

TV Time: Time Travel and American Television

By Michael P. Keaton

“We all travel in time at a velocity of one second per second of time.”¹ The problem, of course, is that our rate of travel is the same as everyone else’s rate, and we are all moving in the same direction. However, the appeal of changing one or both of these factors has led to an entire genre of fiction, a genre which has spread from the written word to movies to television. One of the most recent incarnations of the time travel genre is the ABC series *LOST*, which revealed in season 5 (2009) that time travel is an integral part of its plotline. This revelation spawned fan theories which attempt to explain how time travel fits into the web that is the story of *LOST*. Yet time travel is not new to American television, so a look at its history should provide perspective for understanding some of the events on *LOST*, and it may open up insights into possible resolutions of the time-related plotlines. Television owes much of its inspiration for science-fiction stories, and time travel stories in particular, to the fiction that preceded it. So a history of time travel as portrayed on television is by necessity a look at the history of science fiction and time travel. Due to the limited scope of this paper, an in-depth examination of all time travel literature is neither possible nor desirable; instead, this paper will focus briefly on science’s view of time travel, the reasons why so many find the concept so appealing, some basic terminology, and a wide-angle view of the genre of time travel. After establishing this foundation, the paper will look at how time travel has been portrayed on American television, integrate those lessons into an analysis of *LOST*, and conclude with several general observations regarding time travel television series.

¹ Westfahl, Gary, George Slusser, and David Leiby, eds., *Worlds Enough and Time* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 12.

One of the factors that mark humanity as different from the animal kingdom is the “awareness of time.”² We speak fondly of the past, we live for today, and we anticipate the future. This innate understanding and daily experience with the flow of time colored the manner in which it was viewed. Some cultures viewed time more cyclically than others, but the dawn of modern science seemed to confirm what everyone already knew. “In Newton’s universe, speed was understood as relative, but time was absolute.”³ This view matched experience, and to upset the intuitiveness of it all required something very special: Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity.⁴ Special Relativity turned Newtonian physics upside down in many ways, but none more counter-intuitive than the issue of time. “In Einstein’s universe one speed, the speed of light, is absolute, while time is now relative.”⁵ Relativity implied the possibility of time travel, and it even provided a method which did not involve a time machine; both mass and speed will slow the passage of time. A traveler who leaves earth on a circuitous route would eventually arrive back on earth. If this traveler journeyed at 99.995% of light speed and the journey was approximately 1000 light years round-trip, the traveler would have aged 10 years, but the earth would be 1000 years older.⁶ As strange as this may sound, humanity has an example of this effect – a living time traveler. Sergei Avdeyev, a Russian Cosmonaut, spent 748 days in orbit. Traveling at 17,000 miles per hour (or 0.00254% of the speed of light) for 748 days has made Mr. Avdeyev “one fiftieth of a second younger than he would be if he hadn’t gone on those

² Ibid., p. 1.

³ Bernardin, Andrew. “Einstein, Batman, and the surfer: a skeptical view of time travel,” *Skeptic* (Altadena, CA), 10.1 (Spring 2003): 76 (8). Academic OneFile. Gale. Rickman Library, Southern Wesleyan University, 22 June 2009

⁴ Einstein published his findings on special relativity in 1905. It deals with moving bodies and the speed of light (which remains constant). This led to the famous $E=MC^2$, and it gives us “spacetime”, a merger of space and time. General relativity was published in 1916, and it added gravity to the equation. This gives us the concept that mass can curve or warp spacetime in its immediate vicinity – the larger the mass, the greater the curvature.

⁵ Bernardin, “Einstein, Batman, and the surfer...”

⁶ Gott, J. Richard, *Time Travel in Einstein’s Universe* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), p. 33.

trips...the slowing of his clock is small, but real.”⁷ So travel into the future was a by-product of Relativity, but the past remained unreachable – until 1949. In that year, Kurt Gödel, mathematician extraordinaire, solved Einstein’s gravitational field equations. The results suggested that time travel to the past might be possible.⁸ Essentially, General Relativity suggests that spacetime can be curved to the point that it becomes bent “in ways that permit shortcuts.”⁹ Since 1949, scientists have argued the possibilities and implication of time travel.

The leading scientific proponent of time travel is Kip Thorne, and the method currently en vogue is via “wormholes”.¹⁰ While these ideas are thought-provoking, the field of Quantum Theory has provided an actual example. Research is being conducted into tiny electromagnetic wormholes that transmit light from point A to point B instantaneously - “light would disappear in one place and reappear in another, conveyed along channels that cannot be seen from the outside. They remain theoretical at this stage, but the technologies for making them already exist.”¹¹ Dr. Raymond Chiao and his team at the University of California demonstrated that photons will disappear from one position and reappear on the opposite side of a barrier instantaneously. This means they travel faster-than-light, and “if this light beam could be made to carry a signal, that message would, according to the theory of relativity, be shifted backwards in time.”¹² While science has yet to propose a realistic method for transporting humans to the past, the concept of time travel is tantalizingly viable according to both mathematics and Quantum Mechanics. For a

⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

⁸ Nahin, Paul J., *Time Machines: Time Travel in Physics, Metaphysics, and Science Fiction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1999), p. xviii.

⁹ Gott, Time Travel in..., p. 83.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

¹¹ Ball, Philip. “Light Wormholes could wire space invisibly. (NEWS).” *Nature* 450.7168 (Nov. 15, 2007). 330 (2). Academic OneFile. Gale. Rickman Library, Southern Wesleyan University, 22 June 2009

¹² Clegg, Brian, *Light Years and Time Travel* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2001), p.11.

concept that seems millennia away from fruition, why does the possibility of time travel hold such fascination?

The allure of time travel is multi-faceted. Humans tend to romanticize the past; heroes are larger-than-life, villains are nefarious schemers, and everyone walks around surrounded by a magical glow. Early cultures saw the past as a “Golden Age when humans walked with gods and magical events were part of everyday life.”¹³ Even in today’s world we still speak fondly of the “good ‘ole days.” The Fantasy genre taps into this natural inclination, usually involving a “sword and sorcery” motif. Inherent in this reasoning is that the past was somehow better, and the flow of time has only furthered humanity’s descent.¹⁴ The future, however, was generally viewed as a slightly different version of the present, or if one holds to a cyclical view of history, the future is limited to variable replays of the past.¹⁵ The way in which the future was viewed underwent a transformation in the 1800s...one arguably due to the Industrial Revolution and the progressive spirit of the times. New technology led to machines that were almost “magical” in terms of what they could accomplish. Suddenly, the future held the possibility of being as different from the present as that romanticized “Golden Age” of the past. It is this shift in how the future was viewed that Gary Westfahl suggests brought about the rise of science fiction as a genre.¹⁶ Fiction in general is based on imagination, but while people and events may be created, “ordinary fiction takes for granted the context of knowledge common to author and reader.”¹⁷ Things fall down. The sun rises in the east. Humans cannot fly under their own power – we know the rules. Fiction must be consistent within the world it creates, and in ordinary fiction, that world is our world. Even if a work of fiction is set in the past, gravity and all the laws of

¹³ Westfahl, *Worlds Enough and Time*, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁷ Smith, Nicholas D., ed., *Philosophers Look at Science Fiction* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), p. 5.

physics still apply, and humans behave (more-or-less) predictably. But science fiction is not limited by “standard” rules.¹⁸ The only limit for science fiction is the internal rules created by the story. This opens up a vast array of possibilities in which to look anew upon the human condition. So the appeal of time travel lies in the possibility of visiting a mystical past, or journeying to a futuristic world where “normal” rules can be ignored. For authors, time travel (and science fiction in general) allows “ethically significant aspects of the familiar [to be] projected on a new reality.”¹⁹ However, instead of associating science fiction with a type of philosophy, most people associate it with space travel.

Is science fiction primarily concerned with space travel? That seems to be an overarching theme of popular science fiction, but stories of time travel seem to be the one element that unites the creators of the genre as well as twentieth century authors. “One can argue that time travel is its principal fascination, and that the genre first emerged in response to a growing interest in the future more than a growing interest in outer space.”²⁰ Consider for a moment the most ubiquitous science fiction story of the twentieth century: *Star Wars*. What immediately comes to mind? Spaceships, aliens, robots, etc. This seems the obvious answer seeing that the story takes place in a galaxy “far, far away.” But *when* does *Star Wars* take place? As the famous opening phrase informs us, “A long time ago...” *Star Wars* is set in the past, and although it does not involve itself directly with time travel, it shows how time is central to most science fiction stories. The popularity of time travel stories points us back to the possibilities for speculation. Time travel should appeal to any author who wishes to thrust a character into a totally foreign environment; the past and future can be equally bizarre. For

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰ Westfahl, *Worlds Enough and Time*, p. 2.

writers, time travel is “a valuable device in generating narratives.”²¹ In writing science fiction, and time travel in particular, “an author isolates essential and significant facts of existence by projecting what is familiar into unfamiliar contexts, while either basic facts or laws undergo modification.”²² In many ways science fiction can be an extended lesson in philosophy. Writers are encouraged to “show, not tell”; a good science fiction story will show the reader/viewer “case studies” from a certain philosophical point of view.²³ Time travel appeals to writers with the worlds of possibilities it offers, and it appeals to the general public because of the fascination with both the past and potential futures.

While the science of time travel can be perplexing, the task of sorting through the sub-genres, types, and jargon can be baffling. So before any discussion of science fiction television, a clarification of terminology is advisable. Keep in mind that these terms may not be accepted throughout the entire science fiction community; they are only meant as a general guide to categorizing and understanding the time travel stories and themes that made it to the small screen. Fred D. Miller, Jr. and Nicholas D. Smith use three broad categories of science fiction: Natural, Cultural, and Metaphysical.²⁴ Natural science fiction focuses on science and biology, extending present knowledge to logical limits, or speculating on the discovery of new knowledge and the ensuing ramifications. Cultural science fiction looks at culture and the social aspect of humanity. It can place a “normal” human into an unusual circumstance, or it can anticipate major changes in human thought and behavior and then examine the consequences. Metaphysical science fiction makes extreme changes in basic ideas and human behavior.²⁵ This

²¹ Ibid., p. 3.

²² Smith, *Philosophers Look...*, p. 4.

²³ Ibid., p. 12. An excellent example of this is the television show *Quantum Leap*, which will be discussed later in the paper.

²⁴ Smith, *Philosophers Look...*, p. 6.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 6-8.

category produces some of the more, shall we say, unusual science fiction stories. Time travel stories tend to fall into the Natural or Cultural categories, and sometimes straddle the two. Normally, time displacement is used as the vehicle to explore the cultural side of the equation, or the culture is used as the backdrop against which time travel is examined. Miller and Smith also point out a feature of science fiction that distinguishes it from purely existentialist literature: science fiction assumes that the new scenarios are “knowable” and “governed” and “rationally explicable.”²⁶ For the most part, time travel stories abide by this rule.

As a sub-genre of science fiction, time travel stories have their own jargon and internal logic, and in order to categorize these stories, several questions must be answered. First, what is time? The scientist will explain that it is a set number of regular motions, whether that be the revolutions of the earth, the swing of a pendulum, or the vibrations of an atom. Time, however, is not that simple. There is the Thermodynamic Arrow of Time (as labeled by Stephen Hawking), which means that entropy increases as time passes.²⁷ Yet there is also the Psychological Arrow of Time, the “common feeling that we all have...of the passage of time.”²⁸ The Psychological Arrow of Time not only varies between individuals, but also varies within individuals. The hour of television ‘flew by,’ but the hour-long faculty meeting ‘lasted forever.’ Our second question is: what is meant by time travel? The simplest definition is travel that is forward in time at a rate greater than one second per second, or traveling negatively in time.²⁹ Third, what are the typical methods of time travel? There are three main methods to travel in time: a machine or device of some type, a natural phenomenon, or some sort of “magic”

²⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁷ Westfahl, *Worlds Enough and Time*, p. 11-12.

²⁸ Nahin, *Time Machines*, p. 180.

²⁹ Westfahl, *Worlds Enough and Time*, p. 12.

(sometimes explained, sometimes not).³⁰ The fourth question is a critical one: what is the assumed view of time itself? This is an important point as it dictates, to an extent, the nature and possible consequences of time travel. There are three broad categories in which a story's view of time may fall. The first category is the "Malleable" view. Think of it as the *Back to the Future* model. In this view, time is flexible; if a traveler changes something in the past, the reverberations are felt in the present and future. If someone travels to Vienna, Austria in 1910, tracks down a young Adolph Hitler and kills him, then he never becomes the leader of Germany, and thus "our" version of history is changed. We assume it would change for the better, but the story might suggest that another person takes Hitler's place within the Nazi movement, and that person could conceivably be worse. This model also raises the issue of a paradox, which in time travel parlance refers to a series of events where the laws of cause and effect seemingly do not apply. The classic example: you go back in time and kill your paternal grandfather when he was 10 years old. Therefore, your father cannot be born, and so you will never be born. But if you were never born, then you could not have traveled back in time to kill your grandfather, so he would have survived, and you would have been born. It is not just your grandfather's health which should concern you. Consider that you have two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, etc. If we use 25 years as the length of one generation, then 100 years ago there would be 16 people whose death would negate your existence. 200 years ago, 256 people would be your direct ancestors. 500 years ago, 1,048,576 of your ancestors would be alive, and 650 years ago, 67,108,864 people would be your 24-great grandparents.³¹ While these numbers

³⁰ Some argue that time travel through "magical" means place such a story within the realm of Fantasy rather than Science Fiction. This assertion seems logical in the majority of cases.

³¹ I stopped at 650 years because 67,108,864 was as high as my calculator would go without giving an error message. The "Grandfather Paradox" was first proposed by Rene Barjavel in *La Voyageur Imprudent* published in serial form in 1943. Some dispute whether the concept was in the original stories, or if he added it in the 1958 novel.

would not hold up to the realities of family relations and intermarriages, the point is clear: “You’re kin to everyone...you as much as take a poke at anyone, and the odds are you won’t even get to be a twinkle in your daddy’s eye.”³² Another common paradox involves a physical object. Suppose I’ve had a pocket knife since the age of five when a handsome stranger appeared, gave me the knife, and told me to keep it with me always. As a teenager, I find myself in a situation where I use the knife to save my life. As an adult, I go back in time to see the stranger who gave me the knife and thereby saved my life. However, I come to realize that *I* am the stranger, so I give my 5-year-old self the knife and the instructions to keep it always. The paradox is twofold: first, who made the knife? In this scenario, the knife always existed – I possessed it...because I had given it to myself...which is how I came to possess it...so I could give it to myself...which is how I came to possess it...and so on. This is referred to as a “closed time loop” or a “causal loop.”³³ The second paradox is that the knife must “age”; if I receive the knife at age 5, then travel back in time at age 30, the knife would be 25 years old. It would then age another 25 years as the loop began once more. Eventually the knife would break, so what would happen to the closed time loop? If the knife did not age, the law of entropy (the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics) has been broken. So, the Malleable view of time opens up a host of possibilities, but also presents serious hurdles for authors wishing to use this view.

The second view of time is the “Destiny” or “Predestination” model. Theological implication aside, this model views time as fixed – whatever happened, happened. There are two variations to this view. The first variation simply prevents anything from interfering with the past; if a traveler did change the past, then it had already been done, thus the traveler was not

³² Nahin, *Time Machines*, p. 48. Nahin is quoting P.S. Miller in “Status Quondam,” in *New Tales of Space and Time*, edited by R.J. Healy – (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1951).

³³ Nahin, *Time Machines*, p. 304.

changing history, but fulfilling it. In this view, your trip back in time to kill Hitler could result in the Gestapo capturing you, your gun misfiring, your shot only wounding him, or your shot missing him and hitting a bystander. All of these actions would have already been part of history. A more original example would be the following: you manage to kill a young Adolph Hitler, but you later realize that his best friend at the time disposed of the body and assumed Hitler's identity. This friend then becomes the "Adolph Hitler" known to history.³⁴ In trying to change history, you fulfilled it. The second variation allows for slight alterations, but the universe "self-corrects" so that major points remain unchanged. This variation often appears as a time traveler saving someone's life only to see the person die the next day. In this view, if you manage to kill Hitler, someone else would assume his role in the Nazi movement, and the major flow of events would remain unchanged. The third view of time is the "Multiple Universe" model. This model proposes that every decision/action of every person actually branches the universe into different paths or realities.³⁵ A time traveler who assassinated Hitler would split time into a different branch, and that branch would continue with all of the associated consequences, changing the course of history as we know it. The traveler's original world would continue unchanged (except for his/her absence). At the most basic level, this would fall more on the side of parallel universe travel rather than time travel.

These basic definitions will allow us to categorize time travel television shows in three basic ways. Is it Natural, Cultural, or Metaphysical science fiction? Is the view of time Malleable, Destiny, or Multiverse? And, is the method of time travel a Device, Natural Phenomena, or Magical? A graphic representation would look like this:

³⁴ I am not aware of story that uses this scenario, although such a story may exist. If not, I claim ownership of this plot.

³⁵ A physicist might argue that every action of every particle in the universe splits the universe into a different path. All of these branches combined are sometimes referred to as the "multiverse."

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

The letter indicating the method will be placed in the appropriate box or the dividing line to indicate a mixture. To use a famous movie as an example, *Back to the Future* would be represented as:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural	D		
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

36

It is cultural science fiction, it views time as malleable, and a device is used as the method of time travel.

In shifting the focus to time travel as portrayed on American television, a few ground rules are in order. A cursory examination reveals over 80 shows which have explored the issue of time travel, and some of those shows may be mentioned in passing. However, only shows where time travel is a central theme will be examined in detail. A good example is the Star Trek franchise; each of its various incarnations has dealt with time travel in specific episodes (on multiple occasions), but time travel is not the central theme; therefore, it is outside the purview

³⁶ This chart is my construction. Keep in mind that there is no agreed upon system to classify science fiction or time travel stories. If you asked 100 science fiction fans to develop a system, you would probably end up with over 100 different systems.

of this paper. Also, the focus will be on time travel shows which aired in prime time or in syndication; kid's shows and adult-targeted cartoons will not be considered.

Television made its debut in 1930 when NBC broadcast from an experimental station, W2XBS, in New York.³⁷ Yet the dominant media of the 1930s remained the radio. It was not until the opening of the 1939 World's Fair that NBC initiated regular television programming. For several years there were few TV "series" as we know them; instead, "every night was an event."³⁸ The broadcasts were limited to the New York area, and for a time NBC had a card file of all TV set owners which they used to mail out a postcard every week listing the upcoming schedule.³⁹ 1941 saw the first commercial television as NBC and CBS began the process of networking their signals, but it was 1951 before the signals reached the west coast of the United States.⁴⁰ Even at this early stage the categorization of programming had already begun. The National Association of Educational Broadcasters was analyzing shows as early as the 1950s, classifying programs into 17 categories.⁴¹ However, noting the "eras" of television may be more helpful than categorizing every program. Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh divide programming trends into seven periods. First, the "Vaudeo" era, 1948-1957, which was an extension of Vaudeville and radio programs into the television format. Next came the "Adult Western" era, 1957 – early 1960s, when shows were targeted at an adult audience. The 1958-59 season saw a total of 31 different westerns, but that year also marked the debut of *77 Sunset Strip* – the show that began the TV detective story genre.⁴² The third era is the "Idiot Sitcom" era, lasting from

³⁷ Brooks, Tim and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory To Prime Time Network and Cable Shows: 1946 – Present*, 6th ed., (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), p. xi.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xii – xiii.

⁴¹ Smythe, Dallas. "Reality as Presented by Television." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer, 1954, Oxford University Press, p. 143 – 156.

⁴² Brooks, *The Complete Directory...*, p. xv – xvii.

the early to late 1960s, when the focus shifted to a younger audience. The “Relevance” era was fourth, beginning in the late 1960s and ending in 1975. This era saw African-Americans and women in serious roles, and even the comedies tackled serious issues. 1975 – 1980 framed the “Fantasy” era, when both comedies and dramas tended to be escapist in nature. Brooks and Marsh label the 1980s as the sixth era: a combination of “Soap Opera” and “Real People.”⁴³ Prime time soaps dominated the ratings, and shows that depicted the lighter side of real life gained popularity. The seventh era was the “Era of Choice,” which spanned the 1990s. The explosion of choices, driven largely by cable TV and its specialized channels, marked this period as a time when there seemed to be no discernable theme.⁴⁴ We will add one more period to these seven divisions of Brooks and Marsh. The premier of *Survivor* in May of 2000 inaugurated the era of “Reality” television, which became a staple of both Network and Cable/Satellite television. Using this as a rough frame of reference, 13 time travel shows will be analyzed.⁴⁵

The first television show to have time travel as a central theme was *It's About Time* (1966-1967). It sits squarely in the “Idiot Sitcom” era, and it apparently lived up to that description. Airing on CBS’ Sunday night lineup at 7:30pm, the show followed two astronauts who accidentally travelled back to the Stone Age. The first part of the season focused on the astronauts adjusting to Stone Age life, while the second half saw them repair their ship and return to the present – with a cave-family in tow. So the cave-family adjusting to the modern

⁴³ Ibid., p. xvii – xx.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. xx.

⁴⁵ An attempt was made to be as comprehensive as possible within the rules concerning prime time/syndicated shows. However, I had to make judgment calls on what to include and what to exclude. I have viewed many episodes of the various series, and I read many episode summaries, but I could not analyze every minute of every episode. I understand that leaves the paper open to criticism, as does the fact that science fiction fans take the subject seriously and will gleefully point out any errors. I only ask that if you do criticize the paper or my reasoning, you do it in your best impression of the “Comic Book Guy” from *The Simpsons*.

world was the source of humor for the last half of the season.⁴⁶ *It's About Time* was Cultural science fiction, and although it did not directly address a view of time, it seems that removing the cave-family from the past had no discernable effect on the timeline. Unless one specific episode addressed this topic, a Destiny view of time seems appropriate. The astronauts accidentally travelled in time, and the phenomenon was Natural. The chart for *It's About Time* is:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural		N	
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

It helps to understand the slapstick nature of this show if you realize the creator was Sherwood Schwartz, and his other popular show, *Gilligan's Island*, also ended in 1967.⁴⁷

Another time travel themed show debuted in 1966 and lasted only one season: *The Time Tunnel*, which aired on ABC's Friday night schedule. The tunnel was a government experiment and two scientists were forced inside before it was fully tested. They became disconnected from time, bouncing between various periods and unable to return to the present. Naturally, they turned up just before famous or infamous events (mostly in the past, but sometimes in the future). Even though they attempted to alter outcomes, they were never successful: the Titanic still sank and Lincoln still died.⁴⁸ *The Time Tunnel* is Cultural science fiction, and it is a textbook example of the Destiny view of time. The tunnel was a (malfunctioning) machine, so its chart is:

⁴⁶ Brooks, *The Complete Directory...*, p. 510.

⁴⁷ Gilbert, Matthew, "Let's Do the Time Warp Again," *The Boston Globe*, March 22, 2009. Accessed online: http://www.boston.com/ae/tv/articles/2009/03/22/lets_do_the_time_warp_again/

⁴⁸ Brooks, *The Complete Directory...*, p. 1044.

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural		D	
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
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Two shows in the 1970s seemed to deal with time travel, but upon closer inspection neither one saw a character travel through time. *Land of the Lost* and *Valley of the Dinosaurs* aired from 1974-1976, but the characters in both shows simply discovered a region of the planet that had remained unchanged since the prehistoric times.⁴⁹ The situations which they encountered were similar to situations a traveler to the distant past would encounter, but no time travel actually occurred. Thus, they do not fit within the context of our analysis.

Time Express debuted on April 26, 1979, and lasted almost a month (to May 17). It was temporarily part of CBS' Thursday night lineup, and it fits neatly into the Fantasy era of television. Hosted by real life husband and wife, Vincent Price and Coral Browne, travelers took a train ride through time to a pivotal point in their life, and once there they could try to change certain outcomes.⁵⁰ This show is borderline science fiction; one could make a good case that it is fantasy instead. However, since time travel factored so prominently into the plot, it is included in our analysis. *Time Express*, if considered science fiction, is Cultural. The view of time is Malleable since the plot revolves around the traveler's ability to alter their past. It is interesting to note that successful changes made by a traveler only seemed to affect them and their

⁴⁹ TV.com, a division of CBS Interactive, part of the CBS family; <http://www.tv.com/land-of-the-lost/show/1254/summary.html> and http://www.tv.com/valley-of-the-dinosaurs/show/10289/summary.html?q=Valley%20of%20the%20Dinosaurs&tag=search_results;title;1

⁵⁰ Brooks, *The Complete Directory...*, p. 1043.

immediate circle of contacts. While the train is a machine, it was not a time travel device as we understand it. The time travel itself leans more toward the Magical category. Thus, its chart is:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural	M		
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
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If the magical, change-your-life theme sounds familiar, consider that *Fantasy Island* was completing its very successful first season when *Time Express* debuted. It seems reasonable to believe that *Time Express* was attempting to capitalize on *Fantasy Island*'s success using the 'sincerest form of flattery.'⁵¹

Arriving at the end of the Fantasy era was the NBC show *Voyagers* (1982-1983). Airing on Sunday nights, *Voyagers* followed the exploits of a "Voyager" (essentially a time policeman) and a young sidekick whom he picked up while saving the boy's life; the voyager also lost his instruction manual (a history book) during this rescue. The device he used to time travel, the Omni, was malfunctioning, so he could not return the boy to his proper time. Thankfully, the boy was a veritable fount of historical knowledge, so they traveled the time stream together, landing wherever the malfunctioning Omni dropped them. They could not jump again until they corrected whatever was wrong with the timeline.⁵² *Voyagers* is Cultural science fiction in terms of the main characters being thrust into new situations. But, it is Natural science fiction when considering the *Voyagers* themselves. When were the Omnis created? By whom? Why and when did they realize the timeline needed corrections? For the purposes of the show, the

⁵¹ To my knowledge, no one yelled "de train, de train" when the *Time Express* approached.

⁵² Brooks, *The Complete Directory...*, p. 1100.

situations focused on the Cultural aspect of the adventures, so that is how it will be classified. As to the view of time, there is also a bit of confusion. Obviously the timeline is Malleable since things can and do go wrong. Yet the Voyagers are there to set it right (by the way, who defines the “correct” timeline?). So in this sense, the view of time is Destiny since one timeline is “correct.” And, it is not the universe that self-corrects, but a group of humans (or aliens) who define what should and should not happen. *Voyagers* is therefore a mix of Malleable and Destiny. The method of time travel is perfectly clear: Device. *Voyagers*’ chart is:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural		D	
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Quantum Leap, perhaps the most popular American time travel series, aired from 1989-1993 on NBC. The lead character, a physicist named Sam, was sent leaping through time due to a faulty device. The unusual aspect of this show was that Sam’s physical body did not travel through time; his consciousness made the leaps, inhabiting a new person every episode. The viewers saw “Sam,” but he appeared to be the other person to those around him. This allowed the show to focus on the human element rather than the science fiction aspect. Sam was assisted by a holographic projection of his best friend Al, who would provide information on the person Sam inhabited along with their personal timeline. Naturally, Sam tried to adjust their timeline in order to better their life. The final episode had Sam jump into his own body, but in 1953. A local bartender seemed to know what was happening, and other “Leapers” arrived. Sam asked how to go home, and the bartender said it was within Sam’s power to go home; all of the leaping had been Sam’s choice. As Sam leaped out from that time, he did not go home. He made a leap into

a period where he could help his friend Al. A statement at the end of the episode informed viewers that Sam never made it home.⁵³ *Quantum Leap* clearly falls into the category of Cultural science fiction as the science was secondary compared to the ever-changing situations and social issues which the main character faced. The view of time is not so clear. Time was obviously Malleable since that was the point of the show, but the timeline could only be changed in minor ways. Major events, “such as the assassination of President Kennedy,” were unalterable.⁵⁴ *Quantum Leap* therefore bridges the Malleable/Destiny divide, with small, meaningful changes allowed, while big changes are forbidden. The method of time travel is also a murky area. At first it seems clear that the malfunctioning *Quantum Leap* project is the cause, but as the series progressed it began to appear that a separate “force” was controlling the leaps. The character of Sam came to believe that God was guiding the leaps.⁵⁵ The nature of the final episode seemed to confirm that something other than the equipment was driving Sam’s adventures. This is difficult to categorize, but since the final episode could have taken place in Sam’s free-ranging consciousness, the Device method seems to be the best choice. *Quantum Leap*’s chart is:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural		D	
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Time Trax was a syndicated show which aired from January of 1993 to December of 1994. The Trax machine was invented by a super-criminal who used it to help other criminals

⁵³ Brooks, *The Complete Directory...*, p. 846-847.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 846.

⁵⁵ Wiggins, Kayla McKinney. “Epic Heroes, ethical issues, and time paradoxes in *Quantum Leap*.” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 21.n3 (Fall 1993): 111 (10). Academic OneFile. Gale. Rickman Library, Southern Wesleyan University, 10 June 2009

escape into the past, then used it on himself when the police closed in. The police captured the Trax machine, so the show followed a policeman from 2193 who was sent to 1993 to retrieve those criminals. Armed with a device that could return the criminals to 2193 (and doubled as a stun ray), the policeman tracked them down with the assistance of a supercomputer disguised as a credit card.⁵⁶ *Time Trax* was a combination of Natural and Cultural science fiction: Natural in that the consequences of technological advances were at the heart of the show, and Cultural due to the policeman's adjustment to 1993 society. The view of time is slightly confusing; the show alludes to parallel timelines, but the policeman tries not to alter events and also sends messages to his superiors in 2193 by taking out ads in various newspapers. The messages imply a single timeline which is Malleable. It is impossible to mix the Malleable and Multiverse category, so to categorize *Time Trax* requires a focus on what the show did rather than what it said. Thus, Malleable is the show's view of time. As for the method, the Trax was a machine, making *Time Trax*'s chart:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural	D		
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Sliders premiered on FOX in the spring of 1995 and aired until February of 2000. While it may be a show that immediately comes to mind regarding time travel, the main characters were not necessarily traveling through time. The focus of the show was travel to parallel universes, so although they encountered situations that could be characterized as being from the past or future, the travel was not temporal within the show's internal logic. If they encountered a

⁵⁶ Brooks, *The Complete Directory...*, p. 1043-1044.

dinosaur, it was not because they were in the past; they were in a parallel universe where dinosaurs were not extinct.⁵⁷ Since the “Sliding” took place between parallel universes and not through time, *Sliders* will not be considered part of the time travel genre.

Early Edition, which aired on CBS from 1996 – 2000, is also a bit problematic. The protagonist received a newspaper each morning, but it was the paper from the next day. He spent his day saving people, preventing accidents, and righting wrongs, with the articles in the newspaper mysteriously changing to reflect the altered timelines. The problem is that there was no time travel; the hero simply received a snapshot of 24 hours into the future. There was no time travel device (unless you count the cat that always accompanied the newspaper delivery), and it was not a natural phenomenon. That leaves Magic as the source of the newspaper. The decision to exclude it from analysis rests on the fact that time travel was not a basic element of the show.

From 1997 – 1998, *Timecop* aired on ABC. Based on the 1994 theatrical movie, *Timecop*, the show followed a member of the Time Enforcement Commission. The TEC existed to patrol the timeline, nabbing criminals who tried to change the past.⁵⁸ This show was Cultural science fiction in the sense that the situations were new to the agent, but he had been trained and prepared for those situations. *Timecop* is closer to the Natural science fiction classification as it extends our present concept of policing and science to extremes, then deals with the consequences. The view of time is Malleable since the purpose of the TEC was to prevent changes in the timeline. The method is via a time sled, so Device is the category. Thus, *Timecop*'s chart is:

⁵⁷ TV.com, http://www.tv.com/sliders/show/438/summary.html?q=sliders&tag=search_results;title;2

⁵⁸ TV.com, <http://www.tv.com/timecop/show/2407/summary.html>

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural	D		
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

7 Days ran for three years, 1998 – 2001, on UPN. The technology on the show was rooted in alien technology the US government had salvaged from the Roswell crash. The technology allowed the National Security Agency to send one man seven days into the past. When a major incident occurred, the government needed to discover the details (which could take several days), then send Agent Parker into the past to prevent the incident.⁵⁹ This show is Natural science fiction since seven days in the past cannot be considered a culturally foreign environment. The view of time is Malleable since Agent Parker’s job was to change the future, and the method of time travel was an alien technology which had been salvaged and adapted. *7 Days’* chart is:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural	D		
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Odyssey 5 was a short-lived show on Showtime in 2002 (June to October). The *Odyssey* was a space shuttle with a crew of five, and while in orbit the crew witnessed the destruction of the earth. An entity referring to himself as the “Seeker” appeared and sent the crew five years

⁵⁹ TV.com, http://www.tv.com/7-days/show/273/summary.html?q=7%20days&tag=search_results:title:1. The Syfy Network also aired a marathon of *7 Days* while I was writing this paper.

into the past in the hope that they could discover the cause and prevent it from happening.⁶⁰

While five years in the past is not a foreign situation in and of itself, the premise that a process or conspiracy was leading up to earth's destruction, and the astronauts had foreknowledge of the outcome, serves as the unusual situation that marks this as Cultural science fiction. The show clearly viewed time as Malleable, but the method is less clear. The "Seeker" propels them to the past, so the method is not natural. Is it super-advanced technology, or is the "Seeker" some type of magical being? If the "Seeker" is an alien, then the method must be via a Device. So,

Odyssey 5's chart is:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural	D		
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

The fall of 2002 saw the debut of two very similar shows: *Do Over* on WB and *That Was Then* on ABC. Both shows involved men (30 and 34 years old, respectively) whose lives were less than perfect, and both were given the opportunity to relive their lives. Their adult consciousness, complete with all of their knowledge of future events, jumped into their teen bodies.⁶¹ Both shows are Cultural science fiction in that both men must wade through a flood of decisions and actions in an attempt to alter their future. Time is Malleable in both shows, although the lead character in *That Was Then* periodically returns to the present where he can observe the effects of his altered timeline. The main difference in the shows, for our purposes, is the method of time travel. In *Do Over*, the protagonist is transported back in time by a freak

⁶⁰ TV.com, http://www.tv.com/odyssey-5/show/10858/summary.html?q=Odyssey%205&tag=search_results;title;1

⁶¹ TV.com, http://www.tv.com/that-was-then/show/10814/summary.html?q=that%20was%20then&tag=search_results;title;1 and http://www.tv.com/do-over/show/8168/summary.html?q=do%20over&tag=search_results;title;1

accident which will be categorized as a natural phenomenon. *That Was Then* sees the hero transported back (and forward) in time by unexplained means (though lightning was involved in the first trip), which places it in the Magical category. The charts for both shows are below:

Do Over September 19 – December 5, 2002	VIEW OF TIME			
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
	Natural			
	Cultural	N		
	Metaphysical			
METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL				
D = device; N = nature; M = magical				

That Was Then September 27 – October 4, 2002	VIEW OF TIME			
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
	Natural			
	Cultural	M		
	Metaphysical			
METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL				
D = device; N = nature; M = magical				

Journeyman aired on NBC from September to December, 2007. This show featured a family man with a good life who suddenly finds himself transported to the past where he is able to change the future of other people. He also meets his former fiancée who was killed in a plane crash. His personal struggle revolves around a choice: should he save her from the plane crash? And if he does save her, how will it affect his future? He learns the hard way that the changes he makes to other people's timelines are not always to their benefit.⁶² *Journeyman* could be categorized as Fantasy since the method of time travel seems to be Magical. Assuming it is science fiction, *Journeyman* would be Cultural since the title character is thrust into an unusual situation as he jumps between past and present. Time is Malleable in the show as his actions in the past have both good and bad effects on the present. *Journeyman*'s chart is:

⁶² TV.com, <http://www.tv.com/journeyman/show/69207/summary.html> and Gilbert, "Let's Do the Time Warp Again."

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural	M		
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

ABC's fall, 2008 schedule included a show titled *Life On Mars* (based on a BBC series of the same name) which lasted one season. In the first episode of this show, a police detective is struck by a car and wakes up the 1970s. The show highlights the many cultural differences of American society separated by only 30+ years.⁶³ The problem regarding this show is there is no hard evidence that the detective actually travelled through time. The series hinted that the entire experience could be taking place inside the detective's head (as he lies in a comatose state due to the accident). With no hard evidence that time travel is involved, this show does not meet the requirements to be examined in detail.

The *Terminator* movie franchise spawned a television show which aired on FOX from January of 2008 to April of 2009. *Terminator: the Sarah Connor Chronicles* followed Sarah Conner and her son, John, as they attempted to change the course of events which led to a computer system triggering "judgment day." They learned of this future from time-travelling visitors, both human and robotic, and near the beginning of the series Sarah and John jumped back several years to the time when the computer was created.⁶⁴ *Terminator: TSCC* was Cultural science fiction in that the Connor's normal life is forever changed once they are presented with knowledge of a specific future. The humanoid Terminator robot, which was reprogrammed to

⁶³ TV.com, http://www.tv.com/life-on-mars/show/69238/summary.html?q=life%20on%20mars&tag=search_results:title:1 and Gilbert, "Let's Do the Time Warp Again."

⁶⁴ TV.com, http://www.tv.com/terminator-the-sarah-connor-chronicles/show/68708/summary.html?q=terminator&tag=search_results:title:6

protect John Connor, struggled with what it meant to be “human.” The view of time seems to be Malleable upon first glance, but it appears that actually altering major events on the timeline is very difficult. The Connors try to prevent the creation of “Skynet,” but even though they alter certain events, other events transpire which still leads to Skynet and the apocalyptic future. The final verdict on *Terminator:TSCC*’s view of time might not be settled until the last *Terminator* movie. For now, the show will be categorized as a mixture of Malleable and Destiny. The method of time travel is a device, though it leaves humans naked and slightly disoriented.

Terminator:TSCC’s chart is:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural		D	
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Finally, we arrive at the ABC series *LOST*. Debuting in the fall of 2004, *LOST* follows the survivors of Oceanic flight 815 after they crash on a mysterious island.⁶⁵ If the first three seasons were examined on a stand-alone basis, the show would not be included in this list. While many unusual events occurred on the island, and flashbacks were a common story-telling device, time travel did not seem to factor into the equation. Season 4 hinted at the possibility of time travel with the island seemingly “out-of-phase” with time off-island. Season 4 also provided an episode in which one character’s consciousness bounced back and forth between his present and past. Season 5 confirmed fan suspicions, cementing time travel as a major factor in the plot and eventual resolution of the series. In fact, “Season 5 is likely to be remembered as

⁶⁵ I have followed the show since the first episode, so most of the information (and any errors) regarding *LOST* is based on my memory.

the one when the series came out of the closet and declared itself.”⁶⁶ Several characters appear not to age, and another group of characters were sent skipping through time with some stops providing clues to the period, but the timeframe of other stops being anyone’s guess. Since *LOST* has its sixth (and final) season remaining, any analysis is a bit premature. However, what is currently known through the end of Season 5 allows for some preliminary discussion according to the framework used thus far. First, *LOST* is Cultural as it has thrust the survivors into unusual circumstances since Season 1, with time travel simply being the latest means. It remains to be seen whether *LOST* is science fiction; certain elements of the story push *LOST* toward the fantasy genre, and the last season will determine if the final verdict on *LOST* is science fiction or fantasy. A good example is the creature on the island known as the Smoke Monster (or “Smokey” to *LOST* fans). Smokey could be explained as a god who is protecting the island or something on the island. Smokey could also be explained as a machine, either futuristic or some forgotten ancient technology (think Atlantis). How elements like these are resolved will determine the genre into which *LOST* is ultimately placed.

The method of time travel is also mysterious. No explanation of the perpetually young characters has been forthcoming. The characters who skipped through time were propelled on their journey by the turning of a wheel (imagine an old-fashioned sailing ship’s steering wheel turned on its side) which was partially embedded in rock in an underground cavern. The wheel implies that the process can be controlled, but the odd arrangement gives the impression that some type of natural force is being harnessed. The island also appears to be surrounded by a “force” or “temporal” field that hides the island and protects it from visitors, seeing as how the island can only be approached from a single compass bearing. This field seems to be a natural

⁶⁶ Jenson, Jeff. “Lost in Time.” *Entertainment Weekly*, 1034 (Feb. 13, 2009): 22. General OneFile. Gale. Rickman Library, Southern Wesleyan University, 10 June 2009

phenomenon that was at some point subjected to a degree of human control. So, the method of time travel on *LOST* is as yet undetermined. It could be a natural phenomenon under some degree of human control, or it could be ancient (or even alien) technology. The possibility is still open that some type of magic is involved. Once again, the categorization of the method of time travel will only be settled by answers in the final season.

It should come as no surprise that the view of time on *LOST* is also murky. The characters were told by a physicist who arrived on the island that “Whatever happened, happened.” Subsequent events in his life seemed to confirm this pronouncement, although he had second thoughts about this theory prior to his death. Yet his death itself seemed to fulfill the timeline. As Season 5 ended, a group of characters were attempting to alter their future with a plan that relied on the explosion of a hydrogen bomb (a remnant of US nuclear testing in the Pacific). Viewers do not know if altering the timeline is possible, and neither do the characters. They have argued (and fought) over what actions to take in the past. Will exploding the hydrogen bomb neutralize the natural forces on the island and thereby change the future? Or is the nuclear explosion the event referred to as the “incident” and already part of the timeline? If the latter scenario is true, then exploding the bomb will only fulfill the timeline and lead to the future the characters know. So, not exploding the bomb would alter history. If the explosion is part of the timeline, then it produces a future where Oceanic Flight 815 crashes, and the characters are sent back in time where they explode the bomb, which leads to their future crash and journey back in time to explode the bomb, which... Thus we have a Causal Loop, where the explosion produces the situation that leads to the explosion. A Causal Loop implies the Malleability of time. However, this is a borderline area in that the timeline appears changeable, yet within the looped area of time, the Destiny view takes hold. Any decision made in the past

will be the same decision that was made previously in the loop. If the nuclear explosion is not part of the original timeline, then future events must be altered in some manner, good or bad. Yet if the explosion produces a future where there is no plane crash, then the survivors could not have travelled back in time to set off the explosion, which means there would be a plane crash, which means... This produces a version of the “Grandfather Paradox” in which each outcome negates the existence of the other outcome. Of these two scenarios, the Causal Loop or the “Grandfather Paradox,” the Causal Loop offers the best chance for resolution.⁶⁷ Time would be Malleable except inside the loop, so a character must first realize the loop exists and then do something to break it. But if Destiny reigns supreme inside the loop, breaking it will require an extraordinary series of events from inside the loop, some type of interference from outside the loop, or something magical. So once again a definitive categorization of *LOST* will depend on how the final season plays out and the answers to the Island’s mysteries. *LOST*’s chart is:

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural		?	
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

There were other television shows through the years that involved time travel as more than just a plot device for one or more episodes. In Appendix A these shows are listed along with the shows which were analyzed. Shows which were not analyzed are accompanied by the reasoning which led to their exclusion. The 13 shows which were charted yield several interesting results. It appears that shows which feature time travel as a basic premise have never

⁶⁷ The “Time Loop” theory is popular among *LOST* fans. If you have 10+ hours to spare, Google “Lost theories.”

been very popular as judged by the length of their run. The following table shows comparative air time:

Length of run	Number of shows
4 seasons.....	1
3 seasons.....	1
2 seasons.....	1
1 season.....	5
Less than 6 months...	3
Less than 3 months...	1
Less than 1 month....	1

Of the 13 shows, 10 (77%) aired one season or less, and 6 of 13 (46%) aired less than six months. There also seems to be a cycle regarding the years when time travel shows appeared on the schedule. While no major pattern emerges, it is helpful to note the following:

Two shows premiered in the late 1960s.

Two shows premiered in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

Two shows premiered in the late 1980s/early 1990s.

Two shows premiered in the late 1990s.

Three shows premiered in 2002 (all lasting less than six months).

Two shows premiered late in the first decade of the 2000s.

If any conclusion can be drawn, it is that 5–6 years pass without time travel shows, followed by a 4–5 year period when two or more time travel shows appear. Thus American television viewers might expect one or two more time travel shows by 2012, then another round of such shows in the years 2016-2021.

The type of science fiction varied within the 13 examined shows, but by far the most popular, with 9 shows, was Cultural science fiction. Two other shows were a mix of cultural and Natural, two shows were Natural science fiction, and there were no Metaphysical science fiction shows. It should not be surprising that Cultural was the most popular since it opens up a multitude of story possibilities while allowing the writer to explore the “fish-out-of-water” concept. A preponderance of story possibilities also accounts for the most popular view of time. The Malleable view ruled in 8 of the 13 shows, three shows held a mix of Malleable and Destiny, and only two shows held a purely Destiny view of time. The only show which held the Multiverse view of time, *Sliders*, did not deal with time travel per se, so was not one of the 13 analyzed shows. A Malleable view of time allows for more danger, more possibilities of something going wrong, and more opportunities for the protagonist to correct/solve their problems. As for the method of time travel, the most popular was a device. A device was used in 7 of the 13 shows (54%), although in 3 out of those 7, the device was malfunctioning. Three shows used magical means of time travel, two shows used a natural phenomenon, and one show was a mix of device and magic.⁶⁸ The Device method allows for a certain level of control over time, even when the device is not functioning properly. Use of a device also implies that a certain level of knowledge exists regarding time travel. The hero can use that knowledge in pursuit of his/her goals, or the knowledge itself may be the goal. Magical methods of time travel offer the benefit of dropping a protagonist into an unfamiliar situation, and for unknown reasons. However, it has a major drawback in that it takes control away from the hero – he/she is dependent on unknown forces for certain resolutions. Also, the Magical method must be handled carefully in a science fiction story since it can easily evolve into pure fantasy. Time travel via natural phenomenon offers more flexibility – unraveling the mystery of the phenomenon may be

⁶⁸ That mixed show was *Odyssey 5*, though I chose to list Device on its chart.

a key point in the hero's ability to resolve the plot and return home. So, most time travel shows are Cultural, have a Malleable view of time, and utilize a device as the method of travel.

Time travel remains a sub-genre of science fiction, but it is clearly one of the themes which underpin the genre as a whole. Science fiction spread from the written works of a few authors to a genre that permeates most of society. Time travel remains popular within that genre, but not in the arena of television shows. Perhaps this is due to the complexities of time travel. A novel can go into great detail, but it remains a single story. Movies are limited by time constraints, so they must focus on the story while some of the intricacies of time travel are ignored. Television shows, however, have a basic premise, but the episodes are written on an ongoing basis. More episodes mean more internal logic regarding time travel, but it also means more opportunities to contradict the established rules. In the end, the relative unpopularity of time travel shows may simply reflect the tastes of the American viewing public.⁶⁹ Many people feel that time travel stories are “out there” or “weird” or “not even close to reality.”⁷⁰ Using *LOST* as an example, would the show have achieved its initial popularity if time travel had been a basic premise from the beginning? Time travel was introduced on *LOST* after the fanbase had been established, and through the first few seasons the producers insisted that everything on the show was logical and scientifically feasible. Time travel-themed shows may not have a bright future on American television, although the chance exists that one show will find the proper mix to lure viewers back for multiple seasons. Only time will tell.⁷¹

⁶⁹ It should be noted that the most popular science fiction show in history has time travel at its very core, but it is also a British show. *Dr. Who* aired from 1963 – 1989, and 2005 to the present on the BBC.

⁷⁰ At least these are all opinions expressed by my wife.

⁷¹ Pun intended.

Appendix A

The shows are listed in chronological order, including major shows which were not included in the analysis. The reasoning behind their exclusion is provided.

It's About Time ----->

1966 – 1967

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

The Time Tunnel ----->

1966 – 1967

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Land of the Lost – 1974 – 1976 – This show was based on a present-day section of the earth that was still prehistoric, so no time travel was involved.

Valley of the Dinosaurs – 1974 – 1976 - This show was also based on a present-day section of the earth that was still prehistoric, so no time travel was involved.

Time Express ----->

April 26 – May 17, 1979

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Voyagers ----->

1982 – 1983

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Quantum Leap ----->

1989 – 1993

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure – 1990 – 1992 - This was an animated children's show.

Back to the Future – 1991 – 1993 – This was an animated children's show.

Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure – June – September, 1992 – This was a live action series based on the movie of the same name, but the slapstick nature of the show meant there were no true internal rules regarding time travel, and thus it was impossible to categorize the view of time. It was Cultural, and a device was the method of time travel.

Land of the Lost (remake) – 1991 – 1992 – The same premise as the original applies. See above.

Time Trax ----->

1993 – 1994

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Where in Time is Carmen Sandiego? – 1996 – 1999 – This was a continuation of the popular children's show, *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?*

Early Edition – 1996 – 2000 – No actual time travel takes place.

Sliders – 1995 – 2000 – The main characters were “sliding” between parallel universes, not travelling in time.

Futurama – 1999 – 2003 – The main character accidentally fell into a cryogenic chamber and was frozen for a 1,000 years. He “slept” through time instead of travelling through time.

Timecop ----->

1997 – 1998

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

7 Days ----->

1998 - 2001

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Twice in a Lifetime – 1999 – 2001 – This show aired on the PAX network. People who had died were given a chance to go back in time to a certain point in their lives where they had three days to change their future. A “judge” granted or denied certain requests, and two angel-like characters assisted them in their three-day journey. This show was excluded because it is almost certainly fantasy rather than science fiction. It should probably be categorized with shows such as *Touched by an Angel*.

Odyssey 5 ----->

June – October, 2002

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

That Was Then ----->

September – October, 2002

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Do Over ----->

September – December, 2002

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

LOST – 2004 – 2010 – Not enough information exists to place it within our framework. The final season should (hopefully) make the categories apparent.

Journeyman ----->

September – December, 2007

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

Heroes – 2006 – present. One of the central characters has the ability to time travel, but it is only one superpower among many. While time travel has figured prominently into the plot of several seasons, time travel is not the focus of the show.

Life on Mars – 2008 – 2009 – It is unclear if the main character has actually travelled in time, or if the experiences are taking place in his unconscious mind.

Terminator:

The Sarah Connor Chronicles →

2008 – 2009

		VIEW OF TIME		
		Malleable	Destiny	Multiverse
TYPE OF SCIENCE FICTION	Natural			
	Cultural			
	Metaphysical			

METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL
D = device; N = nature; M = magical

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