. As an example I did a comparative analysis of Firefly and Serenity. The final part of the dissertation will be devoted to a discussion of changes over time and I argue for the possibilities of what I call an “adult turn” in science fiction film and television from the turn of the millennium.
Conclusions: An Adult Turn and Towards New Possibilities

“The 21st century is when everything changes”.

Although I have argued that science fiction have been dominated by a disassociation from sexuality and other adult concerns represented by the Star’verses, this generic cluster has been subject to change. In what follows I suggest what I call an adult turn in science fiction film and television at the turn of the 21st century. I argue that the dominant discourse of the Star’verses and the juvenile as described in Chapter 1 were subject to change and as a result more adult science fiction narratives are now visible. This turn reformulated some of the earlier generic comfort zones and expanded the genre into what it is in the 2010s. From that turning point the boundaries of the genre began to shift and depictions of sexuality and other adult themes did not conflict with the genre identity of science fiction as they did before this turn. I connect this turn to changes in the genre, and society, as well as specific creators and the influence of television storytelling. While I consider several narratives to be key examples of this shift, I will use the cancellation of Firefly as an example of the changes that occurred in the genre at the time. I do not suggest that the cancellation of the series was responsible for the turn itself but rather that it was cancelled partly because of this ongoing change and that it can serve as an example of this shift in tonalities.

Towards Another Future

The adult turn I suggest is not a paradigm change, but rather a type of discursive shift. By this I mean it was not a distinctive change that overthrew and changed everything, but rather the introduction of competing and resisting elements. The generic/discursive cluster of the Star’verses shifted at this time, and other influential texts and contexts competed with its dominance. When discussing generic clusters Mittell writes that they “are contingent and transitory, shifting over time and taking on new definitions,

118 Torchwood intro.
119 Cf. Foucault who in The History of Sexuality, argues that resistance does not primarily happen through “radical ruptures” but “more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in society that shift about” (96).
meanings, and values within differing contexts” (Genre and Television 17). He also argues that the development to, what he calls, complex TV is a combination of different contextual aspects such as technology, a new way of watching television on DVD, the legitimisation of the medium and attraction of creators (Complex TV).

While Mittell argues that it is popular and widespread and even suggests 1990s- the present (2015) “as the era of complex television. [It] has not overtaken the conventional forms” (Complex TV 31). The same can be argued for this adult turn. The connections between science fiction and the juvenile continue to co-exist with narratives of more adult nature even after the turn of the millennium. It is not an abandonment of these conventions but instead a shift away from the juvenile towards more adult tonalities. The genre as well as society and discourse develop and change over time, sometimes intertwined and sometimes separate. If comparing science fiction from the 1950s with science fiction from the 2010s there are still recognisable traits and themes of the genre which illustrates that genre is a flexible and ever-changing negotiation with itself and with the cultural and social discourse of its time.

Although genre, storytelling, and the active role of the viewers that is at the centre of what has been called the “convergence culture” (Jenkins Convergence 1-24), play a central role in what is being depicted, this shift towards more adult science fiction occurring in the early 21st century also owes much to changes in society and discourse at the time. Changes in society inevitably affect content of films and television, not least in a developmentally sensitive genre such as science fiction which is often considered to relate closely to societal concerns (cf. Telotte, Science Fiction 95-6). For example, the development of queer theory in academia and queer or lgbt-movements and politics that took place during the 1990s in the western world creates a contextual background to this time. By the end of the 20th century some new “what ifs...” where posed; in society, in discourse, in theory, in politics, and in (popular) culture. The legacy of postmodern ideas, feminist and queer research and activism, the human rights movement etc. all help form a discourse in which eventually even science fiction could start to ask questions about sexuality, and other more adult questions.

In general, as time has passed, representations of sexuality have become more commonplace. Interracial kisses were taboo in the 1960s, gay and lesbian characters unusual in the 1990s and explicit nude or sex scenes often absent prior to television series such as Sex and the City and The L Word.120 “What

120 For an in-depth analysis of these television series and sexuality see Richardson et al. (72-93).
is accepted at different times and under different conditions remains a matter of debate and, broadly speaking, TV drama has become increasingly permissive” (Nelson 74). For example, as time passed more and more sex became appropriate, Jane Arthurs argues that

[b]y the end of the century, however, the degree of transformation in this mode of address can be exemplified by the global broadcasting of meticulous and detailed descriptions of US President Bill Clinton’s illicit sexual activities. (2)

So, not only changes in narrative fiction, but also in the media climate as to what can be aired on television has had an effect on possible representations.121

**21st Century Science Fiction**

Although there are examples of adult science fiction dealing with sexuality prior to this time it does not necessarily speak against the existence of the adult turn. I do not suggest that this turn signifies something simply appearing at a certain point without any predecessors or indications. Booker for example sees this approaching in 1990s science fiction television, “a larger trend towards darker visions” (147). Ginn also notes that in *Farscape* (1999-2003) sexual themes has been addressed quite passionately (“Human, Alien” 227-9) and in *Star Trek: Voyager* and *Deep Space Nine* the holodeck was used for sexual purposes (233). Booker continues to argue that the early years of the new millennium produced science fiction television series that “tend collectively to turn away from imaginative visions of the future. Often they simply focus on the present; when they do project a future, it is seldom a golden future of technology-driven marvels” (Booker 150). From my point of view, Booker’s reference to the “technology-driven marvels” refer to the previous dominance of the *Star’verses*. He concludes his historical exposé of science fiction television by stating that the early 2000s “turn to sentimentalism and nostalgia can be related to the growing maturity (or perhaps exhaustion) of the genre of science fiction television” (Booker 192; my emphasis). When Booker wrote his book, *Battlestar Galactica* had only been aired as the four part mini-series and he thus considers this a nostalgic turn to re-imagine the original series. However, while nostalgic in a way, it is also a contemporary update of the series which signals this maturation of science fiction television.

I argue that adult themes and content have been made more common in science fiction film and television after the turn of the millennium. In 2016 it

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121 For an extensive overview and analysis of sexuality in television see Arthurs.
is not as unusual to see science fiction dealing with adult themes such as sexuality, and this is not only considering narratives owing their adult status to the horror/science fiction hybridity which otherwise is the primary exception for adult themes in science fiction history. In television series such as Battlestar Galactica, Torchwood, Firefly, Dollhouse, and Orphan Black sexuality is to different extents part of the narratives and reoccurring motifs. The result of this suggested adult turn is what we see today. Compare for example the reimagined Battlestar Galactica and its original which display a darkness as well as depictions of aspects of humanity such as sexuality in contrast to the original.

Compare also Stargate SG1 (1997-2007) to its spinoff, SGU Stargate Universe, from 2009. I consider the series as an attempt to incorporate the changed tonalities in science fiction into the franchise, however unsuccessfully. The series in contrast to its predecessors is darker, in both theme and visual style, includes an lgbtq-character and many visual representations of sexuality. However, the series was canceled after only two seasons (compare to SG1’s ten seasons, and Stargate Atlantis’s five) due to low numbers (Woerner). I consider the failing numbers of the show in part to be attributed to the major change of format of the series. While the Stargate-franchise fit quite seamlessly into the Star’verses, the adult tone and visual style of Stargate Universe echoes Battlestar Galactica more than it does its franchise. The major step between the Stargate-franchise and those narratives that are key to the adult turn becomes apparent in Stargate Universe.

Narratives such as Firefly, Battlestar Galactica, and Torchwood that aired during the first decade of the 21st century can be understood as representatives of a key shift in science fiction. They mark this shift in tonalities and introduce other possible (and imaginable) themes and concerns of the genre that defy the conventions of the Star’verses. These narratives use the queer potential of science fiction narratives, and all introduce issues of sexuality, lgbtq-character(s), a gendered mix of protagonists, and adult themes and narrative concerns.

As these examples illustrate, and as has been discussed in the previous chapter, television narratives have been faster than film to incorporate these generic devices in this way. Lewis Call also argues that the use of four

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122 One could also add speculative series such as Game of Thrones or Jessica Jones (2015-) as examples in which sex and sexuality are dealt with quite explicitly as well as other adult themes. Both represent genres (fantasy/superhero) that likewise have not had a tradition of explicit sex or sexual themes.
television examples in *BDSM in American Science Fiction and Fantasy* is due to the fact that

[t]he long narrative of multi-season television shows permit the construction of rich, complex representations. These long narratives have room for extended conversations about ethics, existence, and other important philosophical matters (25-6).

Notably, three of the series he uses are made by Joss Whedon: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Dollhouse*. Call suggests that “American SF, especially the visual variety, has recently made a dramatic shift towards naturalism. This is ironic, since film and television would seem to be the media most likely to give themselves over to excessive, fantastic visual spectacle” (18). Though Call gives some examples of films, it is evident that he attributes this trend to television. It is in fact *Battlestar Galactica* creator Roland D. Moore who is given the final word as he suggests that his approach is “‘naturalistic science fiction,’ defined as ‘the presentation of a fantastical situation in naturalistic terms’” when discussing the 2004-2009 series (qtd. in Call 18). Call argues that this “return to [...] realism [...] means dramatic changes in the way that SF deals with sexuality, especially alternative sexuality” (18). These dramatic changes that Call indicates, is part of what I call the adult turn.

While there are fewer examples of films dealing more explicitly with sexuality, there are a few exceptions. In films such as *Prometheus* the issue of sexuality is at least addressed as the crew awake from hibernation and find themselves removed from Earth. While waiting to spend a long time in the solitude of space Elisabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace) and Charlie (Logan Marchall-Green) actually have sex and Meredith Vickers (Charlize Therorn) and Janek (Idris Elba) discuss it. While a minor detail in the film, at least the theme is indicated. While many films make use of the changed tonalities in the genre from this time, for many it remains mostly visual surface. In the rebooted *Star Trek*—films for example, the grittier, dark scenography indicates a maturity, but narratives remain quite juvenile in content. Certainly, many films present more adult themes and concerns, but sexuality remain a peripheral matter. As I will return to shortly, *Star Wars* episodes I-III, though not dealing with sexuality per se, also adhere to the more adult tonalities of science fiction from the turn of the millennium.

Douglas describes science fiction television from the 20th century: “the leading edge was technology as used by fantasy heroes, usually ‘perfect’, in action-heavy battles between good and evil, which tended to play to children and adolescents” (24). The contemporary science fiction series and the future of
the genre according to Douglas, is found in character development. Even though a variety of different shows have been made this is what they have in common according to Douglas - flawed, real, characters exploring everything from relationships to philosophy – “I suggest reaching up towards real dramatic writing based on honest characters, and leave cartoon-like thinking to the movies” (24). Although put in a quite blunt way, Douglas’s analysis serves to highlight the difference appearing between film and television in many regards.

As my examples above illustrate, most of the changes in science fiction have taken place in television rather than in film. While not all changes can be attributed to form, issues of human characterisation owe much to the serialised narratives of television. However, due to the increased serialisation of films, filmmakers could use this same potential to develop their narratives. Although the long narrative presents a striking difference between television and film, serialised filmmaking is becoming more common again which could suggest a merge of storytelling techniques. Thompson for example displays how close the concept of seriality and sequels are and that “these forms would appear to indicate that films and television series are moving closer together in their ways of telling stories” (Storytelling in Film and Television 98). Though sequels have been a part of cinema since an early age, they became popular in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{123}

At least since the turn of the millennium it might seem like sequels, prequels, trilogies, or quadrologies are more common than the stand-alone film, not least in speculative fiction. For example film series such as The Lord of the Rings (2001-2003), The Hobbit (2012-2014), The Hunger Games, Star Wars, Marvel/DC-universe films, The Matrix, Terminator, and Alien. In one way I see this as a way for filmmakers to use the potential of the long narrative from television in order to tell more complex stories. From a more skeptical perspective, I see it is a sure way of making more money.

The latter aside, using Star Wars once again as an example it illustrates that each film presents a finished story, even though it presents an openness towards new tales for the heroes in a se/pre/quel. In the long narrative of television drama, characters have to develop over time, in serialised filmmaking however, the protagonist often remains quite static. The development of the heroes in Star Wars throughout episodes IV-VI for example is minor, they learn new things, create new relationships and reach

\textsuperscript{123} See e.g. Storytelling in Film and Television (98-105) for a historical exposé of serialised filmmaking.
certain goals, but when returned to in the next film a quite similar protagonist is presented.

Although the trend in cinema in the 2000-2010s seems to be sequels and serialised storytelling it in fact represents two separate storytelling techniques. Thompson suggests that the concept of seriality means “[c]ontinuing narratives” (Storytelling in Film and Television 104). So the difference between a film sequel and a film serial can be found in the narrative relationship between the films – a serial continues the narrative from film to film while a sequel can begin a new narrative. Films such as Star Wars, The Matrix, The Hunger Games, The Lord of the Rings, and The Hobbit all present continuing narratives about the same protagonists that tie together at the end of the final film, they all present their films as parts, partly achieved goals or even chapters one could say, in the larger story - what Thompson would call “film serials” (Storytelling in Film and Television 104). These are a type of serialised storytelling in contrast to, for example, film franchises with a large amount of sequels such as A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984), Friday the 13th (1980), Jaws (1975), Die Hard (1988), Alien, or Marvel/DC-universe films. These are for the most part not committed to the same story arc throughout their films but rather separate stories in an existing fictional universe – whether it be the continual murdering of Freddy Kruger, Jason, the alien or the shark – or the heroics of John McClane, Ellen Ripley, the Avengers or Batman. Though they are connected to the previous films they are not necessarily dependent on them in the same way as the film serial.

Although different techniques of serialised storytelling are being used in cinema I think that Hollywood is still far from a successful adaptation of the television narratives. In cinema the trend instead, as I see it, has led to a tiresome formula of open-ended narratives and dangling causes in which the opportunity for another film - regardless of whether it is going to happen or not – has to be seized. And most of the time, this is not in the best interest of the story, but rather a financial security – if people liked the film, we can do more – if not, never mind. I consider this trend in cinema as a move towards the long narrative and the storytelling techniques of television but in most cases it is unsuccessful. When successfully used and adapted for film in a convincing way that takes into account the differences in storytelling techniques it presents an opportunity for developing cinema storytelling. But, most of the time, filmmakers fail to balance the levels of narratives between films.

Thompson is similarly seeing the possibility that “the vogue for sequels, series, and serials in film reflects an influence from television” (Storytelling in Film and Television 103). She continues: “The circulation of plots among media
reflects, [...] an important change in our concept of narrative itself – and specifically a loosening of the notion of closure and the self-contained work of fictional art. That change has been due, in large part, to television” (76). However, television in contrast, developed and made use of certain storytelling techniques from the Hollywood cinema as shown by Thompson. I consider this as a successful adaptation of certain parts of the Hollywood formula into the serialised format.

Even though I suggest that television series have a larger potential, and likewise have used it more extensively, than film, the Hollywood film is not entirely static. Hollywood science fiction film does not look the same in the 21st as it did in the 20th century. For example, though episodes I-III (1999, 2002, 2005) of the Star Wars-saga in many ways still conform to the Star’verses, they deal with more adult themes than do their predecessors. The films partly remains within the Star’verses in terms of a certain juvenile tonality, not surprisingly most obvious in episode I, in which its protagonist is a child. In addition, the inclusion of the computer animated character Jar-Jar Binks not only generated criticism of racist stereotyping in the films but also resulted in fan criticism of a “childish” main character. In “Putting Away Childish Things: Jar Jar Binks and the ‘Virtual Star’ as an Object of Fan Loathing” Hills presents this as a way to preserve the cultural significance of Star Wars. I consider this preservation a way to deal with the juvenile from which it came and its need to evolve into a narrative suitable for the 21st century. In other words, a way to “put away childish things” and to deal with the changes in the genre.

However, the films present a coming of age story which leads the protagonist into becoming the antagonist of episodes IV-VI. This inevitably calls for certain events taking place which are not primarily juvenile. Anakin (Hayden Christensen) for example not only has to be separated from his enslaved mother at a young age, but also come back several years later only to find her captured by Tusken Raiders. As she dies in his arms, which dramatically speaking triggers him into his transformation to the dark side, he slaughters all Tusken. Visually underlined is the fact that these creatures are not all warriors. The moment before Anakin steps out to kill them all, a Tusken child is seen playing. He later tells Padmé (Natalie Portman) that: “I killed them. I killed every one of them. [...] And not just the men. But the women. And the children too. They’re like animals and I slaughtered them like animals” (Episode II). This also serves as a foreshadowing of episode III in which Anakin kills the Jedi younglings. While the actual killing of the children happens off-screen, the scene with the younglings play to the emotional and terrifying notion that someone the children trust to save them, has actually come to kill them.
Image 13: Anakin steps into the room, a young child steps out from hiding and asks him: “Master Skywalker, there are too many of them. What are we going to do?”. The camera cuts from a close-up of the child to Anakin’s hooded face and then to a long shot from behind Anakin in which the children’s reactions are visible when Anakin arms himself with his lightsaber. Star Wars: Episode III - The Revenge of the Sith, 2005. © 2015 TM Lucasfilm Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

This maturation of narrative concerns in episodes I-III displays not only the fact that Star Wars is not the Star’verses and that even the storyworld from which it is partly named is subjected to changes at this time. I consider it unimaginable that a similar act would have taken place in episodes IV-VI even by Darth Vader. Though he is part of the destruction of an entire planet, the camera remains with him and Leia aboard the Death Star and does not allow us to see the people that are about to die. Leia’s, and later Obi-Wan’s (Alec Guinness), response to the destruction of her home planet is all we are given as evidence that real people actually lived there. Whether these shifts in tonalities in Star Wars can suggest that episodes I-III could not have been made first (in the 1970-80s) remains unknown, but I would argue that this in fact makes for a valid argument about the order of the production.

While episode III can suggest adult themes such as the murder of children, depictions of sexuality remain quite chaste. Episodes I-III also include a primary relationship based on desire between Padmé and Anakin, the same desire that destroys Anakin. A completed story arc based on romance and sexuality is presented. It first appears as an impossible relationship, due to Anakin being a Jedi, but is still allowed to play through only to be aborted again through the death of Padmé during childbirth and Anakin’s turn to the dark side. The expected sexual encounter (and thus the creation of Leia and Luke) between Padmé and Anakin is due to the reversed order of the narrative’s chronology one of the major dangling causes of the films. It is likewise intertwined with the other plotline of Anakin becoming Darth Vader.
Compared to episodes IV-VI the sexual tension and the themes of sexuality, even though quite chaste, are put at the centre of the narrative. While it presents a double plotline entirely intertwined with the other plotline and Anakin’s turn to the dark side it requires sexuality and needs to be made clear at a narrative level. However, the portrayal of the reproductive sexual encounter is left between the lines. In fact, between the films, episodes II and III. Episode II ends with the secret marriage between Padmé and Anakin and when they meet the next time in episode III, Padmé tells Anakin that she is pregnant. Though this sexual encounter is pivotal to the plot it is left entirely outside the films. All that suggests a sexual encounter between the two is their marriage and a joining of hands. The fact that they had to get married in order to actually have sex (in order to get pregnant, in order to make the following episodes possible) also suggests something about a continued unwillingness to depict sexual encounters and a certain type of ideology of sexuality.

Furthermore, *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* from 2015 continuously displays a maturation of narrative concerns. The first scene of the film shows not only that the previously faceless Stormtroopers can be considered people with emotion and a terrible past. It also underlines this discrepancy towards the previous films by showing blood on dead troopers. In addition, the killing of Han Solo in contrast to for example Obi-Wan’s death in episode IV, actually highlights the corporal death rather than the assentation to incorporeal form. Furthermore, the destruction of planets in the film is in contrast to episode IV-VI visualised by images of the inhabitants of the planets. It thus creates a stronger sense of realism, too actually see that people lived there and then are murdered by the First Order.
However, the de-emphasis on sexuality is continued in the film. Though having a female protagonist Ray (Daisy Ridley), she is, like Leia in the earlier films, de-sexualised through costume and manners. Interestingly Ray is not primarily connected to a romantic plotline, instead it is, ex-Stormtrooper Finn (John Boyega) who engenders the romantic driven plot. However, I consider Finn’s dramatic motivations as either an attempt to reinstate the male hero through his constant attempts at saving Ray. Traditionally paired with the heterosexual plotline, it appears as Finn also has an interconnected romantic plotline together with his attempts at saving Ray. As it becomes clear that she is not a damsel-in-distress and she herself becomes a hero, Finn’s role in the film becomes unclear. From a queer point of view, I consider whether Finn really is romantically bound to Poe (Oscar Isaac) instead of Ray. The scene when they reunite after Finn believed Poe to be dead is emotionally charged, reminiscent of the scene with Kirk and Spock in Star Trek: The Final Frontier as discussed in Chapter 1. This development is left for the coming films, however unlikely it is that this queer potential is going to be acted upon.

Genre is fluid and changeable and as I have illustrated the boundaries of genre remain unsettled and contested. However the changes and the options available to incorporate must first and foremost be thinkable. Someone has to be able to ask the right type of “what if...” question in order for the genre to evolve. The specific type of more mature questions of for example sexuality, is now becoming more commonplace. Hence, the dominance of the Star’verse in science fiction film and television, though still apparent, no longer stands as singular source of inspiration and possibility. As a further example of this shift, I will end this chapter through an analysis of the cancellation of Firefly considered from the perspective of the adult turn.

**The Cancelation of Firefly**

I argue that Firefly was a forerunner to the shift towards more adult science fiction that we see today. The discursive formation that I call the Star’verses dominated science fiction up till the turn of the millennium, and the cancellation of Firefly in 2002, and its later success, might stand as evidence of this turn. Despite its short run Firefly soon became a cult classic. Telotte suggested in that “[e]very cult text is an ‘accident’, a disruption in our normal experience, a work that, for various reasons, should not have retained its following”. He continues to elaborate on the “accidental text – [which] affords a new and even necessary perspective; [...] it serves as a kind of unpredictable revelation, an ‘opening ... door’” (“Firefly” 111). This is precisely what I suggest Firefly did. Though the show itself did not have the opportunity to go through the door, to continue Telotte’s metaphor, because of its cancellation, it instead played a part in opening the door for the genre.
The reasons behind the cancellation of *Firefly* are attributed to different things by different scholars. In addition to issues of bad scheduling from on the network Fox’s part, some considers the western elements and the series genre hybridity as cause for its failure (J.C. Wright), some considers contextual aspects such as format and franchising (Pateman), some relate the cancellation to the swiftly written pilot episode “The Train Job” (DeCandido). Additionally, some consider *Firefly*’s generic identity as science fiction as one contributing element (Battis; Buchanan). Though I agree with previous analyses of the multilayered, textual and contextual, reasons for the cancellation of the show, I propose an additional aspect to consider, the adultness of *Firefly* and its generic linage as science fiction in relation to the *Star’verses*.

Both Jes Battis and Ginjer Buchanan discuss the cancellation of *Firefly* in relation to science fiction. Buchanan argues that the cancellation of *Firefly* has to do with genre expectations and the genre identity of the time. She suggests that it can be attributed to three major players; Fox, *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry, and Joss Whedon himself. She suggests that *Firefly* goes against the televised science fiction conventions that the audience had gotten used to - and there comes Whedon’s fault in the matter. She suggests that *Firefly* goes against the televised science fiction conventions that the audience had gotten used to - and there comes Whedon’s fault in the matter. She suggests that the televised legacy of Roddenberry’s *Star Trek* remained too strong to penetrate, even at the turn of the century. She argues that most successful science fiction television series basically exist in the *Trek’verse*. In an imagined future where there are aliens, both dangerous ones and potential allies. *Firefly* however is more realistic, and without any alien beings – in the *Firefly’verse* humanity is all alone. Buchanan argues, that though Whedon is perfectly aware of these genre conventions - he still made *Firefly*. She concludes, “[his] brave attempt to create an intelligent, adult sf/western hybrid television series was ill-timed and ill-placed” (53). This lack of alien presence in *Firefly* makes Battis argue that it is “uncomfortably close to a human melodrama” (3). Both Battis and Buchanan touch upon the adult tone and themes of the series.

Battis also relates the series to the science fiction canon and displays how cemented values and genre expectations from *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* set the standard for new science fiction at the time. *Firefly*, according to Battis, becomes a unique science fiction television series through a reversal of this cementation. Battis argues that science fiction television traditionally uses characters as equipment, well-known archetypes that use dialogue as a way to advance the plot, and these archetypes fill a specific dramatic purpose (20-1). *Firefly* on the other hand both uses these conventions and takes them a step further by, for example, making the characters dynamic and human (Battis 22). For Battis the main reason *Firefly* was cancelled was the fact that it had “[t]oo much emotion – not enough action” (34). Battis analyses how the entire
exposition of “Serenity” runs against the formula for successful science fiction television; it shows a fight on the ground, and the heroes are on the losing side of the battle. He suggests that “this entire battle scene [hinges] on the emotional transition of Mal himself. The tanks and the guns are simply a backdrop to illustrate his cataclysmic fall from idealism” (Battis 15). The exposition displays the character-driven narrative to come. Battis displays how the emphasis on character-driven narrative over spectacle could have played a part in the cancellation of the series.

Supporting this case is the fact that the original pilot episode “Serenity” was, as demanded by Fox, replaced by the hastily written new pilot “The Train Job”. “The Train Job” is a more action-filled episode while the two-hour long “Serenity” focuses much more on characters. The use of “The Train Job” as pilot contributed to the demise of the series according to Keith R.A. DeCandido (55-61). He displays how, by airing them out of order and using “The Train Job” as pilot, the audience never got a chance to commit to the series. It has also been illustrated and analysed how “The Train Job” “drew attention to aspects of the format that was not necessarily as prevalent in the original pilot” (Pateman 160), and thus presenting a somewhat different focus in the two episodes. “Without a fully formed and easily marketable format, the opportunities for franchising are limited, or reduced” (Pateman 167). The two pilots and the problems associated with financial prospects and potential franchising also speak to the expectations of genre. “Serenity” focuses its teaser on character’s emotions (Battis 15) and science fiction (Pateman 162), an, for the time, unusual combination. “The Train Job” instead focuses on genre hybridity (Pateman 162) and less on the characters involved, highlighting action, bar fights and spaceships, a more common format of science fiction.

I join these previous scholars in the idea that Firefly’s relationship to science fiction contributed to the early demise of the series, which I see as an unpreparedness for an adult science fiction narrative and world in 2002. At first glance Firefly does not seem like an adult science fiction show but given a closer look it deals with several adult themes. Like Whedon’s earlier television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer, not much is what it seems in Firefly. There is a continuous slippage between expectations and action, between humour and seriousness, between genres, and not least between the adult and the juvenile. It is funny, quirky and presents a feeling of home and family aboard Serenity most of the time. Battis’s also relate to the adultness of

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124 Pateman suggests that the science fiction elements of “Serenity” is presented as part of its format in the teaser and only later are the western elements made visible. In “The Train Job” however, these genres are presented as “integral of each other” (166).
Sexuality, is also recurrently dealt with in the series. This presence of sexuality in Firefly becomes evident in almost every episode and most characters, as shown in Chapter 4. Television columnist Robert B. Taylor writes: “Whedon has created a reality where sex is not something to be outlawed or looked down upon, and beauty not a trait taken lightly” (132). It is not only a productive positive sexuality that is thematically dealt with but also a darker, violent sexuality and issues of prostitution and rape. Though some of these themes are unusual in science fiction, Firefly owes some of its thematic to the Western that is a genre not unfamiliar with certain of these traits. The western/science fiction hybridity is, however, as I see it secondary to the realism of the characters in Firefly.

Zoë and Wash, the married couple aboard the ship, and their relationship, is a good example of both the adult themes and the realism of characters as discussed above. This representation of an adult marriage contributes to the adult tone in the series, not to be confused with the necessity for it to have a serious tone. They are depicted as an adult, realistic couple. Leigh Adams Wright notices in passing, when discussing race and ethnicity in Firefly, the sexual activeness of Wash and Zoë’s relationship, in fact their relationship “is not the focus of the show but rather an unobtrusively integral part of the ship dynamics” (30). Their relationship is depicted both physically and mentally throughout the series; we are made witnesses of marriage disputes and everyday affection, flirtatious and suggested sexual intimacy as well as images of them having sex. Their marriage becomes a part of the crew’s dynamic as L.A. Wright suggests and does thereby not only function as a symbol of equality and progression due to the interracial pairing, or the gender swapped traits of the two. Zoë is the second-in-command and an ex-soldier, or to use Michelle Sagara West’s words “not the most attractive of men; he’s neither tall nor

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125 Or as suggested by Fred Erisman more specifically John Ford’s Stagecoach (1939). Nancy Holden argues that in order “for Firefly to retain its integrity as a western, it had to conform to basic requirements of western-ness” (144).
classically good-looking, [...] and [wears] a really horrible shirt” (97). West further notes that Whedon “wanted this show to be about real people, in real situations. Adults, struggling with life” (99). She continues:

The marriage of Wash and Zoe is an adult marriage. [...] This marriage fits the context of the show itself: adults in a grim situation, making their way in the world. Adults do marry. It happens frequently. Once married, you’ll notice, they don’t agonize about it constantly – and angst of this particular kind wouldn’t suit Wash or Zoe’s characters well – because it’s a choice they’ve made, aware of who the other person is, and it’s founded on respect. On communication. And on a great deal of affection and consideration. (99-100)

This adult representation of marriage is unusual to see, not least in science fiction.

In contrast to the depictions of the primary relationships dominant to science fiction that has been discussed throughout this thesis, this relationship stands out as something different. They are in fact a couple who have made the move to a domestic heterosexual relationship. According to West the producers expressed a wish for Whedon to remove the marriage from the show and instead focus on their early romance. What the producers were asking for was in one respect the traditional relationships that does not have to move into the domestic and familiar (cf. Gwenllian-Jones). West points toward the realness in their relationship and how misinterpretations of their marriage as troubled relate to the adult and realistic-tone in their relationship - in contrast to the growing up, high school narratives of Buffy or Angel. Huff also considers the adultness of Zoë when analysing her as a believable character through her three-dimensionality as a character, not only a woman or a warrior. The consequence is a quite unspectacular, familiar and ordinary relationship.

The discussion of having children that Zoë and Wash have in the episode “Heart of Gold", is likewise for West a sign of bravery on Whedon’s part: to take on subject matters as realistic and serious as a married couple discussing having a baby in an uncertain, dangerous world (West 103). Compared to the mystical pregnancies otherwise depicted in science fiction, in which the female body is at constant threat of being impregnated more or less forcefully, this is an unusual narrative.\(^\text{126}\) It is an active choice of them both, a conceptual decision that they have to take. It is not something that is sprung upon them like a problem that just happened, they, like most of us, do not know if they can have a baby, how they would be as parents, if they could provide for the

\(^{126}\) See e.g. Cordelia, twice in Angel, Councilor Troi in Star Trek: TNG, Gwen in Torchwood, and Starbuck in Battlestar Galactica.
baby or how their working situation would allow for the care of a baby. I find myself wondering where they would put a changing table onboard Serenity, and how they could childproof the metal stairs leading down to the cargo bay. How would they be able to make Jayne put away all his weapons lying around and could they avoid bringing the job home at the end of the day when they live aboard a the ship?

I have argued that the adult tone in *Firefly* also contributed to the early demise of the series, an unpreparedness for an adult science fiction narrative and world. As has been argued by both Battis and Buchanan, *Firefly* had its run during the dominance of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* (see also Burns). In other words, it did not conform to the genre expectations of the *Star‘verses* that presented worlds where there are aliens, a utopian future, heroes and myth. *Firefly* is far from that. For example, writer Roxanne Longstreet Conrad comically displays in “Mirror/Mirror: A Parody” that the characters in *Firefly* are dramatically different from those of the *Star Trek*-universe. By telling a story of crews switching ‘verses with each other she displays how Mal et al would swiftly take command of the Enterprise while that crew would perish on Serenity while trying to engage in diplomatic relations with Reavers. What she displays convincingly is the normativity of the *Trek‘verse* and the down and dirty, realistic crew from *Firefly* with sexuality, ambiguity, and life experience. She concludes her comparison by saying: “*Firefly* gave us something special” (Conrad 181). What that special was, I would argue, is connected to the genre identity and expectations brought forth by the *Star‘verses*.

By the time *Serenity* was made in 2005, *Firefly* already had a large fan following of “Browncoats”\(^{127}\). The fans in fact contributed to the possibility for Whedon to make the film (cf. Abbott 228). The film however, as displayed in Chapter 4, rather returns to a more traditional science fiction, both in format and in content and through less adult concerns. But, when the unlikely event occurred that a cancelled television series was able to inspire a film in 2005 the popularity and cult status of *Firefly* was already a fact - and more importantly the changes instigated in the genre had already begun. In 2004 *Battlestar Galactica* premiered and in 2006 *Torchwood*, both science fiction narratives that deal with more adult themes. Both series ran for four seasons, and while *Torchwood* still lacks a complete narrative resolution, *Battlestar Galactica* is an ended series. Whedon could also in 2009 make another attempt at a more mature and sexually charged science fiction series with *Dollhouse*.

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\(^{127}\) See e.g. Cochran for an analysis of the fans of *Firefly* and *Serenity*.\(^{128}\)
Conclusion and Final Remarks

I began this research aiming to explore depictions of sexuality in science fiction, and in particular the lack of queer characters and considerations in a genre with such queer potential. Different texts and contexts have been used to explore an extensive material in order to explain, analyse and contribute to the understanding of science fiction, of storytelling and of queerness. By focusing on characters, narratives and depictions of sexuality, and queer sexuality in particular, I made visible a tendency to disassociate science fiction from issues of sexuality, due to a dominant understanding of the genre as techno-centred, juvenile and heteronormative. This tendency of science fiction, represented by what I call the Star’verses, has dominated the genre since the 1980s and not until the turn of the millennium came a turn towards more adult science fiction, especially in television. By that time, typically mature themes and content were becoming more and more common in science fiction. As of 2016 depictions of sexuality and even queer sexuality is not as uncommon in science fiction as they were. However, there is still a long way to go for science fiction creators to fully realise and use the queer potential of the science fiction narrative.

This research also attempts to display how different storytelling formats affect the possibilities of the story being told and thus argues that the classical Hollywood style is built upon a heteronormative structure. The serialised storytelling of television drama, though partly derived from classical Hollywood storytelling, allows for more elaborate characters. Science fiction television’s focus on characters and narrative over science fiction film’s emphasis on visual spectacle and special effects has helped develop the genre, in both media.

For future research on depiction of sexuality, other adult themes and queerness in science fiction film and television there is still much to be done. The time period primarily discussed in this dissertation is, with some exceptions, up till the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{th} century. The examples taken after this time such as Torchwood and Firefly that I at the beginning saw as counter-examples of science fiction genre conventions and expectations, in fact could be interpreted as forerunners or instigators of this turn in the genre. As argued, science fiction of today more often displays sexuality (and even non-heterosexuality) than it did prior to the turn of the century and this is a source of research which could further develop an understanding of the possibilities of science fiction narratives to present norm-critical analyses of society. But in order to do so the limits and boundaries confining genre, not only scholar work but storytelling conventions, need to be critically examined in order for the creators of these narratives to be able to imagine and create stories that
move beyond the expected. So queering not only opened up insights concerning the adult turn, the same method could be used – I hope – to further deal with the gendered possibilities of future worlds – imagined or real.
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