

The Art of Interpretation: Women, Directing and Science Fiction Television

Abstract:

While there is an established tradition of women writers of SF literature, it is more difficult to identify a similar pantheon of women creators of science fiction television. This is because authorship tends to be seen to be located within a single figure, usually a male writer/producer, despite the collaborative nature of television production. This essay examines the contribution of women to science fiction television by re-evaluating the role of the director. By surveying a sample of SF TV, the essay identifies a selection of women, including *Doctor Who* directors Hettie MacDonald, Alice Troughton, and Rachel Talalay, who have helped shape contemporary SF television through their aesthetic sensibilities and their continued presence within the contemporary television industry. In so doing it aims to destabilize conventions that position creativity within one, often male, creator and locate the female creative voice within science fiction television.

keywords: women, director, authorship, industry, *Doctor Who*

Since Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein* (1818), there has been an established tradition of women writers of SF literature. While the arena remains male dominated, women authors, such as Ursula K. Leguin, Octavia Butler, James Tiptree Jr, Margaret Atwood, and Joanna Russ, have played a significant role in pushing the boundaries of the genre, often utilizing its speculative nature to explore feminist issues and present provocative representations of gender. Within cinema and television, it is more difficult to identify a similar pantheon of iconic women creators of SF, although one might include figures such as Thea Von Harbou author of *Metropolis* (GER 1927), Irene Shubik, producer of SF anthology series *Out of the Unknown* (UK 1965-71), Jane Espensen, writer for *Battlestar Galactica* (US 2004-2009) and producer/showrunner of *Caprica*

(US 2009-2010). There is an established tradition of challenging representations of gender within SF film and television. As Lorna Jowett explains, ‘science fiction, because it deals with the novel and the strange, has the potential to offer something new in terms of gender representation’ (‘The Girls Who Waited’ 78). Science fiction film and TV, such as *Alien* (Scott UK/US 1979), *Arrival* (Villeneuve US 2016), *Battlestar Galactica*, *Firefly* (US 2002-3), and *Continuum* (Can 2012-15), not only offer complex representations of women – defining and redefining conceptions of the ‘strong woman’ within popular culture – but they utilize the tropes of the genre to unpack, critique and often challenge our understanding of gender.

Despite this creative preoccupation with gender, science fiction film has, largely, been seen to be created by male directors, such as Fritz Lang, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Joss Whedon, Ridley Scott, and J.J. Abrams. A list of science fiction films directed by women is harder to construct. Harbou may be the author of the screenplay and novel of *Metropolis* but the film is generally attributed to Lang. None of the films cited in Dean Conrad’s overview of female representation in SF cinema are directed by women although his webpage on the topic does include a few examples of female-directed films: *Born in Flames* (Borden US 1983), *Tank Girl* (Talalay US 1995), and *Sticky Fingers of Time* (Brouger US 1997) (79-99; ‘Women in Science Fiction Film: A Viewer’). To this list I would add Kathryn Bigelow’s *Strange Days* (US 1995), one of the most mainstream and high profile American science fiction films directed by a woman and if we consider superhero films as a part of SF, then we must add Patty Jenkins’ *Wonder Woman* (US 2017). Similarly science fiction television is usually helmed by male creator /showrunners, such as Ron Moore/*Battlestar Galactica*, Joss Whedon/*Firefly*, and Simon Barry/*Continuum*. The creator/showrunner is the figure responsible for overseeing the conception and production of a television series and thus is usually perceived to have creative authority like the figure of the director in cinema. While Melissa Rosenberg is a significant example of a female showrunner of science-fiction/fantasy series *Jessica Jones* (US 2015-), as are Ali Adler, co-creator/showrunner for *Supergirl* (US 2015-), and Tara Butters and Michele Fazekas, showrunners for *Agent Carter* (US 2015-16), recent statistics produced by *Variety* confirm that only eleven percent of the new shows produced for the 2016-17 season had a female showrunner (only two percent of which were non-white women) (Ryan ‘Showrunners’).¹

Film and television remain, however, collaborative media, despite long standing traditions within scholarship, industry, and fandom of locating creativity within a singular presence. While James Cameron is generally perceived to be the creative force behind his films, Gale Ann Hurd was co-writer of *The Terminator* (US 1984), producer of *The Terminator*, *Aliens* (US 1986), *The Abyss* (US 1989), and executive producer on *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (US 1991). Hurd was also producer on *Alien Nation* (US 1988), *The Relic* (US 1997), and *Armageddon* (US 1998), and executive producer on *Tremors* (US 1990), while currently operating as executive producer of *The Walking Dead* (US 2010-) and *Falling Water* (US 2016-). On *The Walking Dead* Hurd is credited alongside another key female contributor, co-executive producer, Denise M. Huth. Huth is a high-profile producer of *The Walking Dead*, regularly appearing alongside male producers Robert Kirkman, Scott M. Gimble and Greg Nicotero in various paratexts of the show such as DVD/Bluray extras and the spin-off series *The Talking Dead* (US 2011-). Similarly, while *Doctor Who* (UK 2005-) is identified as the creative responsibility of showrunners and lead writers, Russell T. Davies, Stephen Moffatt and Chris Chibnall, executive producer Julie Gardner was instrumental in getting new *Who* back on the air in 2005. As Lorna Jowett points out, quoting *Starburst's* David Richardson, Gardner is regarded by many “as one of the most influential creative figures in television today”, citing “her key role on *Doctor Who* and its spin-offs” as well as other executive producer credits, and her role as Head of Drama and Controller of Drama Commissioning as evidence’ (140). That is not to diminish the role of male cinema directors and television showrunners but to acknowledge the creative contribution of Hurd, Huth, and Gardner, like other women in similar roles, in facilitating and shaping these productions. To find the contribution of women within science fiction film and television, therefore, often requires looking beyond the traditional ‘auteurist’ roles to a range of production personnel.

With this in mind, the aim of this essay will be to consider the issue of authorship in relation to our understanding of the role of women within science fiction television. To achieve this, I will examine the creative contribution of women through the role of the director, a role that holds a central place within the televisual production process but is often rendered invisible within discussions of TV.² As a result, women directors are often rendered doubly invisible, first because of their gender within a male dominated industry; secondly because the director’s role within a collaborative process does not sit comfortable with notions of authorship that are based

upon singular vision. Through a survey of fifty-five science fiction television series made in the UK, USA and Canada, and largely within a post-millennial context, this essay will examine the extent to which women are contributing to the production of science fiction TV as directors and identify a selection of women who have repeatedly returned to the genre in this capacity.³ In particular, it will analyse the contribution of three women directors, Hettie MacDonald, Alice Troughton, and Rachel Talalay, to *Doctor Who* (UK 2005-) through a discussion of three critically acclaimed episodes of the series. Through this analysis, the essay will examine the role of the director within TV production and consider how women contribute to the shape of contemporary SF television. In so doing it aims to destabilize conventions that locate all creativity within one, often male, creator and to acknowledge a range of collaborative and creative voices that are crucial to our understanding of science fiction television.

The Director in Television

Since the development of the auteur theory in the 1950s and 60s (see Caughie), the director is, arguably, recognised as the primary creative force behind the construction of a film, even with the understanding that most cinema production is a highly collaborative in nature.⁴ This is primarily because it is generally the director's job to oversee all elements of a film production and ensure that every aspect works together to construct a coherent whole. In contrast, the director is not generally perceived to be the auteur of a television series or serial. As Jonathan J. Cavallero explains, 'scholars have tended to look to network programming strategies, showrunners, writers, and writing staffs as the most important creative voice(s) behind television programs' (47). For instance, Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimagi align a production company, MTM, with authorship identity through their analysis of how it 'established [its] reputation as *the* "quality" company in the American television industry' (ix). Jason Mittell argues that while television may be a producer's medium, where the executive producer oversees all elements of the series production, 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' (89). Furthermore, for many years there has been a resistance to utilising authorship as a discursive frame through which to analyse television. There are a number of reasons for these different approaches to authorship within television studies.

As pointed out by Derek Kompare, television is a mainstream media, a product of mass communication, and as such, as television studies took hold in the 1970s, ‘television was reconceived...as a medium of “texts” and “readers,” but not “authors,” or at least none beyond the monolithic constructions of networks, studios, and media corporations offered up by Marxist theory and political economy’ (96). Where authors have been identified, scholars have often turned to the writer/producer, which historically was in part the result of the medium’s relationship with radio, through which stories were ‘told’ not ‘shown’. This legacy was exacerbated by production and broadcast constraints that encouraged an emphasis upon story and dialogue over visuals. Budgets were often low as compared to film and audiences were initially watching television on small screens and in black and white. So while British science fiction author Nigel Kneale had a significant collaborative partnership with Rudolph Cartier on *The Quatermass* serials, with Kneale as writer and Cartier as director, these productions are more often discussed as a product of Nigel Kneale’s creative vision – his authorship (Jowett and Abbott). Similarly, *The Twilight Zone* (US 1959-64) in the US is largely attributed to creator/chief writer/executive producer Rod Serling, as well as his team of writers including Richard Matheson, George Beaumont, George Clayton Johnson to name a few. While there is growing recognition of the substantial contribution of Director of Photography George T. Clemens upon the carefully constructed visual style for the series, there has been little acknowledgement of the many directors who have overseen the filming of individual episodes such as Richard Donner who directed ‘Nightmare at 20,000 feet’ (1963).

Furthermore, as discussions of contemporary quality and cult television have begun to establish a canon of television series, privileging story and aesthetics, the notion of the auteur has increasingly been applied to the showrunner, or what Roberta Pearson calls ‘hyphenate-auteurs’, writer-producers who ‘have control over the day-to-day running of the show’ (17). Derek Kompare argues that the ‘showrunner’ is increasingly positioned within the industry, as well as the academy, as the author of ‘distinct series’ partly to help networks brand themselves as the producers of ‘quality’ product made ‘distinct’ by the original vision of an auteur and partly to facilitate the formation of a cult following around the ‘cult auteur’ (98-99). Levine and Newman similarly suggest that the primacy of the showrunner serves to legitimate television, noting how ‘the rise to prominence of television auteurs and authorship discourses surrounding them functions to distinguish certain kinds of television from others, and, as in cinema, to promote

auteur productions as culturally legitimate' (38). According to Kompare, the showrunner is the *auteur*, delegating visual style to 'directors, art directors, and editors' (98). This runs counter to notions of cinematic *auteurism*, which traditionally perceived individual vision to be communicated through the visual style rather than the screenplay, but in serial television drama, storytelling and the seasonal narrative arc remain the driving force. Contemporary showrunners may possess a vision for the look of a series, but often delegate its achievement to other staff, or they may work with a director/executive producer who oversees the establishment of a visual style for the series, such as Kim Manners on *Supernatural* (US 2005-), further highlighting the collaborative nature of television. In fact there is a growing body of scholarship seeking to position showrunners within a collaborative conception of authorship to highlight the number of creative voices that contribute to the production of quality television, thus broadening the understanding of authorship in relation to television. This work includes Janet K. Halfyard's analysis of the musical contribution of Christophe Beck to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; Matthew Pateman's discussion of editor Lisa Lessek's contribution to Joss Whedon's television oeuvre; Roberta Pearson and Maíre Messenger's extensive interviews with the craftworkers who contributed to the production of the *Star Trek* series, and John T. Caldwell's discussion of 'below the line' labour within television production. The notion of delegation of responsibility brings us to the final reason that the episode director, as opposed to director/producers like Manners, is not usually seen as a central creative force within television, which is that in multi-episode series, directors are often brought in to direct individual episodes, with little input into the broader vision for the entire show. Even Cavellero, whose work seeks to re-examine the contribution of the director in television, distinguishes between directors of single dramas as part of anthology series and directors of serial television, explaining 'in the case of ongoing series, this view seems somewhat (but not entirely) justified, as directors are assigned to individual episodes and navigate their way through a portion of a much larger narrative' (47-8). These directors are usually expected to conform to an established aesthetic style and it is the role of the executive producer to oversee the overall vision for the series and ensure that each episode works as part of a narrative and series design. Brian Lowry explains, that 'in those olden days, TV directors were dismissed as guns for hire, whose main job involved articulating scripts in workmanlike fashion' (71). There are, of course, different approaches to the role of director from series to series and country to country, and, as implied by Lowry's use of the phrase 'in those

olden days', the contribution of the director is changing as the production and broadcast of television adapts to a more competitive multi-channel, multi-platform landscape. Roberta Pearson and Maire Messenger Davies explain that in the network era of *Star Trek*, 'while the directors bore the primary responsibility for coordinating the work of those on the sound stage during the seven or eight days of shooting an episode, they still required input from the producers and the craft workers' (101). Furthermore, director Winrich Kolbe, 'who directed forty-eight episodes of the post-*TOS* [*Star Trek: The Original Series*] series,' told Pearson and Messenger Davies that 'directors don't have much impact on the production process: "Only in the pilot does a director have anything to say. In regular television, you walk on the set, the regular cast is there, the regular writers are there, the standing sets are there. The only option I have is whether I want to have one camera or two cameras. That's a matter of money'" (110-111). Pearson and Messenger Davies acknowledge however that while on 'network shows, the director's role has remained fairly constant from the classic era to the postnetwork era, but with cable programmes with shorter seasons, more leisurely shooting schedules, and two or three people directing the majority of episodes, a director's input could potentially be much greater' (212 n. 8).

It is clear that directing experiences can be quite different depending upon the individual, the channel, the country. Daniel O'Hara working on series such as *Being Human* (UK 2008-13) and *Doctor Who*, has commented that 'if you are directing a couple of episodes of a long-running series, you have to accept that someone else's creative voice is the driving force behind the show' but at the same time explains that part of the skill of being a TV director is that 'you have to master the balancing act of delivering something that will satisfy producers and executives, while at the same time letting your own style come through' (qtd in Spencer 17). Rachel Talalay points out that in her experience on *Doctor Who*, a show renowned for the auteurist voices of its showrunners Russell T Davies and Steven Moffat, 'There's not a fact sheet...The mandate really, well there really wasn't any discussion. It was just expected that you embrace and bring one's own vision to it' (qtd in Brew 2014).⁵ In the US, director Lesli Linka Glatter explains that the stand out series are those that bring together great writing, acting and directing (qtd in Birnbahum 15). Directing is therefore a significant contribution to the construction of a television series.

The director is responsible for translating the script into the visual form and to achieve this, according to Directors UK, their job ‘consists of the following components: interpreting and planning the realisation of the creative content, style and structure of a work; capturing and gathering the creative content through directing the production crew, the performers, presenters and contributors in a work; directing the editing of the creative content to form it into a cohesive whole’ (‘Women Directors’ 4). As Bethany Rooney and Mary Lou Belli, based upon the US context, explain, ‘as TV directors, we are given a script – a written story that we translate into the visual medium. The artistry of the director begins with interpreting the script. We are storytellers, inheritors of the tradition of telling tales around a campfire. We have to figure out what each scene really means, how each scene contributes to telling the whole story, and then design how to communicate that visually’ (2). The television director works under highly pressurised circumstances and with varying degrees of autonomy depending upon the production and broadcast context of the show. It however remains that the director is responsible for interpreting and visualising the script, balancing their vision for the episode with the needs of the series.

Women SF Directors

When Ava DuVernay (director of *Selma* [US 2014] and *13th* [US 2016]) began working on the pilot for the series *Queen Sugar* (US 2016-) for the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), her original plan was to direct all eight episodes but as the project developed, she decided to ‘recruit a team of female directors to handle the series’ (qtd in Brownfiled). This decision to recruit an all-female directorial team is an unusual move within the contemporary television industry but has been followed by Melissa Rosenberg on *Jessica Jones*. While season one featured three women directors of four episodes, including S.J. Clarkson handling the first two episodes, Rosenberg has announced plans to recruit only female directors for the second season (Ryan ‘Jessica Jones’). These choices are, in part, a response to recurring reports that have highlighted the imbalance between men and women directors. In recent years, Director UK, the Director’s Guild of America (DGA), the Canadian Union for Equality on Screen (CUES) and Women in View on Screen have commissioned reports on gender inequality within the film and/or television industries across the UK, USA, and Canada. These reports produced between 2014 and 2016 reveal similar data about the number of women directors working within the television industry

across the three countries. In the UK, between 2011-12, 13% of drama episodes were directed by women, while in Canada between 2012-13 17% of directors working on TV drama were women (but only directing 11% of the episodes produced) (Directors UK 2; *Women in View on Screen 2015* 5). In the USA, according to the DGA's 2015-16 Episodic Television Diversity Report, out of a sample of 4000 episodes drawn from 299 scripted series, 17% were directed by women.⁶ Direct UK's report went further to break down their analysis by genre and pointed out that women directors were best represented by factual programming with women directing 50% of the episodes while science-fiction and fantasy were the worst represented, with women directing 4% of the episodes within their sample (13). The report acknowledged gender stereotyping in terms of what women directors were offered with women 'more likely to direct factual programmes concerned with body issues, food, or homes' (2), while drama directors were 'unlikely to be offered sci-fi programmes or action adventure' (2).

All of the reports highlight as a particular issue, the tendency to draw directors from a list of 'known' practitioners, who can be guaranteed to deliver the episode on time and on budget. According to the Directors UK report 'people in hiring positions appear to operate with a *very* small pool of trusted experienced women directors compared with their male peers. Some companies we spoke to could not name more than a handful of woman directors. There is a lack of awareness of women candidates, and when the known, 'trusted' women were not available, those hiring tended to switch to another known (male) name' (22). Those Canadian directors interviewed as part of the CUES report made similar claims with one director quoted as saying 'that the ratio of women to men on the studio/network approved list is "handfuls versus *handful* for sure"' (2). These reports concur that often producers and network executives are unaware that the pool they are drawing from is so limited. For instance, when criticized for not hiring any women directors for seasons six and seven of *Doctor Who*, Steven Moffat explained "'Female directors and writers have a tendency to turn us down,'" Moffat tells Zap2it. "There are fewer female directors and female writers — it's a statistical fact — it's shameful but it's true. Most of the people who are desperate to do 'Doctor Who' are men" (qtd in Hayner). Since the show's return in 2005, *Doctor Who* has produced 167 episodes, only sixteen (9.58%) of which were directed by women. According to the Directors UK report, women make up 27% of their membership (4). So, while it is accurate to say that there are fewer women than men directors, the ratio of women-men directors on *Doctor Who* does not reflect this membership. Executive-

producer Marti Noxon makes similar assertions in an interview for *Variety* where she states ‘The irony is that where we’re at right now is that there aren’t enough women with enough experience to fill all the spots we’d like to at this moment, because all of a sudden there’s this charge toward diversity, but there’s been so little precedent that most of the women directors who are ready are already working’. She is however, politely, corrected by leading TV director Lesli Linka Glatter who states ‘I think you’d be surprised. There’s a much, much deeper list. There are a lot of well-experienced women directors’ (qtd in Brinbaum 12).

To begin to assess the state of play for women directors within science fiction television, I surveyed a sample of fifty-five SF series produced in the UK, Canada and the US, drawn from a mix of broadcast, basic cable, premium cable and VOD services. These fifty-five programmes have collectively produced a total of 3,256 episodes of which 289 were directed by women. The shows within this sample were largely produced post-2000 as this period marks the proliferation of channels and platforms for television drama and as such has witnessed a growth in the number of programmes that fall within a broad definition of science fiction. Acknowledging the hybridity of television, the diversity of channels and broadcast and national contexts, I have taken a wide-ranging approach to my understanding of SF, thus encouraging inclusivity rather than exclusivity. The sample is drawn from diverse sub-categories of the genre, including space operas, alien-invasion, technologically driven/’fringe’ science series, cyborg SF, time travel, dystopian visions, and superhero narratives.

I also included a small selection of series that were made (or began) pre-2000, which represent the transition from network to post-network television in the US. These included *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (US 1987-1994), *Star Trek: Deep Space 9* (US 1993-99), *Star Trek: Voyager* (US 1995-2001), *Stargate: SG-1* (1997-2007), and *The X-Files* (1993-2002). This transition not only resulted in a proliferation of SF series, but the gradual transformation of the traditional network season of between 22-24 episodes to a variety of shorter seasons. Each of these pre-2000 series were long running successful franchise productions, producing over a 100 episodes each but with little directorial contribution from women. For instance, 4.55% of the episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* were directed by women as compared to 4.05% of *ST: DS9* and 5.88% of *ST: Voyager*. The longest running series in my sample was *Stargate SG-1* which produced 213 episodes, with only one directed by a woman (0.47%). *The X-Files*

produced 207 episodes, with two directed by women (0.97%). One of the women was series star Gillian Anderson. While still relevant to this study, Anderson does not represent a career director, unlike Roxann Dawson and Angela Tapping stars of *Voyager* and *Stargate* respectively, who both began directing while acting but have since maintained careers as directors. The proliferation of SF series has contributed to increased opportunity for women to work in the genre and the shift toward shorter seasons has led to an increased proportion of women directing SF TV. In many cases the actual number of episodes directed by women may not be that different from the cases cited above, but their proportional representation is higher. For instance, *Continuum*, *Dark Matter* (Can 2015-) and *Humans* (UK 2015-) each included four episodes directed by women and while these figures represent a total of six women directors (with Amanda Tapping directing three episodes of *Continuum* and two of *Dark Matter*), they highlight different proportion of influence by women in the development of each series (see table).

In contrast, the DC superhero series produced for the CW in the USA and shot in Canada are still based on the network model of 20 – 23 episodes per season. In comparison to the pre-2000 long-running SF series, they demonstrate a movement toward a greater contribution of women directors with women directing 10.2% of *Legends of Tomorrow* (US 2016-), 10.87% of *Arrow* (US 2012-), 11.63% of *Supergirl* (US 2015-) and 15.49% of *The Flash* (US 2014-). While this is below the American industry targets, it does mark an increase from the earlier network-era SF series. *Supergirl* in particular stands out as one of very few women-centered superhero series and has a woman, Ali Adler, as co-creator, along with a high proportion of women writers. The emphasis upon diversity within its casting, its narrative focus on female relationships, primarily between Supergirl, aka Kara, and her adopted sister Alex, as well as her professional mentor Cat Grant, and its introduction of LGBTQ characters within its narrative, highlight a strong women-centered voice across multiple planes of the production from producers, writers, cast, and directors (including Lexi Alexander, Karen Gaviola, Rachel Talalay, Rebecca Johnson and Tawnia McKiernan).

The British series *Life on Mars* (2006-7), *Ashes to Ashes* (2008-10), *Fortitude* (2015-) and *Primeval* (2007-11), produced for the BBC, Sky Atlantic, and ITV, represent an established model of short seasons, usually between 8-10 episodes. These series possess a high proportion of women directors. More significantly, these women have been the lead directors on these

shows, each directing more episodes than their colleagues. S.J. Clarkson directed six episodes of *Life on Mars*.⁷ Catherine Morshead directed six episodes of *Ashes to Ashes*. Hettie MacDonald directed six of *Fortitude*, including the first three episodes of season two, thus establishing the aesthetic tone for the second season. Finally, Cilla Ware directed nine episodes of the SF action series *Primeval*, including its first three episodes, thus establishing the overall design, pace and aesthetic. In contrast, Channel Four series *Misfits* (UK 2009-13) and *Utopia* (UK 2013-15) possess a very low number of women directors, with only two women handling a total of four episodes of *Misfits* and no women directors working on *Utopia*.

At the opposite extreme is *Sense8* (US 2015-), an American series with a particular transnational identity in terms of thematic focus as well as production and reception context created by J. Michael Straczynski and transgender siblings, Lana and Lilly Wachowski. This is an authored series, with the three creators credited with writing the entire show, while 20 of the 23 episodes were directed by either Lily and/or Lana Wachowski. Of course the Wachowskis have an established history of cinema directing with a propensity for SF, having co-directed *The Matrix* (US 1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (US 2003), *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003), *Cloud Atlas* (2012) [all as the Wachowski Brothers] and *Jupiter Ascending* (2015) [as the Wachowskis]. As such, their entry into television is in a position of power drawn from their success in cinema, providing them an unusual amount of autonomy to exert authorial influence. This freedom was further enhanced by the fact that *Sense8* was produced for Netflix, the platform that utilized the Wachowski's combined drawing power, along with that of co-creator Straczynski known for *Babylon 5* (US 1994-98) and his work in comics, to increase subscription.

Table

TITLE	# OF EPISODES	# OF EPISODES DIRECTED BY WOMEN	% OF EPISODES DIRECTED BY WOMEN
<i>12 Monkeys</i>	36	2	5.56%
<i>The 100</i>	58	6	10.34%
<i>Alphas</i>	24	4	16.67%

<i>Arrow</i>	138	15	10.87%
<i>Ascension</i>	3 (mini-series)	1	3.33%
<i>Ashes to Ashes</i>	24	8	33.33%
<i>Battlestar Galactica</i>	73	2	2.74%
<i>Caprica</i>	18	1	5.56%
<i>Continuum</i>	42	4	9.52%
<i>Dark Matter</i>	39	4	10.26%
<i>The Dead Zone</i>	81	6	7.41%
<i>Doctor Who</i>	167	16	9.58
<i>Dollhouse</i>	27	3	11.11%
<i>Dominion</i>	22	2	9.09%
<i>Extant</i>	26	5	19.23%
<i>Falling Skies</i>	52	2	3.84%
<i>Firefly</i>	14	1	7.14%
<i>The Flash</i>	71	11	15.49%
<i>Fortitude</i>	21	6	28.57%
<i>Fringe</i>	100	1	10%
<i>Haven</i>	78	14	17.95%
<i>Humans</i>	16	4	25%
<i>Invasion</i>	22	0	0%
<i>iZombie</i>	45	7	15.56%
<i>Jessica Jones</i>	13 (season 1)	4	15.38%
<i>The Leftovers</i>	30	12	40%
<i>Legends of Tomorrow</i>	49	5	10.20%
<i>Life on Mars</i>	16	6	38%
<i>Lost</i>	118	4	3.39%
<i>The Man in the High Castle</i>	30	2	6.67%
<i>Marvel's Agent Carter</i>	18	2	11.11%
<i>Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D</i>	88	13	14.77%
<i>Midnight Texas</i>	10	1	10%
<i>Misfits</i>	38	4	10.53%
<i>Orphan Black</i>	50	2	4%
<i>Primeval</i>	36	9	25%
<i>Sanctuary</i>	59	4	6.78%
<i>The Sarah Jayne Adventures</i>	54	9	16.67%
<i>Sense8</i>	23	20	86.95%
<i>Stargate Atlantis</i>	99	1	1.01%
<i>Stargate SG-1</i>	213	1	0.47%
<i>Star Trek: Deep Space 9</i>	173	7	4.05%
<i>Star Trek: Enterprise</i>	98	10	10.20%
<i>Star Trek: The Next Generation</i>	176	8	4.55%
<i>Star Trek: Voyager</i>	170	10	5.88%
<i>Stranger Things</i>	17	1	5.88%
<i>Supergirl</i>	43	5	11.63%
<i>Terminator: Sarah Connor Chronicles</i>	31	2	6.67%

<i>Torchwood</i>	41	4	9.76
<i>Travelers</i>	12	3	25%
<i>Under the Dome</i>	39	4	10.25
<i>Utopia</i>	12	0	0
<i>Warehouse 13</i>	64	10	15.63%
<i>Westworld</i>	20	1	5%
<i>The X-Files</i>	207	2	0.97%

Table - Sample of Proportion of Women directing SF TV

The identification of key women directors regularly returning to SF and therefore playing a role in shaping the genre's televisual presence is, therefore, challenging, not only because of the small numbers working on these series, but also as a result of the fact that the career television director tends to work across multiple genres of TV, arguably, more fluidly oscillating between genres and directing styles than film directors. For instance Steven Moffat praises Rachel Talalay for the fluidity of her directing style "her style always shifting to fit the demands of the narrative," he says. "I'd challenge anyone to watch her four *Doctor Whos* (and now one *Sherlock*) and identify them as the work of a single director" (qtd in Collis). While Moffat sees this as a strength in Talalay's CV, and it is for a show like *Doctor Who* that requires diverse approaches to genre, the Directors UK report notes that 'women's CVs are often described as "eclectic"; a term which in this context appears to have negative connotations, suggesting a lack of a coherent career strategy, and a zig-zag career pathway. Women have taken more diverse, broad-ranging work in many instances, partly because of fewer opportunities to remain on a linear career pathway. Rather than being celebrated as evidence of flexibility and diverse ability, it is often viewed as "not focused"' (22). As such the diversity of a director's CV may be by choice or necessity. Either way, this eclecticism often prevents them from building up their genre credentials.

Despite these facts, analysis of this survey begins to identify a range of women directors who repeatedly return to SF and Fantasy genres and thus by their presence and creative contribution play a role in shaping the landscape of contemporary SF TV. Angela Tapping, who began her SF career as one of the lead actors in *Stargate: SG-1* and *Stargate: Atlantis* (CAN/US 2004-9), made her directorial debut on *SG-1* in 2004. Since then she has been a leading director of SF television in Canada, working on series such as *Sanctuary* (CAN 2008-11), as star, director and executive producer, *Primeval: New World* (CAN/UK 2013), *Continuum*, *Dark Matter*, *Van*

Helsing (US 2016-) and *Travelers* (CAN/US 2016-). Like Tapping, Roxann Dawson began her SF career as an actress, starring as the half-human/half-Klingon Lieutenant B'Elanna Torres in *Star Trek: Voyager*. While on *Voyager*, she made her directorial debut, which led to a career as a television director. She went on to direct a total of ten episodes of *Star Trek: Enterprise* (US 2001-5), and has since worked on such SF series as *Lost* (US 2004-10), *Heroes* (US 2006-10), *Caprica* (US/CAN 200-10), *Under the Dome* (US 2013-15), and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* (US 2013-). Dawson's interest in science fiction extends to her work as a writer, authoring the SF novels *The Tenebrae Trilogy*. While Holly Dale began her career as a feminist documentary filmmaker in Canada, she increasingly works in Canadian television, contributing to such series as *The Dead Zone* (CAN/US 2002-7), *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (US 2008-9), *Falling Skies* (US 2011-15), *Being Erica* (CAN 2009-11), *Extant* (US 2014-15) and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D*. Mairzee Almas is a career television director who specializes in drama, action and science fiction, working on *iZombie* (US 2015-), *Defiance* (US 2013-15), *The 100* (US 2014-), *Ascension* (CAN/US 2014-) and *12 Monkeys* (US 2015-). Each of these directors came to television along different paths, but they repeatedly return to SF as episodic directors with varying degrees of autonomy but with an eye for the genre that contributes to its increasingly popular presence on contemporary television screens.

Case Study: The Women Directors of Doctor Who

Lorna Jowett, who has written extensively on the role of gender within *Doctor Who* argues that 'the notion of authorship in the new *Doctor Who* universe is... tied up with the current market place, the reach of a global transmedia brand, the reputation of the BBC and, inevitably, the status and personae of those seen to be in creative control of a given series' (*Dancing with the Doctor* 124). As she demonstrates, the creative control has fallen within the purview of the series' showrunners Russell T. Davies (2005-2009) and Steven Moffat (2010-17). Both are lead writers but not directors by trade, although they maintain input on the visual design in their showrunning capacity.⁸ Yet it remains the director who is responsible for bringing their scripts to the television screen. As such the director engages in a creative collaboration with the writer and showrunner in their conceptualisation and actualisation of the show. While visual style is generally perceived as the expression of authorship within traditional conceptions of the subject,

television series such as *Doctor Who* highlight the collaborative nature of TV in which creativity emerges through multiple layers of production thus unsettling such notions.

Since *Doctor Who* returned to television in 2005, five women have directed sixteen out of 167 episodes. These directors are Sheree Folkson (1 episode), Catherine Morshead (2 episodes), Alice Troughton (2 episodes), Hettie MacDonald (4 episodes), and Rachel Talalay (7 episodes). Together they have directed 9.58% of the series output, putting *Doctor Who* in line with many of the American shows in my sample but well below British series such as *Primeval*, *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes*. These women represent very different backgrounds within directing and, particularly, in science fiction film and TV. Folkson is primarily a career television director working across a range of non-SF genres on series such as *Call the Midwife* (UK 2012-), *Hit and Miss* (UK 2013), and *Cassanova* (UK 2005). She has directed the feature romantic comedy *the Decoy Bride* (UK 2011) and does not, generally, specialise in science fiction, at least not too date. Catherine Morshead has an extensive background working across a wide range of classic British television, including *Emmerdale* (UK 1972-), *The Bill* (UK 1984-2010), *Shameless* (UK 2004-13) and *Downton Abbey* (UK 2010-15). Beyond directing two episodes of *Doctor Who*, her primary contribution to science fiction was via the hybrid SF/police drama *Ashes to Ashes*. In contrast, while Alice Troughton began her career as a staff director on *Doctors* (UK 2002-2004), *Holby City* (UK 1999-) and *Eastenders* (UK 1985-), she primarily directs SF and fantasy television and represents the most prominent woman director within the Who-universe, directing two episodes of *Torchwood* (UK 2006-11), nine of *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (UK 2007-11) and two of *Doctor Who*. In addition to these series, Troughton has directed for *Merlin* (UK 2008-12), *Atlantis* (UK 2013-15), *In the Flesh* (UK 2013-15), *The Flash* (US 2014-), and *Legends of Tomorrow* (US 2016-), making her an increasingly visible presence within contemporary SF television

Unlike, Folkson, Morshead and Troughton, Hettie MacDonald and Rachel Talalay both began their directing careers working in feature filmmaking before transitioning into television when they were unable to get work as a cinema director. For instance, MacDonald began her career in theatre and then moved to film by directing the feature release *Beautiful Thing* (UK 1996), a gay love story set in Thatcher's Britain. The film was warmly received by critics and festivals, and was selected for the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes, and won the best film at the

London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (1996). Despite the positive reception, this film did not translate to a career in cinema directing but rather a successful career in television. MacDonald primarily specialises in police procedural/detective series such as *Law and Order: UK* (UK 2009-), *Agatha Christie's Poirot* (UK 1989-2013), *Wallander* (UK 2008-16), and *The Tunnel* (UK/France 2013-). Her contribution to SF lay in her four episodes of *Doctor Who*, most notably the award winning 'Blink' – the first of *New Who* to be directed by a woman – and her episodes of *Fortitude*.

Talalay began her career firmly within cinema production and was mentored by cult film director John Waters. She worked as a production assistant on *Polyester* (Waters US 1981) before moving to New Line Cinema and working her way up through the ranks from accountancy to producer on *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4* (Harlin US 1988), as well as Waters' *Hairspray* (US 1988) and *Cry-Baby* (US 1990). This eventually led to her becoming a director on *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (US 1991), the sixth entry in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, followed by the low budget SF thriller *Ghosts in the Machine* (US 1993). In 1995, she made the punk feminist post-apocalyptic comedy *Tank Girl* (US 1995), one of the rare examples of an SF film directed by a woman as mentioned at the start of this article. The film, however, was a commercial failure, taking in only \$4million at the box office, despite a budget of \$25million, which made it impossible to get another film directing job. Talalay has blamed a culture of gender discrimination for her inability to overcome this hurdle, citing many male directors being given opportunities despite similar financial failures. This point is supported by her mentor John Waters who explains ‘ “Well, certainly, I failed *plenty* of times and was given another chance,” he laughs. “But the subjects that Rachel liked were not *girly* things. It wasn't like she was trying to do romantic-comedies. I mean, she liked movies that *men* would have directed: horror, and action, and everything.”’ (Collis) As a result, Talalay made the transition to television. Since then she has worked in the US, UK, and Canada as an episode TV director, as well as directing television movies. Like most TV directors, Talalay has worked across a broad range of genres but her extensive directorial credits demonstrate a significant contribution to SF and Fantasy television, directing for series such as *Supernatural* (US 2005-), *The Dead Zone* (CAN/US 2002-2007), *Flash Gordon* (US/CAN 2007-2008), *Haven* (CAN/US 2010-15), *Continuum*, *Legends of Tomorrow* and *Doctor Who*. On *Doctor Who*, Talalay has directed the third largest number of episodes on the show and is clearly emerging as one of the leading

creative personnel in the Moffat years. She has directed the final two episodes for seasons season eight, nine and ten, as well as the 2017 Christmas special which ended Peter Capaldi's years as the Doctor and introduced his replacement, Jodie Whittaker, the first female Doctor, a key moment for the series. Talalay's is an increasingly significant creative presence on this show.

It is of course not my intention to simply redirect the authorship of *Doctor Who* away from its showrunners and writers toward its directors. Instead, I aim to showcase the collaborative nature of television by highlighting the often-ignored contribution of the director to a creative mix. In particular I would like to focus on the work of MacDonald, Troughton and Talalay who have not only each directed episodes written by Moffat and Davies but these episodes, 'Blink' (9 June 2007), 'Midnight' (14 June 2008) and 'Heaven Sent' (28 Nov 2015), have often been singled out as a selection of the best work in New *Who*. In particular they have been praised for their writing and creatively attributed to their writers.

Through close analysis of the direction of these episodes, I will demonstrate how the director renders these stories televisual, and thus highlight the collaboration that is inherent between the writer and director and thus problematizing the singular perception of authorship.

'Blink', 'Midnight', and 'Heaven Sent'

While MacDonald is best associated with crime dramas, such as *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, *The Tunnel*, and *Wallander*, she is particularly adept at fusing mainstreams genres such as police investigation with genres the uncanny of SF and horror. The strength of this stylistic approach is evidenced in *Fortitude*, a European police investigation narrative set in the Arctic, that melds Scandi-noir with American procedural dramas and science fiction. Her subtle and intimate Gothic SF aesthetic disrupts the familiarity and realism of the police procedural by infusing an uncanny and unearthly edge, qualities that emerged from her first foray in *Doctor Who*, 'Blink'. As Jowett explains, "'Blink' is often cited as one of the best episodes of the new *Doctor Who*...It is also notable that while 'Blink' is a frequently praised episode, its 'authorship' is generally attributed to Moffat, the writer, and not to the director' (*Dancing with the Doctor* 149). Moffat won the BAFTA Craft and BAFTA Cymru Awards for Best script for this episode, and was nominated for a NEBULA award. The story, which revolves around an encounter with aliens who can transport their victims into the past, is based on a classic science

fiction time travel trope where characters from the future travel into the past and set events in motion that make their own future possible. It is, however, its conception of an alien race of living statues known as the Weeping Angels that can only move when they are unseen that gives MacDonald the scope for developing an intimate gothic and uncanny SF aesthetic that makes this episode stand apart from the more action-oriented stories that defined this particular season (such as ‘The Runaway Bride’ [25 Dec 2006] and ‘Daleks of Manhattan’ [21 April 2007]).

‘Blink’ was planned as a double bank episode, sometimes referred to as Doctor-lite, in which the Doctor and his companion only make fleeting appearances. The double bank is a strategy designed to help manage a demanding and short production schedule by having two crews shooting different episodes simultaneously. As a result, ‘Blink’, quite deliberately, does not look like most other *Doctor Who* episodes but instead looks like a Gothic police procedural in keeping with MacDonald’s generic repertoire. In fact, as the main protagonist Sally Sparrow (Carey Mulligan) and her best friend Cathy Nightingale (Lucy Gaskell) enter the grounds of a gothic mansion to investigate a strange event that happened to Sally the night before, Cathy notes with excitement that they are having an adventure and likens it to television mystery series:

Cathy: Okay let’s investigate. You and me, girl investigators. Love it! Hey Sparrow and Nightingale. That so works.

Sally: Bit ITV.

Cathy: I know.

Moffat’s script knowingly acknowledges the story’s generic allegiances, but it is MacDonald’s direction that fuses the TV detective with Gothic SF through her intimate, claustrophobic and gothic style. The beginning of the episode presents Sally as an investigator, trespassing onto private property and exploring an abandoned mansion. The gothic tone is established in the opening frames, on a close up of a decrepit iron gate on a dark rainy night as the camera cranes up to reveal Sally climbing over. As she walks toward the house, the camera stays outside of the fence, shooting down on her through the bars of the gate and the leaves of the tree that hang overhead. This style of framing, in which Sally is observed through objects such as bannisters, fences, windows and trees, will continue throughout the episode, creating the uncanny

suggestion of her being observed and offering a disquieting and unearthly edge to Sally and her investigation.

It is in the presentation of the Angels that MacDonald's direction is most significant, providing a gothic SF gloss to seemingly familiar and benign objects that will haunt the series in future episodes. Her composition conveys the statues' unsettling stillness while also implying the movement that is never seen. When Sally searches the old house, she finds three statues of Angels, all concealing their faces behind their hands and arms. MacDonald presents them as menacing by having Sally enter the frame in long shot surrounded by these Angels. The sequence then cuts to a series of low angle close ups of each statue, shot from the centre, reinforcing the sense of Sally being surrounded. Each of these close ups is unsettling in its composition, such as a shot of Sally, flanked by an Angel on the right, as she looks away to the left and toward one of the other Angels. The next shot is of two Angels in close up with a rack focus, shifting attention from one to another as if in anticipation of some action that is yet to come. These shots convey Sally's scrutiny of the scene but also invite the audience's investigation of the image. This is rewarded in the next shot when Sally moves toward one of the statues, briefly blocking the view of the Angel in the background before revealing that it is no longer concealing its face – a change that Sally does not see. While initially presented as mysterious, MacDonald's use of increasingly baroque composition as the episode progresses transforms the Angels into objects of horror. For instance, while waiting to speak to a Detective Inspector about her friend Cathy's disappearance, Sally spots two statues of Weeping Angels on a church outside the police station. As she looks out the window, the sequence cuts to a close up of Sally's face as the camera zooms in to an extreme close up of her eyes as they blink in slow motion. The scene cuts back to the long shot of the church and the statues are gone. The sequence ends climactically by the reveal, in a high angle long shot, of Sally, dwarfed by the oversized window frame, which is now flanked by the two weeping angels. The extreme close up of her eyes, the slowness of her blink, angle of the shot, the oversized window, and the looming Angels, are excessively presented to convey their monstrosity and, as described by Graham Sleight, 'designed with ruthless precision to drive the story and terrify children' (26). So while the Weeping Angels were the conception of Steven Moffat, the manner in which they were visualised and Gothicized through MacDonald's direction was a key factor in their being considered one of the scariest of the *Doctor Who* monsters. Furthermore MacDonald's visual

style in this episode stands as a significant contribution to the strand of Gothic SF that underpins the series.

Like 'Blink', 'Midnight', written by Russell T. Davies, was also a double bank episode although, not Doctor-lite but companion-lite. 'Midnight' takes place in one location, a space bus – the Crusader 50 – that moves through a toxic landscape where the sunlight can kill and as a result there are no windows on the ship. The threat comes in the form of a monster outside trying to get in, first by knocking on the bus' outer hull and then possessing one of the passengers, Sky Silvestri (Lesley Sharp). It takes her language and causes her to repeat what everyone is saying until she speaks in complete unison with them, eventually taking over the Doctor (David Tennant)'s speech and thus stripping him of his identity. This is an SF story that explores the worst of humanity, whose paranoia and fears of difference and the unknown lead them to turn on each other. This is a writerly piece as it is largely based upon dialogue, takes place on one set and requires a tour-de-force performance at the centre as Sharp had to learn and deliver the entire cast's dialogue with precision. Davies notes, however, that at the read-through the script 'sounded slight and unimportant and weak...Lesley synced so well with everyone – it was an astonishing performance – so it sounded interesting rather than scary. It even started to sound natural. I do worry that a thin conceit has become a whole episode' (qtd in Davies and Cook 314). Davies questions how the episode will be made to work, expressing the hope that 'maybe whacking great CUs of fearful faces will sell it' (qtd in Davies and Cook 314).

While Davies' remarks are flippant, they identify the directorial issues with this episode which are to visualize an invisible monster and make it televisually scary. Furthermore, the invisible monster within the script is twofold: it is the monster who steals words and it is the paranoia that emerges from the passengers. As such, 'Midnight' is an exercise in direction as much as writing and performance and Alice Troughton commented that she was 'terrified' by the challenges that faced her with this script, in particular how to keep the singular location interesting in terms of filming (Davies, Tennant and Troughton). Despite her anxieties the episode is exemplary of the director's job to interpret the screenwriter's work and weave the script, performance and technical elements together to create a monster without special effects while also generating an atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion so palpable as to lead the passengers to want to throw Sky and the Doctor out of the bus. Troughton began this process by

first giving up a day's filming for rehearsal time and then shooting the episode in chronological order – two practices that are unusual in television (Davies, Tennant and Troughton). This atypical approach served to establish a genuine camaraderie among the cast which translates well into the early scenes as the Doctor and the other passengers chat amicably and render the space 'quite warm...merry' (Troughton qtd in Davies, Tennant and Troughton). This approach also served to maximise the claustrophobia of the Crusader 50 set, which becomes increasingly restrictive as the episode progresses and amity turns to suspicion, paranoia and terror after the bus has broken down and Sky becomes possessed. Davies confirms that shooting the episode in this way impacted on the cast by explaining that they began 'to go stir-crazy on that Crusader 50 set. They did the monster-knocking-on-the-outside-of-the-bus scene today. Both David and Lesley texted to say, "We're scared to death!"' (qtd in Davies and Cook 314-15). The claustrophobia of the shooting environment translates on screen and emerges through the growing hysteria of the episode.

Furthermore, Troughton conveys claustrophobia through the shifting representation of space on board the bus. In the early scenes the passengers are positioned in different locations around the set and the scenes are shot with a classical style in which each scene begins and ends with a fade in and a fade out, conversations are constructed through shot reverse shot editing that visually connect the Doctor with the other passengers, and the Doctor's initial interaction with Sky is captured in an intimate medium close up, two-shot of them together, sitting side by side discussing their relationships and the pleasures and pains of travelling alone. These sequences contrast with the later scenes once the alien has possessed Sky and has synchronised her speech with theirs, the passengers cower at the back of the bus and Troughton films them, largely, in a series of isolating close ups, highlighting their close proximity and yet alienation from one another. Furthermore, the two-shot of the Doctor and Sky is recreated three more times with the now possessed Sky, first as he tests her ability to repeat and later her synchronisation with his speech, and then finally when she traps him and steals his voice. The intimacy of the first scene is now transformed into something more insidious through the echoing and synchronising of speech, accompanied by harsher spotlight that frames them in silhouette. The call-back to the first two-shot highlights her transformation, her alien nature and her increasingly hostile intent.

Troughton notes that one of the biggest challenges within the episode was to transform Sky into an alien without the use of make-up or special effects, noting that Sharp had nothing to hide behind (Davies, Tennant and Troughton). While in part this is achieved through Sharp's performance, something that Troughton says she discussed with Sharp, it was also achieved through choices of lighting, the positioning of Sharp in the frame, and the carefully constructed soundscape of her voice, as she repeats all of the dialogue. For instance, the revelation that Sky has been taken over by the alien is revealed after she is found crouching in the dark, alone at the front of the bus. Filmed with her back to the camera, casting an expressionist-style shadow on the wall, she is coaxed into turning around. As she slowly turns the camera dollies in from a medium shot to a close up, stopping as her face is revealed and she looks up into the spotlight. Her unblinking eyes and sharp, lizard-like head movements as she looks from person to person, her mimicking of the Doctor's head tilts, and her repetition of his dialogue present her as 'alien'. Later, as the other passengers recoil from her behaviour, she remains crouched in the corner and is repeatedly framed in the background of the shot, as she speaks the dialogue in complete synchronisation with each passenger, a haunting visual and aural presence that fuels the group's paranoia and fear. Through the subsequent montage of close ups of the passengers as they begin to panic, intercut with shots of Sky, Troughton conveys the transformation of the group into a primitive mob, quick to turn on each other. So while Davies' narrative weaves a story of paranoia, it is the manner in which Troughton presented the story that makes that paranoia palpable and affective, or as Troughton explains, 'severely disturbing'. As the audio-commentary with Russell T Davies, David Tennant and Alice Troughton on the DVD indicates, this episode exemplifies the collaborative creativity between writer, director, cast and crew to pull this episode together into a masterful and experimental piece of SF TV.

Having previously directed science fiction films and expressed her genre fandom, Rachel Talalay has been very open about her desire to work on *Doctor Who* from the point of its revival in 2005:

"The minute I watched it, I called my U.K. agent and said, 'I need to do this show,' " she recalls. Talalay met with *Who* producers on a couple of occasions, but to no avail. In between, she sharpened her fantasy and sci-fi chops, directing episodes of *Supernatural* and Syfy's *Haven*. Finally, as the *Who* team was gearing up to shoot the 2014 season,

Talalay put together a reel of visual F/X and action scenes she had directed and sent it to executive producer Brian Minchin. Impressed, Minchin and his fellow EP, head writer Steven Moffat, hired her to direct the two-part season finale (qtd in Collis).

Her experience of working in the genre, her ability to foster the intimacy of character-driven TV and her confidence in handling special effects and action sequences has made her ideally suited to contributing to, and shaping, the Who universe. Peter Capaldi points that that

“There are a lot of people directing, but very few are really special,” says the actor.

“Rachel is. She will get the best out of any scene – technically, dramatically, visually, and emotionally – and is wonderfully collaborative to work with. She excels at getting beauty and drama to flourish in our punishing schedules, not a task for the timid or mean-spirited, and has the heart and eye of an edgy smart artist.” (qtd in Collis)

In contrast to ‘Midnight’ and ‘Blink’, ‘Heaven Sent’ was not a double bank episode but rather the penultimate episode within the ninth season and the one directly following the ‘death’ of the doctor’s long-time companion Clara Oswald (Jenna Colman). It therefore holds a pivotal position in the ninth season, bridging the gap between the emotion of Clara’s death (‘Face the Raven’ 21 Nov 2015) and the series finale (‘Hell Bent’ 5 Dec 2015) and exploring the grief felt by the Doctor (Peter Capaldi) that fuels his actions in the final episode. Its thematic centrality provided space for a more experimental approach, and so, like ‘Midnight’, it broke with many televisual conventions and raised particular challenges for the writer, actor and director. What makes this episode stand apart is that the Doctor is alone, raising challenges for Capaldi’s performance but also for the writer, to narratively justify the inclusion of dialogue when he is by himself, and for the director to make it televisually interesting and not purely a lengthy voice over or a theatrical soliloquy.

The story takes place in a labyrinthine castle surrounded by an ocean, to which the Doctor has been teleported where he is being stalked by a veiled spectre (‘the Veil’). Clues to the meaning and purpose of his enclosure are scattered throughout the building and a substantial portion of the narrative is constructed around him working out where he is and why he is there, while avoiding certain death at the hands of the Veil. He eventually works out that he has been there for 7,000 years and has repeatedly been killed by the Veil, only to start the whole process

again by switching on the teleporter, which still holds a copy of him in its hard drive, before burning to dust as another copy of the Doctor is teleported to the castle. The final twelve minutes of the episode is a slowly building montage of his *Groundhog Day*-style repetition of the same attempts to work out where he is and uncover his means of escape from the castle, while millions, eventually billions, of years pass. The narrative is characteristic in its complexity of Moffat's work but Talalay brings gravitas and an epic scale to the production through lush visual design and dynamic camera movements, necessary to convey the terror of the castle and drive home the episode's overwhelmingly bleak conclusion.

This episode is ideally suited to Talalay's experience, integrating action and special effects with intimate, character-based drama as the Doctor confronts his grief for Clara's death and his fear of dying. As he walks down the corridor of the castle, confidently declaring war on whomever brought him there, Talalay shoots the scenes with a Steadicam, retreating before him and conveying his command of the situation. That is until he sees the Veil, a cloaked figure of decay surrounded by flies, at which point he begins to run, acknowledging his fear of death and desperate desire to avoid it. Talalay contrasts the steady pursuit of the Veil, which does not change its speed, with the manic retreat of the Doctor as he runs down the corridor, captured in fast paced, often hand-held cinematography. This aesthetic oscillation between contemplative slow visuals and manic action visualizes the Doctor's opening narration in which he observes that from the day we are born we are being pursued by something that will never stop: 'never faster, never slower. Always coming. You will run. It will walk. You will rest, it will not'. This statement underpins the aesthetic dynamic of the episode (integrating script and visual design) as the spectre is a consistent presence to which Talalay returns, like a steady beat beneath the action. The Doctor fluctuates from manic pursuit of answers, depicted as fast pace action such as the Doctor leaping out of a window, plummeting to the ocean floor, before suddenly bursting into his Tardis, to periods of contemplation and realisation, like the image of him sinking to the bottom of the ocean floor and seeing it covered in thousands of skulls – his skulls. These images are haunting and Talalay returns to the shot of the skull repeatedly in the final montage asserting the Doctor's mortality alongside his flagrant denial of death through repeated regenerations. This episode is an ideal embodiment of the collaborative nature of quality SF television, bringing together Moffat's script, Capaldi's performance, Murray Gold's sweeping musical score all woven together through Talalay's direction.

When considered together, these three episodes highlight the role of the director within the collaborative production of television, as all three directors worked in tandem with showrunners Davies and Moffat, as well as a wide range of artists, actors and technicians. They also stand as evidence of the individual contributions of MacDonald, Troughton and Talalay to SF television through their direction of three highly acclaimed episodes. The aesthetic challenges they faced as directors were quite different, from making monsters that do not move scary to shooting an entire episode in one location with an invisible monster to dramatically visualising an episode that spans billions of years and is structured as a long sustained monologue. The issues that emerge from these plots are unique as are the directors' stylistic flourishes. As such these directors, and their work on *Doctor Who*, is an effective indicator of the creative contribution by women to SF television and as representative of a slowly growing number of women working in this capacity.

Conclusion

Authorship on television is still largely male dominated, particularly in relation to science fiction. As I have shown, however, this is in part because of the focus within academic, industry and fandom of locating authorship within a singular figure, adhering to a romantic notion of the sole artist that is not in keeping with the creative collaboration that underpins the television industry. When one expands the analysis to other creative production roles, there is an increasing – if still restricted – number of women who shape the face of a growing SF TV landscape. While my survey of post-millennial science fiction TV confirms industry concerns over the gender imbalance within leading production roles like director, it has also signalled a shift toward a growing proportion of women directing SF television, albeit largely caucasian women thus highlighting continued issues for women of colour in the industry. This move has been facilitated by the reduction of the number of episodes and industry pressure to increase diversity within cast and crews. The survey also identified a broad array of women directors working within contemporary TV, building a portfolio of science fiction work. These women provide key creative voices within the science fiction landscape. My analysis of *Doctor Who* in particular highlights the way in which women directors, who are often side lined by fans, industry and academia in favour of male writer/producer, have been responsible for bringing flagship episodes to the screen, interpreting and adapting the written word into the televisual form that made them

effective and affective. By acknowledging their contribution to these episodes, my aim has been to first destabilize traditional notions of authorship in television that render women directors as invisible; secondly to provide indicative examples of the creative contribution women are making to SF television; and finally, to begin identifying a canon of women SF creators in television.

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¹ The statistics in the *Variety* article are based upon the figures provided by five broadcast networks: ABC, Fox, CBS, NBC, CW

² One could also look at the contribution of women writers to SF television, including Jane Espensen, Laura Collini, Elizabeth Craft and Sarah Fain, but that would be a project in its own right and is beyond the scope of this article.

³ While the television industries in the UK, USA and Canada possess distinct industrial and creative practices, TV is becoming increasingly transnational in terms of production personnel and audience consumption. Many of the women in my survey regularly work in Canada, the USA and the UK and as such an overview of the role of women directors within contemporary English language SF TV benefits from the inclusion of programmes from across these three territories. The fact that the Directors Guilds of all three countries have produced reports highlighting the issues facing women directors signals notable connections that are worth pursuing.

⁴ It is important to note that authorship within cinema is a similarly contested area in part because, like television, it is a collaborative medium. Much research has been done to explore the contributions of other figures within film production such as Schatz on the studio system and studio producers and Richard Corliss on the screenwriter. It is not, however, within the space of this article to discuss the role of authorship within cinema.

⁵ In the same interview, Talalay notes a significant difference between British and American Television 'in North American television, you get three days to edit, then they kick you out and do whatever they want. In the UK? Although the schedule is shorter than a feature, you are *absolutely* treated like the director. And it's very much why I prefer working in the UK. The director is respected' (Brew 2014).

⁶ These reports also illustrate an even greater disparity of directors of colour. While there are some women of colour who are working within the industry as directors, a large proportion of women directors are Caucasian. It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article to examine the role of women of colour within SF television and would suggest that this is an subject for further research.

⁷ S.J. Clarkson was also the lead director on the first season of *Jessica Jones*, directing the first two episodes and thus setting the stylistic tone for the show.

⁸ At the time of writing Chris Chibnall has yet to take over as showrunner for *Doctor Who*.