

# TELEVISION IN TRANSITION

*The Life and Afterlife of the  
Narrative Action Hero*

*Shawn Shimpach*

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication



# TELEVISION IN TRANSITION



# TELEVISION IN TRANSITION

*The Life and Afterlife of the  
Narrative Action Hero*

*Shawn Shimpach*

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2010

© 2010 Shawn Shimpach

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

*Registered Office*

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

*Editorial Offices*

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at [www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell](http://www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell).

The right of Shawn Shimpach to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Shimpach, Shawn.

Television in transition : the life and afterlife of the narrative action hero/Shawn Shimpach.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-8536-3 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-1-4051-8535-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Heroes on television. 2. Action and adventure television programs—United States—History and criticism. 3. Action and adventure television programs—Great Britain—History and criticism.

I. Title.

PN1992.8.A317S55 2010

791.45'652—dc22

2010002110

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12.5pt Galliard by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

Printed in Singapore

1 2010

*Lily, now we can play with the toys*





# CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	viii
Introduction: The Time and Space of Television in Transition	1
1 Television in Transition	14
2 The Hero	30
3 How to Watch Television	48
4 <i>Highlander</i> : The Immortal Cosmopolitan	66
5 <i>Smallville</i> : “No Flights, No Tights”: Doing Business with Superman	94
6 <i>24</i> : In Real Time	125
7 <i>Doctor Who</i> : Regeneration through Time and (Relative Dimensions in) Space	152
Conclusion: Do We Need Another Hero?	179
<i>Notes</i>	190
<i>References</i>	209
<i>Index</i>	227

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book emerges from an excitement and fascination about the contemporary television industry and textual practices developed and nurtured over the years I have been fortunate enough to teach various television studies, media studies, and history of electronic media courses. I am gratefully indebted to the many wonderful students who have listened to, challenged, motivated, and informed me at NYU, WUSTL, and UMass. For early support of these teaching opportunities and indeed for their very possibility, I especially thank Richard Allen, William Simon, Chris Straayer, David Irving, Paul Thompson, James Gardner, William Paul and Jeff Smith. Invaluable assistance with teaching these courses was also provided to me by Anne Harris, Cathy Holter, Vinicius Navarro, Talitha Espiritu, Juan Monroy, and Jonathon Graas.

A particular thank you to Toby Miller for continuing to provide all manner of guidance, support, sage advice, and sharp wit, well beyond the call of duty. For support, comments, insights, and all kinds of crucial inspiration, I thank Gianpaolo Baiocchi, Paula Chakravartty, Christopher Kamrath, Anna McCarthy, John McMurria, and Cheryl and Duane Shimpach. This book could not have been completed in so timely a fashion without the motivation and feedback provided by the Junior Faculty Writing Group: thanks so much Martha Fuentes-Bautista, Claudio Moreira, Demetria Shabazz, and Emily West. Thanks also to Robin Anderson, David Avishay, Chris Boulton, Alison Brzenchek, Sean Dubois, Michael S. Duffy, Matthew Fee, Matthew Ferrari, Roger Hallas, Fadia Hasan, Danny Kim, Zachary McDowell, Gamze Onut, Pia Pandelakis, Lin Shi, Louisa Stein, Ann Stewart and Rachel Thibault. For research assistance, I thank Rachel Miller, Jung-Yup Lee, and Haijing Tu, as well as Leda Cooks and Jarice Hanson for making it possible.

For memorable conversations, unparalleled intellectual enthusiasm, and generously offering both the right reasons and just the right attitude for moving forward, I gratefully acknowledge and thank Anca Romantan: irreplaceable and unforgettable, she is achingly missed.

Invaluable (not to mention remarkably efficient and rapid) copyediting and formatting was performed on this manuscript by Jennifer Acker. Her work here was made possible with the support of the Mellon Mutual Mentoring Micro-Grant Program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I thank the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Office of Faculty Development, especially Mary Deane Sorcinelli, Jung Yun, and Lily Ladewig.

An earlier version of much of Chapter Four appeared in *Cultural Studies* vol. 19, No. 3 May 2005, pp. 338–371 as “The Immortal Cosmopolitan: The International Co-production and Global Circulation of *Highlander: The Series*.” Kind thanks are due to that publication and publisher Taylor & Francis for allowing the revised, updated use here.

Thank you also to Carmel McPherson for her interest, support, organization, specialized knowledge and for providing unbelievable access. Many fond thanks to the terrific participants and attendees at the Highlander World Wide 8 (HLWW8) convention in Vancouver, who graciously invited me to participate and received me with warmth and enthusiasm. Thank you to the members of the listserv HIGHLA-L for allowing me to lurk and learn all these years as well as the many fan-produced websites I have feasted on in the writing of this book.

A special thank you to David Abramowitz for taking time to answer my questions with his wisdom and insights; to Ken Gord for taking an interest in this work and committing thoughtful, informative, and witty at-length answers to email; and to Adrian Paul for reading “The Immortal Cosmopolitan!”

This book would never have come together without the early interest and sustained support, crucial critical feedback, considered advice, and continued encouragement provided by Jayne Fagnoli who served, along with Margot Morse, at Wiley-Blackwell, as my guide through the specificities, peculiarities, surprises, and joys of publishing a book.

Peer reviews throughout the process of writing this manuscript have been invaluable, making the book you are holding much smarter, clearer, and more insightful than it otherwise would have been, thanks to my anonymous reviewers. Nitin Govil deserves (and has) my abundant gratitude for his generous response to this manuscript and the extended time

and enthusiasm he committed to reading, thinking, correcting, and encouraging its improvement. If this book proves less than a “crucial intervention” it is through no fault of his, only mine.

Thank you Lily and Charlotte for your curiosity, your *joie de vivre*, and especially your patience. Finally this book simply would not have been possible without the boundless support, sympathy, sacrifice, patience, motivation, transcription, speed-reading, and practicality provided (usually) with good humor and indulgence by the simply wonderful, completely incomparable Elizabeth Horn. Thank you.

# INTRODUCTION

## *The Time and Space of Television in Transition*

*The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel. (William Gibson, Neuromancer)*

From a few national broadcasters to hundreds of digital channels and from a box in the living room to screens of every size, everywhere, television does not mean what it once did. This book is about both the transformations and the continuities in recent television programming as an industry reorganizes itself around changing economic, institutional, and technological conditions. Global economic shifts, regulatory liberalization, and myriad technological changes have redefined television and its cultural role. For more than two decades popular and scholarly discourse on convergence, new media, and technology has been busy predicting the utter demise of television, imagining the ways it will dissolve into new technologies and cultural practices. And yet, more than a quarter-century after William Gibson's novel helped popularize the word "cyberspace," it has become more difficult than ever to even picture the color of a *dead* television channel, so ubiquitous and plentiful is TV programming. Less enchanted by the imagination of what comes after television than with the stubborn persistence of what remains on television and the telling (if at times admittedly desperate) strategies used to keep it there, this book seeks to interrogate the conditions and practices of contemporary television culture.

It is of course true that television is and always has been in transition. Little about television ever remains static, from images on the screen to seasonal programming schedules, from personnel to labor agreements, and from technology to regulatory schemes. Indeed the history of the television industry is filled with moments of transition experienced as crises, replete with dire predictions, panicked rhetoric and a shuffling

## 2 Introduction

of personnel and practices. The current crisis in television's transition, however, is increasingly registered well beyond the industry itself, with popular media, public discourse, and even casual viewers noting changes in the experience and meaning of television. New institutional and narrative strategies are emerging to compensate for and capitalize on these changes. *Television in Transition* argues that this particular transition is in fact symptomatic of a more seismic shift in the institutional practices of a television industry increasingly concerned not only with the small screen but also with the whole world and multiple media outlets. This book analyzes a series of specific case studies to reveal the spatial (transnational) and temporal (transmedia) assumptions that increasingly constitute the prerequisites for television production, circulation, and even viewing.

Since its start broadcast television has operated with the twin strategies of expanding space and containing time. The broadcast networks strived for the largest spatial reach (most affiliates, strongest signals, etc.) while enforcing the temporal simultaneity and ephemerality of the programming they broadcast. If the very earliest television technologies made "liveness" a requisite, ensuring that viewing was limited to the time (and duration) of the broadcast, the enforcement of such strictures soon became entirely artificial. Such temporal restriction was crucial to the economy of scarcity upon which broadcasting was premised (tune in on Channel 4 at 8:00 or you will miss it, maybe forever). This economy of scarcity placed a premium on (limited) access to broadcast programming, allowing broadcasters – both commercial and public service – a means of managing the risk and unpredictability of audiences. If the audience was to see the programming at all, they could tune their receivers to one channel and gather in front of their screens at one time.

The transition in television described by this book is actually the prolonged acquiescence by the established television industry to institutional changes in this relationship to time and space. For the largest broadcast networks, spatial reach has practically reached its limits with the global saturation of potential audiences in television signals. Therefore industry competitors can no longer claim the advantage of reaching into more homes than one another, nor can they continue to expand their market geographically (at least not into new markets not already saturated in television). Space is saturated. The artificial scarcity of programming imposed through temporal limitations, meanwhile, has

been superseded or circumvented by deregulated competition and consumer technology. Time must therefore be expanded. The drawn-out response to these changing conditions by television programmers has been the increasing assumption of spatial saturation in combination with growing temporal expansion (see it first on Channel 4 at 8:00, then again on Saturday, then on cable, then online, then on DVD, etc., etc.). The economy of scarcity that informed all levels of programming decisions is being haltingly replaced by an economy of abundance. Where once access to a program was carefully timed and that time greedily delimited in order to make the program valuable and draw an audience, new strategies for gathering audiences are characterized by the ubiquity of distribution across space and time.

Of course both the scarcity and the abundance are perceived from the television audience member's point of view; the industry has rarely suffered a scarcity of programming, only imposed it. Moreover, to characterize this on-going transition this way is not to suggest that viewer access to programming has become unencumbered or without cost or that television industry intellectual property holders and distributors do not profit from new means of distribution. Instead it suggests that the space and time considerations upon which television's institutional practices have been premised are changing, impacting first and foremost the established broadcast network practices for gathering (and for commercial outlets, selling) an audience. It is for this immediate reason that, for the television industry, such a dramatic transformation in the conception of the purpose and practice of the time and space of television programming has been experienced as a crisis, catalyzing change in institutionalized practices. For viewers, meanwhile, it is at a minimum clear that programming is changing in response. It seems to be asking for new and different forms of "attention" from viewers, offering, on one hand, blazingly eye-catching aesthetic and iconographic imagery to stand out from the clutter and attract momentary attention, thumb poised over the remote. At the same time, programming has become intriguingly complicated in its formal and narrative structure, asking the curious for their sustained and focused attention. Meanwhile, this same programming has expanded into multiple, technologically new media outlets where viewer attention is characterized by both self-motivation and intersubjective engagement. For the viewer, too, then, television is in transition.

#### 4 *Introduction*

The programming intended to accommodate, even capitalize upon, these changing spatial and temporal relations has accordingly seen both its commercial and its semiotic value changed. Programming must now be designed to travel, both spatially and temporally, as never before. The commercial value of programming is no longer based on its temporal scarcity (now available across so much media, so readily time-shifted), but instead on its ability to “translate” to new spatial geographies (different nations, different broadcast systems, different cultures; and also different formats, different distribution outlets, different screen sizes, etc.). At the same time, the commercial value of programming must be durable, sustain interest, and continue to gather an audience over the time it takes to travel through these spaces. Together, these new criteria place an emphasis on the value of a program’s “afterlife,” the continued circulation, repackaging, and repurposing of programming beyond its initial iteration.

As a result the very definition of television programming has transformed. Conceived of within the industry as intellectual property with brand potential, programming is no longer simply the content of broadcasting, but instead has become best understood as a textual form disseminated across a multiplicity of viewing and institutional engagements. Any given television channel has become just one way to see (part of) the program on offer. Amid the constantly shifting relations between the constituent units within media conglomerates, this has altered the balance between distribution outlets (control over any one or even several of which is now less significant) and control of intellectual property rights (which attach across different outlets, over space and through time). As the televisual economy transitions from scarcity to abundance, the pressure is on intellectual property to carry spatial abundance (ubiquity) and temporal abundance (afterlife) through this new relationship between industry and viewers. Giving such property life and value is the newly imagined role of television narrative.

As the television industry seeks to balance various degrees of audience investment, from the occasional to the cultish, across these transforming paradigms of time and space, it is nonetheless important to understand this programming not simply as a reflection of the industry’s anxiety about these changes (even while, on one level, indeed, it is), but also as narratives featuring characters that attract the (even if sometime only fleeting) interest, imagination, as well as avid fandom of millions of people around the world. These are narratives that offer occasions for various and distinct modes of identification – including dis- and counter-identification – and



spectatorial pleasures. Even as they engage and sustain newly imagined forms of viewer attention, narrative remains the site of affect and interpretation well in excess of industry needs or control.

Building on traditions in television studies from Raymond Williams' theorization of "flow" to John Caldwell's concept of "televisuality," *Television in Transition* therefore proceeds with the understanding that the form of television is inextricable from the industrial infrastructure of media production and distribution. This book intends to integrate methodological approaches too often kept apart by treating the commodity sign of television programming as both an institutionally-derived cultural object and a culturally meaningful narrative. To adequately account for television programming during this period of transition and redefinition, this book examines specific examples of the regulatory, institutional, and economic relations that constitute the contemporary television industry. Such an approach goes a great distance in terms of explaining television's role (both globally and locally) in the economic and political landscape – why it is the way it is, why it tells some stories and does not tell others, how it strives to persist. Yet this approach fails to address why anyone would watch television in the first place; the pleasures and frustrations to be found and what television programming means as it travels around the globe and into people's homes, mobile devices, and lives. These considerations require an approach sensitive to the cultural and textual practices of television, how it signifies and what meanings and indeed affect it may offer. This book seeks to account for the peculiar biography of the contemporary television commodity as it travels through space and time by combining both of these approaches, the institutional and the textual. This study argues for and demonstrates the need to blend institutional and political economic analysis of contemporary television with textual and cultural readings of television programming. Televisual texts are treated as sites of both fact and interpretation. This is accomplished not with recipes for television study but with specific, concrete examples that provide telling models of an integrated approach to text and institution that does not simply reduce one to an effect of the other. In this way the epochal transformations in the television industry can be understood in terms of the site that matters most for most people: the programming. But the programming that arrives on the screen is at the same time understood in the context of the route it took to get there. Such an approach seeks to offer a new account of how innovation takes place within the television industry's management of predictability, risk, and familiarity.

## 6 *Introduction*

Innovation has certainly characterized this era of television in transition with the rise of new forms and focus in much of television's programming. Were this to be an all-encompassing survey, or even a comprehensive summary of the era's major programming trends, it would need to substantially account for, for example, the rise of reality television programming and its derivations; the emergence of single-camera sitcoms; the growth of programming and channels featuring and aimed specifically at demographic minorities; the success of premium subscription cable as a bastion of self-declared "quality" programming; etc. Rather than offering such an overarching summary of programming types, however, the objective of this study is to examine institutional and textual implications of television's transition. It does so with a consistent point of reference, examining a single, stalwart programming type across four distinct and revealing examples.

There remains much to be learned not only from what is new but also from what remains the same on television during periods of transition. It is particularly productive, given the transformations and changing strategies examined here, to consider the way that certain kinds of programs have been imagined to compensate for what has been experienced as rapid change and unpredictability. For television studies, this means examining not only programming that has emerged during such an era, but also (re) focusing on types of programming that have endured, been retooled and repurposed, and relied upon to negotiate these transitions. It also means focusing critical attention not only on the most exceptional, formally innovative, taste-flattering, "buzz"-ed about programming, but also the banal, everyday schedule-fillers that, after all, constitute the bulk of programming schedules.

Several years ago I wrote that the real action on TV was in reality programming (Shimpach 2002). Certainly reality shows, in their recent pervasive growth and perhaps surprising durability as a programming type, with their apparent capitalization on the essence of the television medium, their novel cultural and textual attractions, their globally localizable formats, their union-and-residual-averse production labor practices, and their propagation of neo-liberal governmentality, encapsulate much of what constitutes contemporary television practices (see, for example, Andrejevic 2003; Ouellette & Hay 2008). And yet reality programming is not the most revealing site at which to consider television's newly developing relationship to time and space. With such a relatively short history of institutionalized production practices, reality television as it is

currently recognized has not so much undergone the transitions in television as served as but one, albeit significant, symptom of these transitions. On the crucial and changing role of specific kinds of narrative within the changing time and space of television, reality programming, for all its careful manipulations and brilliant post-production, simply cannot comment. The examples considered in this study – a small number drawn from a much larger, long-term trend – instead demonstrate the reliable return to past successes and comfortable narratives that continues to characterize so much television programming amid rapidly changing conditions. So even as reality programming inevitably haunts these pages – in some of the aesthetics, plot points, and marketing analyzed and especially as the implied “other” to these more traditional formats: formally, institutionally, economically – the focus here is on what is new about what is old.

Therefore the action on TV may perfectly well be in action after all. Specifically, this book examines this era’s familiar return in television programming to action shows with individual (super)heroes intended to navigate the new, international, multi-channel universe. As new structures of television production and distribution combine with new forms of television programming, the white male hero in particular has been asked again and again to help save the day. Signaling a subjectivity confronted with the possibility of its own demise, this hero, no less than the programming in which he is placed, offers an exemplary engagement with the paradigm of afterlife, repeatedly deferring death through the fantastical mastery of space and time. Yet in the event, this hero has found himself to be an unstable subject, also facing multiple crises and transitions, both external and internal, as he is placed within the transnational destabilization of broadcast television in transition.

The specific examples in the chapters that follow will focus on four institutionally distinct, yet thematically similar case studies, each constituted initially by the run of a television program featuring super heroics: *Highlander: The Series* (1992–8), *Smallville* (2001–present), *24* (2001–present), and *Doctor Who* (2005–present). Institutionally, these programs all represent challenges to the era of the broadcast network, some airing initially in syndication or on new networks, each produced through new institutional arrangements including international co-production and strategies to “runaway” to financially-compelling alternative production locales. Taken in the order listed, these programs begin at the margins of

## 8 Introduction

broadcast television (first-run syndication) and draw increasingly closer (from WB to Fox to BBC) to the center of the traditional broadcast industry (itself now only a part of a much larger television universe, which is in turn only a small part of an again much larger media universe). There is a temporal logic to the choice of these programs taken in this order as well, as the programs closer to the center of traditional broadcasting (and thus the end of this book) have been produced for organizations slower to acquiesce to the changing realities of television in transition. Thus the book concludes by briefly considering the first US commercial television network, NBC, in its eventual, apparent acquiescence to these changing conditions through the example of its recent take on the super heroic in the program *Heroes*. Together these programs demonstrate television's continuity (through their reliance on "reliable" genre, character, casting, and to some extent production styles) in seeking to unite a fracturing television audience in front of a single narrative centered on a white, English-speaking, male hero. They also demonstrate television's transformations (emerging outside the big three US networks, produced to circulate globally, planned with lengthy afterlife in mind, presenting recurring allegories of crisis and impending demise) as they promise to support, among other things, easy translation across state, linguistic, and cultural barriers. Each of these programs has been produced to travel – geographically and temporally – and therefore represents, superficially at very least, their producers' best imagination of the forms, stars, heroes, and stories that will succeed over space and through time amid transforming conditions.

Culturally, meanwhile, these programs span the range from syndicated schedule-filler (*Highlander*) to teen genre (*Smallville*) to critically acclaimed quality television (24) to national public service (*Doctor Who*). These programs, in other words, consist of everything from the exceptional object of aggrandizing discourse to the overlooked everyday of television scheduling that typically falls under the radar of cultural arbiters. Textually, too, these shows have much in common beyond what they represent in terms of behind-the-camera transformations. For example, from a programmer's point of view, each is a version of an hour-long action drama, specifically designed to attract and hold viewer attention amid the increasing clutter and competition of contemporary television. To that end, each of these programs is spectacular to behold, with aesthetic, iconographic, and formal components constituted well in excess of mere function. Moreover, these shows combine action elements with

recognizable traits of other popular and/or spectacular genres: romance; science-fiction/fantasy; espionage; domestic drama; etc. With the exception of *24*, each of these programs combines an episodic narrative structure (where the hour ends with a clear resolution) with ongoing serial narrative elements (developed over the course of many episodes). Thematically, each program offers fantasies of transcendence, of temporal and spatial mobility that serve, almost allegorically, to underscore their very conditions of production and circulation. They do this by each re-imagining their hero as both in constant crisis and as the savior of civilization (or meta-textually of television). Each focuses on the super-heroic exploits of a man with powers beyond any of his cohort, embodying neo-liberal fantasies of spatial and temporal mobility, whether it is Duncan MacLeod's immortality, Jack Bauer's rapid non-stop commutes across Los Angeles County, Clark Kent's special-effects laden super-mobility, or the Doctor's grimly bemused travels through time and space. At the same time, each calls up new questions of political, economic, and cultural citizenship, crossing borders, splitting affinities, and pushing boundaries through reinterpretations of long-time televisual representational themes (white masculinity, heroism, nation, genre, etc.) within moments of transformation and perceived crisis.

These programs signal relatively innovative efforts to rework, reinvent, and "save" television, each representing a specific, important response to television in transition. At the same time, they each return to and rely upon representations of "super" white men resolving action-filled narratives with various degrees of violence. Thus this book will be submitting each of these programs to the multiple critical pressures of an integrated methodology that asks these texts to tell us what they have to say about television and about the world in which they travel and signify. While the case study chapters that follow therefore focus on a single type of programming in order to produce a cumulative argument, the approach taken to analyze them is equally applicable to other types of programming (e.g. sitcoms, reality, news, soap opera, HBO, etc.). Nonetheless, the particular programs chosen for this study are different enough from one another to allow for detailed examples of some of the significant changes behind the camera, but similar enough in terms of genre, narrative, and character to allow for comparative studies of meaning amid the recent and ongoing transformations in production and distribution. These are popular shows with surprisingly complex meanings that also illustrate important aspects of television in transition.

Prior to the consideration of these four programs the scene will be set by establishing the context for this era of transition as well as for the approach taken in the consideration of each program. Chapter 1 details institutional factors, offering a brief history of industry practice, regulatory and technological changes, and the place of programming within the larger scheme of television broadcasting. Through this brief history of the television industry in transition, the changing institutional role of narrative and the rising significance of a program's afterlife will emerge. Chapter 2 contextualizes textual factors significant to the programs considered in the following chapters. Beginning with the interrelationships between narrative, genre, and gender, this chapter queries the role of the hero in television programming. As "mainstream" continues to be conflated with white masculinity despite all contrary evidence and amid television's rapidly fragmenting audiences, channel proliferation, and shrinking revenue, this chapter considers the time and place of heroes effectively encountering all manner of assault on their claims to universal signification. Their subjectivity, however, bears the scars and pressures of temporal and spatial transcendence. Chapter 3 offers strategies to consider for blending these critical contexts into an integrated method that accounts for and draws on both the institutional and the textual in considering television programming. This integration of textual and institutional approaches is theorized through television studies, genre critique, and everyday viewing. It is framed as a proposal to the reader of where to watch, how to watch, and what it means while encountering television's texts and accounting for their production.

Chapter 4 begins the case studies. It focuses on *Highlander: The Series* in order to examine the rise of international joint-ventures in television production and distribution financing – looking at the conditions, limits, and implications of such programming around the world. *Highlander* was an early, successful example of a short-lived but significant wave of 1990s first-run syndication focusing on action, violence, and fantasy. Textually charged with the task of balancing international marketability with local accommodation and resonance, *Highlander* added the fantasy of immortality to the ideal of unfettered global mobility. This chapter will analyze this textual fantasy while arguing that the show's production and circulation were constructed to operate in a parallel fashion. *Highlander* was therefore not only a successful alternative business model for millennial television operating outside of the Hollywood production houses, but can also be read as thematizing its own international origin, circulation, and

afterlife. The character of MacLeod's immortality propels him into a life of eternal wandering, losing markers of specific national identity, accumulating material goods and esoteric knowledge, finding home to be everywhere and nowhere. This chapter therefore articulates the neo-liberal reinvention of the extra-national to the international co-production and circulation of *Highlander* and MacLeod, both, as a sort of immortal cosmopolitanism.

Chapter 5 considers the production and the narrative of *Smallville* within a larger media landscape concerned with brand management and conglomerated cooperation. Recasting the well-known narrative and genre expectations of the iconic hero Superman as what was then the archetypal WB teen, *Smallville* embraces the inherent contradictions (other/normal, alien/all-American, interstellar/unworldly) in order to produce a singular hero who embodies a coalition of identities. This same coalition, it was hoped, would constitute the program's audience as the WB planned its (ultimately failed) ascendancy from netlet to mainstream broadcast network. In the character of (initially) a teenaged Clark Kent, *Smallville* offers one of Time-Warner's most durable, profitable, and recognizable trademarked brands, Superman, capable of traveling across multiple media outlets faster than a speeding bullet (even if without his trademarked insignia and costume). By building on the WB's focus on the teen demographic to present a narrative featuring a cultural superhero at a time in his life before he was a superhero, *Smallville* offers a Clark Kent flatteringly presented to a primarily young audience as forever deferring his entrance into destiny and myth and thus instead sustaining his (narrative) potential.

Chapter 6 considers efforts to stand out from the glut and clutter of multi-channel programming by offering a television series as a sustained programming stunt. This chapter examines *24* as a text featuring rogue, individual heroism nevertheless constantly and utterly dependent upon an infrastructure of the latest technology, complex bureaucracy, and the sustainability of novelty. This chapter will parallel such heroism with the series' stunt conceit (takes place in "real time"), success in afterlife, and neo-conservative genesis amid changing geopolitical realities in order to argue that such a fantasy of reactionary heroism only thinly veils the structural conditions of the show's success. The program *24* offers insight into the strategies of the "fourth network," Fox, during this period of rapid industry transformation and demonstrates the bigger budget, network response to these changing conditions, in which

innovative production style is combined with an elaborate, multi-character narrative to establish “quality” television. This important program has bolstered Fox’s ratings and prestige at a time when the network’s standing appeared to be under threat by the very transitions it helped augur in becoming the successful fourth network. As such, this program asks us to consider, both on-screen and behind the camera, the politics, violence, and representation of crisis (televisual, political, gendered) through a hero who might function as national allegory during a period of perpetual crisis as the geopolitical is encountered in professional and domestic life.

Chapter 7 considers the relationship between new iterations of nation and narrative in the regeneration of the BBC’s own classic series *Doctor Who*. As the BBC reconsiders its cultural role amid growing commercial challenges within the liberalized regulatory schemes of Great Britain and around the world, the program’s hero, a (charmingly British) alien Time Lord, has regenerated into increasingly younger forms while remaining nonetheless safely familiar. Not immune to the same pressures of transition despite its public service mandate and funding scheme, the BBC has responded to television’s changing time and space in ways borrowed from commercial broadcasters and in ways emphasizing its special relationship with its public. As the return but also the regeneration of an iconic and beloved classic program, *Doctor Who* demonstrates both the global nature of television’s transitions and the BBC’s specific efforts to itself regenerate amid them as a vital national treasure. In this program the Doctor himself has now been tellingly refigured as perhaps the last of his kind, forever (literally through time travel and regeneration) returning to Earth (and especially Great Britain) where he is simultaneously greeted as familiar friend and suspect alien.

The book concludes with a brief consideration of NBC’s *Heroes*. This program has offered a multi-cultural ensemble of flawed heroic characters on a network once the symbol of broadcast preeminence, but now hemorrhaging viewers. Finally acquiescing (too late?) to television’s spatial and temporal transitions, *Heroes* was conceived for NBC primarily as a multimedia property whose text would be disaggregated over multiple media outlets. Secondarily one of those outlets (if still the most expensive, prestigious, and viewed) would be broadcast television. *Heroes’* success and failures suggests the continuing efforts to negotiate the time and space of television in transition.



The circulation of all these television programs, but also, and rather distinctly, the stories they narrate, are involved in complex and revealing new negotiations of time and space and identity. Their story is offered here to the student of television – whether situated on the sofa, in the production studio, the classroom, or ivory tower – to consider in her or his own space and time.