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The Outer Limits, by Joanne Morreale. Wayne State University Press, 2022, 132 pp.

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Netflix's *Black Mirror* (2011–present) is often compared to *The Twilight Zone* (1959–1964) for its thoughtful science fiction (SF) commentary on contemporary society. Yet, as Joanne Morreale shows in her excellent study of *The Outer Limits* (1963–1965), it might be with that less well-known SF series that *Black Mirror* should be compared. The confusion that often occurs between episodes from *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits* highlights the many similarities between the two series, with the former's success paving the way for the latter. Morreale's concise book, the latest in the TV Milestones series by Wayne State University Press, can only help bring back into the spotlight a series which over the decades has been unfairly living in the shadow of *The Twilight Zone*.

Initially titled *Please Stand By*, *The Outer Limits* was, as the author shows, "more firmly rooted in science fiction" than Rod Serling's series, although the book also regularly returns to the series' gothic and noir trappings (4). Like *The Twilight Zone*, however, the series was geared towards offering audiences "fantastical worlds in order to comment upon the real world" (2). This is what the showrunners made clear in the "Canons", or what today would be called the "bible" of the series: *The Outer Limits* was intended to be "a one-hour, dramatic television series whose dramas are woven upon the inventive and imaginative loom of Science Fiction" (3). The showrunners took the science fiction genre seriously, addressing themes as varied as conformity, discrimination, politics, censorship, mass culture, state surveillance, and anti-communist hysteria. As Morreale makes clear in the introduction and throughout the book (sometimes at the price of repetition), *The Outer Limits* stood out from regular fare from the time (or since) by offering bleak narratives conveying "an atmosphere of pervasive dread" meant to disrupt and unsettle audiences rather than reassure them and put them in the right mindset for commercials (5).

This is important as Morreale establishes in the introduction how the two creative forces behind the show, Leslie Stevens (the show's creator, executive producer and occasional writer and director) and Joseph Stefano (producer and occasional writer), had immense artistic ambitions for the series. Stevens was a successful playwright who wrote the screenplay for *The Left-Handed Gun* (Arthur Penn, 1958), which was adapted from Gore Vidal's original teleplay, and wrote and directed the well-regarded feature *Private Property* (1960). That low-budget film, which *Film Quarterly* at the time denounced as "shaded pornography" (Jackson 47), and which "terribly depressed" the Kennedys when they watched it (Schlesinger 81), drew its inspiration from the French New Wave and established Stevens' credentials as a promising auteur (6). As for Stefano, he had written the screenplay for Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), and both made clear their ambitions to draw from auteur cinema to offer thought-provoking, artistically ambitious fare. Such ambition, however, fatally ran counter to the business logic

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prevailing at the network, and one of the book's great accomplishments is its skilful contextualisation of the show against the backdrop of early 1960s television and society.

Chapter One, "Highbrow Meets Lowbrow", discusses the industrial context, as television was undergoing major transformations at the time. After its first so-called "Golden Age" in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the TV industry, still based in New York, was looking towards radio and theatre as inspiration for prestige live action dramas, the focus was switching to Hollywood and to a more overtly commercial business model. Whereas early SF shows like *Tales of Tomorrow* or *Science Fiction Theatre* were shot and broadcast live and relied on cast and crews from theatre, increasingly the networks were moving away from the paternalistic model of giving audiences "edifying" productions with cultural value and toward more formulaic, industrialised shows that emphasised entertainment at the expense of drama. This meant that writers, who had until then enjoyed a great level of autonomy, were now increasingly expected to fall into line and follow the networks' advertising-friendly edicts. This also explains why, as stressed by Morreale, writers like Stevens (who described himself as a "creative dramatist") formed their own production companies and became in turn directors and producers (7). Stevens himself explained his reasoning, in one of many enlightening quotes in the book: "Basically, I'm a writer. I became a director to protect the writer, and I became a producer to protect both of them, and a company owner to protect them all" (25). Moreover, because science fiction tended to be seen as a juvenile-oriented genre, writers felt they had more latitude to use its tropes to covertly address real-world issues like anti-communist paranoia; this was a well-known strategy used by many SF writers and showrunners since (for example, *Battlestar Galactica*'s take on the War on Terror in the early 2000s).

Chapter Two discusses specific episodes of the show in terms of their connection to "noir science" and "gothic science fiction". The author offers excellent visual analyses of key scenes in representative episodes to illustrate how cinema and theatre influenced the series' "televisuality" (33). In "Nightmare"—featuring a young Martin Sheen—chiaroscuro lighting, disorienting camera angles, deep focus shots, off-centre placement of figures, distorted set designs and special effects are all put to use to create an example of noir science fiction (34–35). The episode subverts Cold War stories like *The Manchurian Candidate* and is a good demonstration of the series' critical, if not subversive, perspective on Cold War politics.

"The Bellero Shield" episode, relying on "the experience of terror associated with horror" (42), uses gothic tropes such as a tomb-like wine cellar where a murder has just taken place, an isolated mansion in which heavy curtains create oppressive shadows and the scientific laboratory inside the home, undermining its harmony, "to explore the theme of the shadow side of human nature" (42).

Taking place entirely in the home and revolving around family dynamics, the episode is read by Morreale (with good reason) as dealing with stifling patriarchy and domestic containment of the wife at the centre of the narrative. However, partly because the episode is so reminiscent of *Macbeth*, Morreale ultimately concludes that it "undercuts its own feminist message" by making the female character the real monster of the episode (53).

Chapter Three continues to offer excellent close textual analyses of episodes, this time to identify the ways in which they addressed Cold War tensions typical of the 1950s and the 1960s dream of the New Frontier of science and space. To do so Morreale works on three episodes. The first, "The Galaxy Being", starring Cliff Robertson, was in fact the pilot episode of the series. This is probably why the episode (written and directed by Stevens) gives so much

prominence to a television set, in which an alien being is imprisoned and from which it subsequently escapes. As pointed out by the author, the idea of losing control over television transmissions is a good idea for the first episode and illustrates the show's self-reflexive nature, as shown by its weekly intro sequence. Although Morreale never uses the term, the episode is also a good example of humanist science fiction, in the mould of Jack Arnold's films in the 1950s: the scientist and the alien, both scientific dreamers willing to break the rules in the interests of science and communication, are essentially the victims of social constrictions and the military's trigger-happy paranoia.

"O.B.I.T." focuses on a U.S. Defense Department surveillance machine that can observe anyone at anytime and anywhere. The story works to demonstrate all the issues raised by such omnipresent invasion of privacy, until the final twist reveals that an alien conspiracy aims to weaken America from the inside by fostering fear, distrust, and paranoia everywhere—anti-Communist witch-hunting is ironically shown to be the very way of sapping America's foundations. At the same time mise-en-scène continues to work effectively to reinforce the narrative, as with the final shot, a high-angle, omniscient god's-eye view shot which connotes continued surveillance, and paranoia, in the foreseeable future (69).

Finally, "The Architects of Fear", starring Robert Culp, is another interesting episode as it slowly turns the lead character's wife into the protagonist. Morreale's reading of the episode might be too generous, however, as the wife is still associated with values of domesticity, love, and caring that are contrasted with the male hubristic technocrats. This is to be expected given the times, but also makes clear how *The Outer Limits* is indeed a product of its era, most notably when it comes to gender dynamics (as already made clear by *The Bellero Shield*). Morreale is so keen on emphasising the show's critical and subversive nature that this simple observation is sometimes overlooked.

Chapter Four is a fascinating look at *The Outer Limits* from the theoretical framework of adaptation studies. The author discusses accusations of plagiarism aimed at James Cameron's first *Terminator* (1984), which Harlan Ellison claimed copied the episode (entitled "Soldier") that he had written for the series. Likewise, Alan Moore's comic book *Watchmen* (1986–87) was accused of ripping off "The Architects of Fear." Although the two works did indeed clearly draw from the show, Morreale is right to point out that, as Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, or Linda Hutcheon have memorably shown, the intertextual connections between hypo- and hyper-texts form an infinite, complex and ultimately fascinating web. Morreale focuses on *The Outer Limits*' own hypotexts, highlighting, for example, how much the series drew from the same pool of writers as *Alfred Hitchcock Presents, Thriller* or, inevitably, *The Twilight Zone.* She discusses Charles Beaumont, a prolific contributor to *The Twilight Zone* (writing twenty-two episodes for that show) who submitted a script for *The Outer Limits* that was deemed to be too similar to one of these earlier stories. The story was thus rewritten by Donald S. Sanford, who himself had written no less than fifteen episodes for *Thriller*, from which he drew inspiration for the new version of the script, as shown by Morreale (the episode in question, discussed at length, is *The Guest*s).

Finally, Morreale also uses Chapter Four as an opportunity to return to Stevens and Stefano's roots in cinema and their desire to draw from auteur and foreign films. Her case study here is "The Forms of Things Unknown", which, as she shows, draws very heavily from Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (the episode is even set in France). Fittingly, this is the last episode of the first season of the series and of the Stevens/Stefano era. Unhappy with pressures from the network, both quit the show and had nothing or little to do with season two, which

unsurprisingly resembles more closely a traditional TV series. This explains why Morreale chose not to take that season into account in the book. These departures justify her choice, although it should be noted that season two still features some of the series' most popular episodes. This is most notably the case of "Demon With a Glass Hand," co-written by Harlan Ellison, who received a Writer's Guild Award for best screenplay for that episode.

The last chapter examines the influence of *The Outer Limits* over the decades. This chapter is less convincing and the argumentation somewhat strained, as the series was perhaps less influential than the author is willing to admit. In the case of the original *Star Trek*, for example, the discussion consists mostly in showing how the two shows shared some of the same writers and staff, props and practical effects. *The X-Files* is also mentioned, although the author discusses mostly similarities rather than influences, such as moody atmospherics, a humanist view of monsters, or a reliance on horror (*The X-Files* was largely influenced by *Kolchack: The Night Stalker*). This is also where Morreale finally discusses the 1990s continuation of the show, also called *The Outer Limits,* which was produced in the wake of the success of *The X-Files.* She is right to analyse that show as an "exercise in branding" since producers mostly used the same title (and a similar opening) to create a series that was very different from the original proposition (4). However, Morreale is unduly harsh in regarding the new series as a cynical cash grab and as "moralistic" because it aimed to reassure viewers, the way commercial television often does, rather than jolting them out of their moral comfort zone. To prove her point she compares an episode of the original version ("A Feasibility Study") and its 1990s remake ("Feasibility Study"). However, there were many other, and much better, episodes which have the kind of commentary—and ending—which she defines as true to the spirit of the original. An excellent episode like "Trial by Fire", for example, also criticises hostile, war-like assumptions about other beings (it was co-written by Stevens, although he is not credited). Another episode of the new series, "Afterlife", also co-written by Stevens, could have fruitfully been compared to "The Architects of Fear" since their stories and morals are similar. Morreale finally discusses *Black Mirror*, whose opening sequence does recall in its self-reflexivity that of *The Outer Limits.* But she oddly chooses to focus on the episode "USS Callister", even though it so clearly is (by her own admission) a satire of *Star Trek* and its fandom. Here again she is discussing similarities, without demonstrating how one series actually influenced the other.

Overall, this is an excellent study of an excellent TV series, which can only help entice audiences and scholars to divert some of the enormous attention they still devote to *The Twilight Zone* to probe the many rewarding depths of Leslie Stevens and Joseph Stefano's fascinating oeuvre.

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