

Time on TV: Narrative Time, Time Travel and Time Travellers in Popular Television Culture (ISBN: 9781784530136)

Timeslip: Putting Aside Childish Things

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In 1970 ATV aired the first series of *Timeslip*, the channel's entry into children's SF, and a self-conscious effort to compete with the BBC's output, in particular *Dr Who*¹. After the success of the pilot, it was eventually extended to four series comprising 26 episodes which were shown early evenings (5.30 pm on Mondays) over 1970-1971 and repeated over 1973-1974. A novelisation of the first two stories was written by Bruce Stewart in 1970.²

Despite strong fan interest evidenced in its excellent official website, *Timeslip.org.uk*, the series has received only passing reference in scholarly accounts of television science fiction. Possibly one of the contributing factors to this dearth of analysis is the industrial dispute which prevented some of the 26 episodes being filmed in colour, and the subsequent loss of colour masters for all but one episode; the series being available today only from 16mm transfers in black and white with the exception of episode 6 of season 2.³

However, *Timeslip* deserves closer examination, both as a successful and challenging example of children's television SF in its own right, and for its remarkably complex approach to issues of science and technology unusual for children's programming of the time. Today one is struck by its relentless scepticism about the consequences of scientific progress, running counter to contemporary educationalist approaches to science and technology (see Robins, 11). This chapter will concentrate on the ways that *Timeslip* offers an education for its young protagonists, almost wholly at odds with the more technophile discourse of children's television of the day developed through critically dystopian encounters with possible futures, as well as the past. Of particular concern will be the way

that *Timeslip's* technophobic future nightmares are established in relation to the protagonists in their present of 1970, as well as within the wartime national past of 1940, to form a coherently critical view of technocracy and intellectual elitism.

The story centres on the adventures of two holidaying adolescents, Liz Skinner (Cheryl Burfield) and Simon Randall (Spencer Banks), whose discovery of an invisible Time Barrier leads them to experience alternative possible futures and also to visit the past. These transports include disturbing future dystopian visions of a world dominated by authoritarian and technocratic rule, but crucially begin with a journey into the wartime past at a nearby military research base. Here they meet the charismatic figure of Commander Traynor (Dennis Quilley), a soldier/ technocrat whose hubris and manipulation of the children contributes to what becomes an often brutal *rite de passage* for the children as they seek to return to their family life in the 1970s, while helping to avert future disasters. All of these stories are bound together by the personal connections of the central characters (Liz's father is revealed to have been a victim of wartime scientific research at the base) as they encounter alternative versions of themselves and others playing key roles in each future scenario, and which forms the basis of the series' cautionary perspective on attitudes to science and technology.

In the first story 'The Wrong End of Time', the Skinner family, comprising father Frank, mother Jean and daughter Liz are taking Simon Randall the son of Frank's recently-widowed best friend, on holiday with them. Exploring a nearby derelict Ministry of Defence site, a former naval research station near St Oswald in Rutland, the children slip through an invisible 'time barrier' into 1940 when the station was still active, and are caught up in an attempted Nazi commando raid to steal secret scientific research and technology. The Nazi leader, officer and scientist Gottfried is in many ways characterized as the opposite number of the manipulative British scientist and project chief Commander Traynor. This is the beginning of a series of adventures in time for the children, during which they experience two alternate and heavily dystopian near futures set in 1990. Here,

technological research and its unrestrained application are shown to have horrific consequences as we witness experiments upon helpless human 'volunteers' (Story 2: 'The Time of the Ice Box') and the destruction of the environment (Story 3: 'The Year of the Burn Up'). Returning from these futures the children discover their origins in secret research programmes of the recent past and the present (Story 4: 'The Day of the Clone').

Although *Timeslip* was conceived originally as a single story, the resultant series is surprisingly coherent due to consistent narrative and thematic elements. The unremarkable plot line in which the children try to avert future disasters is rendered more compelling and politically interesting here by the simultaneous attempt to avoid the children themselves becoming, in those futures, victims or agents of the various technological nightmares they encounter. It is this issue of their participation and of agency which gives the series its more critically dystopian edge. Moreover, these issues are given a wider historical and national context through the first story and its setting in 1940; British wartime military research is here given a more sinister countenance than its customary 'backroom boys' mythology encourages, and it is suggested, ultimately, to be inseparable from the technological dystopianism we go on to witness in the future, and indeed the present.

Science and Children's TV

Timeslip's main science-related discourses tend to be split, in a relatively traditional formulation, between more speculative arguments explaining the show's central narrative device of time-slippage, and its presentation of the applied scientific research and technology which provide the basis for its technophobia. The former is constructed first of all through the appeal to scientific wonder common to many children's television programmes of the time, (see below) not to mention the various magazines (including the children's spin-off from the TV Times, *Look-In*, in which the series appeared in comic strip form). As well as the supporting references to scientific advisor Geoffrey Hoyle, the first two episodes featured a brief introductory piece-to-camera by well-known science journalist Peter Fairley who, as news science editor for *ITN* and *TV Times* was well-known to

viewers (including youth audiences) from his coverage of the Apollo missions in the Sixties: 'It's fiction, of course, but it's very close to a new theory scientists are now working on to explain the universe, and time. Today's science fiction so often becomes tomorrow's science fact' (Introduction to: 'The Wrong End of Time')

Fairley's endorsement establishes a comfortably familiar viewing framework for the early evening family audience who were, by then, regularly entertained with programmes featuring strong scientific components of 'how things work' interest. These included *How* (1966-1981), *Blue Peter* (1958-) and *Magpie* (1968-1980) and there was a parallel market in magazines such as *Look and Learn* (1962-1982), as well as a weekly TV spinoff of the Gerry Anderson technophile adventure series *TV Century 21* (1965-1971)⁴. This mirrored the general surge of confidence in a newly modernised nation where technological mastery and change featured strongly in Britain's national self-image in which:

'future generations were going to be different not only because they never had to know the hardships of economic poverty and war, but because they would be entirely familiar and at ease with the coming technologic world of the space age: the future of rockets, computers, plastics and all the myriad electronic gadgets and marvels of "Tomorrow's World" '(Cook 2006: 95)⁵

This pro-technological content was reinforced by science documentary programming which comprised a strong component of the BBC's Reithian mandate. Timothy Boon discerns that by the end of the 1950's some of the prominent debate about science broadcasting had now focussed rather narrowly on science in and for itself to the exclusion of wider issues:

'[T]here was nothing that looked at all like the science in the service of social welfare ... and which had come to be associated with the political left. There is a hint here of Cold War attitudes

affecting what types of science were to be represented. ... [Scientific experts and commentators] may have differed on what the precise focus of television science should be, but they all emphasised the transmission of the content of modern science, rather than its effects' (Boon 221)⁶

Breaking with much of the contemporary television discourse of scientific wonder directed at children, *Timeslip* constructs a classic technophobic vision of human society and values imperilled by overreaching scientists. Ironically, the series is unusually far-sighted in the range of technology depicted, which includes lasers, drug testing, cloning, tidal barriers and environmental issues, all of which are misused and co-opted by the technocratic Whitehall élite. A refusal simply to readmit technology as the solution to technologically created problems is a clear concern of writer Bruce Stewart who criticized:

'political philosophers and social engineers who work out a theory and then require the race to be fitted to it. I remember when high-rise flats started in England there was a marked increase in the incidence of neurosis among the dwellers. The answer was not that we should go back to living on the ground as we had (mostly) done, but that there should be an increase in psychiatric facilities to assist the afflicted' (in Robins 10)

Timeslip's central plot device —time slippage—crucially evades the instrumental use of technology embodied by a Time Machine. The techno-mastery and relative sanctuary of Doctor Who's *avant la lettre* Steampunk TARDIS is rejected. Roland Barthes comments, suggestively, on Jules Verne's appeal to children through the security of the vessel which always promises resolution and that while:

... the ship may well be a symbol for departure; it is, at a deeper level, the emblem of closure...

To like ships is first and foremost to like a house, a superlative one since it is unremittingly closed, and not at all vague sailings into the unknown: a ship is a habitat before being a means of transport. (Barthes 66)

Such a sense of secure closure and of control is virtually absent as the children simply pass through the invisible barrier which may, or may not, send or return them to their desired destination in time, including their own present of 1970; the various technologically-determined spaces encountered are, in general, nightmarishly claustrophobic and it is only the domestic space of home and its echo in the community of misfits in 'The Year of the Burn Up' which offer such security.

The Home Audience and Intimacy

Broadcast just after 5pm, *Timeslip* addressed a substantial family audience for whom the protagonists might appear unremarkable or typical, within the rather middle-class conventions of much TV performance of the time. The cosy familiarity of the series' present in 1970 is established through the reassuring iconography of the village hostelry in St Oswald (ostensibly Rutland via Ambridge) and the Skinner's home; while offering a schematic rather than dense level of *mise en scène*, these are effective enough as a clear point of social and cultural anchorage. Though functioning largely to establish the family's typical qualities, it nevertheless reinforces thematic issues through artwork on the wall of Liz's bedroom marking her interests as less bookish than Simon's, and that of the living room which contrasts with later pictures in a Whitehall office which appear to be inspired by scientific subjects. In a similar vein, the Gypsy caravan and the presence of Borrow's *Lavengro* also hint, in the first episode, at a lifestyle opposed to the world of the Technocrats.

Cook and Wright argue that such an intimate context for British SF TV was advantageous, enabling its ideas-led approach to work in relative freedom and with a potency specific to it as a medium:

SF TV practitioners were able to reach right inside the home, communicating powerful messages and where necessary manipulating audiences' fears, because programmes were watched by viewers in their own private space with all their public defences down and so in that sense they became personal. (Cook and Wright 3)

Timeslip takes this audience and establishes spaces familiar enough to have featured in the everyday goings on of the soap opera *Crossroads* (1964-1988) which preceded it by half an hour, then contrasts them with visions of a Britain past and present. Though initially appearing distanced and detached from 1970, both wartime past and technocratic future are ultimately drawn together in ways that effectively construct critically dystopian perspectives bearing on *Timeslip's* present. Much debate exists about the concept of the 'critical dystopia', and I wish to argue that *Timeslip* may be accurately described as one, as a text which, in Constance Penley's words moves beyond providing the mere spectacle of future disaster 'to suggest causes rather than merely reveal symptoms' (122).

Such causes are established through implicating the series' present, and the wartime past in scientific atrocities of the near futures, revealing the consequences of unquestioning attitudes to the use of science and technology, and through the ways that its characters, especially the children, are obliged to reflect on their own potential for complicity. The show comprises a series of juxtaposed and related moments of past, present and possible futures in which the protagonists are potential agents rather than simply witnesses. *Timeslip's* nightmare future visions resonate with the technological imperatives of the Cold War sublime; fantasies of scientific mastery in clandestine

research establishments sanctioned and enforced by a Technocrat government. Counter to the flow of the educationalist discourse of children's programming, *Timeslip's* critical and oppositional account is constructed around three main axes. The first establishes future dystopianism firmly within the familiar terrain of the British wartime past and the present of 1970, the second is a sustained criticism of technocratic elitism which is strongly marked as patriarchal, and the third is through the alternative, if tentative, utopian community established in 'The Year of the Burn Up'.

The Wartime Past and the Cold War

The Ministry of Defence base, derelict in 1970, nevertheless conveys an aura of Cold War military secrecy in its dilapidated but potent iconography of fences and bunkers and 'Keep Out' signs. Thrown back to 1940, just prior to the night-time German commando raid, the children are interrogated by the military whose classified work is 'too important for policemen' and where we establish a consistent theme of scientific imperatives liberated from ethical constraints, which lead to ordinary people being patronised and abused. The myth of humble backroom labs, where distracted but brilliant boffins earnestly toil like Santa's elves to save the nation, is soon deflated.⁷ Though we see white-coated lab workers earnestly staring at radar monitors, they are marginalised and the drama soon centres on Traynor and his German counterpart Gottfried as brilliant warrior/scientist. The German soldiers are portrayed largely within wartime thriller conventions through unnecessary brutality, while Gottfried is given a more urbane and rational portrayal; the soldiers speak in untranslated German, but Gottfried has perfect English having studied at Cambridge before the war. As well as having the Cold War resonance of spying, it serves to place the two naval officers as part of an élite and future dialogue and events confirm this. Discussing, over cigars and brandy, their pre-war research correspondence it becomes clear that they see themselves as naturally apart from the other characters. This elitism is soon extended to Simon whose 1970s knowledge and natural ability appeals to both the officers; each will try to manipulate Simon by appealing to his fascination with science – Gottfried soon has him at work with a soldering iron.

Though featuring some elements of the Cold war thriller (the pub landlord is exposed in the present as a German fifth columnist; Gottfried is feared to now be 'with the Russians'), later episodes defuse such anxieties with several references to collaboration with the Russians. Tony Shaw notes that spy fiction peaked in the early 1960s, and that there was the beginning of a 'new phase from the early 1960s in which the cinema's overall support for Cold War orthodoxy mingled with cynical asides about the lamentable dimensions of an increasingly claustrophobic and authoritarian conflict' (2001: 194).

It is this relationship of Cold War science and authoritarianism that *Timeslip* addresses, and the Ministry of Defence base serves, in tandem with its ghostly deserted twin in the present, as a master template for a series of heterotopic spaces which, echoing each other, function ultimately as cautionary variations upon the same theme. The research station establishes ideas of wartime scientific experimentation that take on a more sinister cast for a later generation: less backroom wizardry than *Brave New World* (1932).

Gottfried's pan-scientific appeals cast a long shadow over future episodes featuring enforced prosthetic implants in 'The Day of the Icebox's, and Technocratic elites trying to eliminate communities of 'Misfits' in The Year of the Burn Up'. In the final 'Year of the Clone' the images of elderly people being marched along for the latest in a series of failed drug tests are genuinely disturbing in their echoes of the Holocaust.

According to series creator Ruth Boswell, *Timeslip* consciously played down the hardware elements typical to Science Fiction focussing instead on imaginative content (2013), and this was no doubt an advantage given the low budget constraints everywhere visible in the studio sets and restricted use of location. Yet there is some genuine benefit from the hermetic quality of these sets, which intensify our sense of the claustrophobia and totality of the dystopian world they seek to represent.

Writing of such constraints Cook and Wright argue for their capacity to make a 'virtue of necessity' and that British science fiction television:

'was ideas-led, though on the level of plot, character and situation rather than having the luxury of detailed descriptive re-creations of alternative worlds axiomatic of literary sf. Its plots often functioned as metaphors or allegories, reflecting wider social and cultural preoccupations at the time of their production, particularly political tensions, or anxieties about the effects of new technology'. (Cook and Wright 3)

It is not the modest *mise en scène* of future technology that is effective here, but the relations of the various time-shifted 'variations-on-a-theme' that generate their critical value, crucially feeding back on the narrative's present of the 1970s, and not merely constructing reified and frozen visions of future catastrophes. For Frederic Jameson such a vision would

'... not seriously attempt to imagine the "real" future of our social system. Rather, its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come.' (2005: 288)

Thus *Timeslip's* dystopian episodes reflect back on each other, implicating present and past, and the momentum and secrecy of scientific research appears driven from within Britain, rather than in response to external threats typical of Cold War discourse (the series is notably free from two symptomatic elements: invasion and nuclear threat).

The Scientist and Intellectual Elitism

While future stories introduce the stereotypically unhinged figure of scientist Morgan C Devereux (John Barron, speaking in what sounds like mid-Atlantic Dalek) he functions to confirm Traynor as a far more nuanced and plausible figure. Ultimately technological disaster is attributed less to the hubris of rogue scientists than to the establishment as a whole, an establishment, moreover, which at times involves the future participation of our protagonists.

We first encounter Commander Traynor at ease in the local hotel bar at St Oswald, dressed in a style suggestive of a middle class milieu somewhat above that of the children and their families and amongst the horse-brasses and log fire *mise en scène* he appears every inch a member of the local squirearchy. Though an establishment figure *par excellence*, he is nevertheless a figure of some complexity and ambivalence, as we encounter him at different moments throughout his career as naval commander: Whitehall scientific mandarin, fugitive, prisoner and even clone. While smugly patrician, authoritarian and advocating extreme technocratic positions, he is neither conventional egghead nor boffin, and the main concession to the iconography of mad science is a rather bouffant hairstyle evocative of large foreheads in 1950's SF movies such as *This Island Earth* (Joseph M Newman: 1955) . Significantly, his character also undergoes experiences in which he is victim and fugitive from a world created in part by his own actions.

Though Andrew Tudor, identifies mad scientists to be in some decline in 1970's horror cinema, television was arguably the beneficiary: *Quatermass*, the character and the trilogy of original BBC dramas, 'helped establish two of the key characteristics of British TV SF: the centrality of the scientist and the reflection of Cold War fears' (Cook and Wright 2006: 7)., and their increasing adoption of an 'anti-establishment stance'. The figure of Professor Bernard Quatermass played a pivotal role in establishing the scientist as integrated into society, or at least the establishment, and images of mad scientists, as lone maniacs in exotic and isolated locales, gave way in the post-war years to narratives in which 'Scientific discovery has simply become part of the order of things' (Cook and Wright 146).

Partly in the tradition of a Bernard Quatermass, Traynor is less heroic; as antagonist, his representation of establishment science is that of urbane and self-sufficient scientific mandarin ('answerable only to the Prime Minister') and this well-groomed image of masculine authority evokes Fred Inglis's description of political establishment mouthpieces during the Cold War: "They acted out in public and for our benefit those qualities of manly and womanly character on which our great nations so depend: niceness, resolution, efficacy, decisiveness, calm, charm courage, and a dapper suit.' (1992: 437)

Laura Forster also notes changes taking place in 1970's series such as *Doomwatch* (1970-1972) and *Survivors* (1975-1977), in the emerging characters of 'the 1970s "dropout" scientists, ... [who] ... in tune with issues of contemporary Britain, split their profession and can be seen in direct opposition to the ambitious, driven, Faustian overreacher seen in other science fiction' (Forster, 2009: 90). Such representations of the scientist, less melodramatically performed and written (less 'mad') were also appropriate, in Forster's view, to the televisual space:

[W]ith fewer special effects at a television director's disposal, smaller budgets, and pressure to make use of "free" studio space rather than expensive location shooting, scientists were necessarily less outlandish characters. Televisual practices lent themselves to the close-up and the medium shot, the domestic or small-scope setting, and fixed-camera techniques. This, I suggest, necessitated a different kind of portrayal of the scientist. (79)

The scientific intellectual elite's indifference to the feelings and interests of everyone else is marked by increasingly extreme abuses of ordinary citizens. Frank Skinner, a mere rating during the war, is lastingly traumatised by the effects of technology Traynor orders him to sabotage; the scientist's lack of compassion is emphasised as the events of 1940 are intercut with Traynor's lofty rationalisations to the Skinners in the present and to which Frank angrily replies: 'And what did our little

investigations into 1940 teach me? Only that I'd been mug enough to get in the way of one of your 'new developments', and been made to suffer for it ever since'¹⁰

Stewart's script consistently underlines the arrogance of scientific élites and their potential to play God and this critique of intellectual superiority surfaces early on. Furthermore it is consistently structured across gender discourses as well as a technocratic class hierarchy; later, this informs some bitter jokes between Simon and Liz who are established as a fairly conventional 'chalk and cheese' mismatch. Liz is given a more emotionally-defined, girl-next-door role versus Simon's rather withdrawn 'science geek'; even Liz's father suggests, in response to Liz's negative view of Simon's bookishness that she could read a few more herself. In 1940, Simon's ability and interests earn him special attention from the scientists and his helpfulness with the equipment (or collaboration, from another perspective) is pointedly contrasted in one well-composed shot with Liz doing the dishes in the foreground.; though herself marginalised by performing domestic duties she also participates in these hierarchies by commenting on Sarah, the mentally handicapped and visibly distressed farm girl, as 'not very bright'. Meanwhile, in the present Traynor has been enjoying his superiority over the Skinners with complex scientific speculations about the Time Barrier; when Jean protests he says, smugly, 'what would you suggest?' knowing she hasn't a clue.

Superior intellect and I.Q. resurface constantly in future stories as the justification for callous indifference to actual human beings, and in *The Time of the Icebox* the children meet the first of their possible future selves in 1990 in which Dr Joynton defers to things she doesn't need to know, but which 'various superbrains would'. More significantly, a grown-up Liz, now calling herself Beth (Mary Preston) has been given an intelligence-enhancing drug rendering her as aloof and heartless as the rest of the scientists, telling Liz (in an effective reversal of her earlier comments about the farm girl) 'I was a little idiot when I was you'. By *The Day of the Burn Up* Liz's intellectual ability is given a more extended treatment as the infallible computer has decided that she and Simon's future selves are intellectually incompatible and thus non-viable as a couple: she a 'D minus' to his 'A Plus'.

Complaining furiously to Beth that it's 'the worst thing I've ever heard', Beth replies sarcastically 'No, Liz. It's progress.' Beth refuses the machine's judgements, and, as a future Liz, begins to enlighten her past self. This initiates a series of running and bitter ripostes to Simon's insensitivity on the subject, for example: 'Oh forget it, it's too difficult'/'Sorry Simon – didn't realise it was A Plus stuff'.

Traynor manipulates the children, and his decisiveness, status and confidence suggest the kind of assertive and successful father figure absent from their backgrounds. Both fathers (best of friends) are 'absent' in some sense: Simon's, an amiable unassuming character, appears fleetingly when they go back five years to 1965 and Frank is established, through both plot and Derek Benfield's sensitive performance, as a man whose wartime trauma caused breakdown. His distracted manner exemplifies a consistent sense of his ineffectuality as he fails constantly to grasp the nature of the children's experiences (functioning partly as the 'disbeliever,' common in science fiction stories), and his business ventures are unsuccessful. Traynor is, by contrast the very image of the successful male, however his relationship with the two children is inflected in different ways. Significantly Liz is more sceptical about him and his works, while Simon's knowledge of science is easily exploited through Traynor's flattery. Ruth Boswell's initial vision of the project was centred on the idea of Liz's encounter with her own father (2013) and this strand of the narrative is one of two main threads, along with the relationship of Simon and Traynor, which work rather in counterpoint. Liz is distinguished by more intuitive qualities through her mother's psychic ability to link with her daughter across time, and she is, throughout, more sympathetic to the circumstances and feelings of individuals. Her relationship with her father, Traynor's victim, is positive by contrast with Simon's initial fascination with the scientist's work; as the classic stereotype of the young male nerd, appealing constantly to logic and prodigiously familiar with science and technology, he is something of a *Joe 90* (1968-1969) lookalike, bookish and with large spectacles. His ability to grasp new developments in technology and science, while reasoning aloud, serves to deliver expository material to the viewer, but this initial wonder diminishes as he is steadily caught up in the negative

consequences of Traynor's world. Simon's relationship with Traynor reveals the dangers and illusions of an uncritical fascination with technology.

At first glance, this split of emotionally-sensitive women versus cool and rational men appears simply to reproduce some of the classic gender stereotypes of popular SF, yet they provide the mainspring for one of *Timeslip's* more potent critiques. Joy Leman has discussed how changes in women's social roles during the 1960s began to provoke a shift in serious television SF drama, arguing, for instance, that by the time of *A for Andromeda* (1961) the female characters were given more central roles within the actual scientific, rather than domestic, discourses of the drama and that, though flawed, they were 'no longer the groupies of Quatermass' found in the three *Quatermass* serials of the 1950s (Leman 1991: 122). *Timeslip* takes rather a different tack as Liz encounters her IQ-boosted scientist future Other, Beth, whose unpleasantness and insensitivity reveal her simply to have adopted the worst aspects of the male-dominated technocracy. The final critical perspective on this is established through *Timeslip's* questioning of traditional educational philosophy as part of the Misfits' alternative vision of society.

The Counterculture as Utopia

In 'The Year of the Burn Up' the *zeitgeist* is most acutely evident as the children are thrown into an alternate 1990 Britain pitched somewhere between the Wellsian and the Orwellian. Sanctuary is found in a rebel community of so-called Misfits being persecuted by Technocrats whose Master Plan again evokes fantasies of Cold War technological mastery; maps of grids and infrastructures echo the Civil Defence measures so witheringly exposed as ineffective in Peter Watkins's *The War Game* (1965) five years earlier. In this future, international collaborations involve the Russians melting their sections of the Polar ice caps in a global effort to subdue Nature once and for all: 'There are few things as wasteful, cumbersome and unproductive as a flower ... something had to be done about natural forms in general'

The ensuing global catastrophe of the 'Burn Up'¹¹ is the cause of the tropical jungle¹² at which the children arrive, soon revealed to be 'darkest Buckinghamshire'. Here the children encounter alternate selves whose dissent from the Technocracy forms part of their ongoing education. In Simon's case it is 2957 (David Graham), a Technocrat Controller of wavering commitment, and Liz once again meets Beth who, in this future, is not a scientist but an artist leading the Misfit commune. Dominated by women and children (a young David Thewlis among them) the commune is Bruce Stewart's countercultural riposte to the patriarchal Technocrats, its collectivist activities dedicated to art and self-fulfilment while subsisting off the land in the face of impending eco-disaster. The Misfits' ethos is strongly suggestive of holistic educationalist philosophy which formed part of the 1960s counterculture and the machine's pronouncements about Liz/Beth's abilities are rejected as she says to Simon that 'all the computer's test result told me was that I was myself and not somebody else'. This individualist defiance is directed both to the standardisation of the Technocracy's cloning programme and to contemporary education when she later tells Liz her 'D plus' is because 'your teachers didn't know how to encourage your talents' –let it flow'.

The Misfits' community, however rudimentary and fragile it appears in the face of the global catastrophe, completes the critique of technological and intellectual elitism. Not self-consciously Luddite, it simply shows a society existing happily in adversity and against the technological grain; it is such broadly Utopian qualities which give *Timeslip* much of its unusually critical dystopian force. Following Tom Moylan, Frederic Jameson distinguishes between those dystopias which are anti-utopian 'given the way in which they are informed by a central passion to denounce and to warn against Utopian programs in the political realm' (2005: 199), and those which still retain a sense of utopian potential: 'The critical dystopia is a negative cousin of the Utopia proper, for it is in the light of some positive conception of human social possibilities that its effects are generated and from Utopian ideals its politically enabling stance derives.' (2005: 198)

Conclusion

Timeslip's pessimism about technology and scientific élites is hardly unusual in SF, but its place in children's television is a unique one, as is its relentless *rite de passage* which visibly takes its toll on the children who return to their own time and their families so much the wiser. Aided by the noticeable changes in the actors over the production – especially Spencer Banks as Simon – we are struck by how much the principal characters develop due to experiences formed through debate and encounters with their possible future selves. There is little time for the sentimental and the childish as tough choices and grim experiences make this a harsh coming-of-age tale. This quality places the show's account of technological dystopianism, quite properly, within the terms of Darko Suvin's famous account of the SF *novum* and particularly in the terms he offers below:

... if SF is organized around an irreversible and significant change in its world and agents, then a simple addition of adventures, where *plus ça change plus c'est la, même chose*, is an abuse of SF for purposes of trivial sensationalism ... On the contrary, the easiest narrative way of driving a significant change home is to have the hero or heroine grow into it (or better, to have the hero or heroine define it for the reader by growing with it), and much valid SF uses the plot structure of the "education novel," with its initially naive protagonist who by degrees arrives at some understanding of the *novum* for her/himself and for the readers. (79)

Significantly this 'education' draws upon countercultural and anti-establishment attitudes of the time, challenging uncritical technophilia not only through environmental perspectives, but prompting the children to re-evaluate their own attitudes; even Traynor himself appears chastened by events resolved neither through *Deus* nor *machina*. Our parting shot is a moving one, set once again at the Ministry of Defence base. A somewhat dishevelled Traynor stares forlornly after his technocrat double, a clone, despatched into some temporal limbo in search of its own destiny.

Meanwhile in long shot we see the Skinners and Simon walking away in the opposite direction, staged as two couples, but with Simon and Liz subdued and sobered by experience.

Notes

¹ See also Stewart, B., 'Timeslip Memories Part Two' and timeslip.org.uk for the most detailed and comprehensive account of the series' complex narrative.

² Currently available in complete (though largely black and white) form, as a 10hrs 50 mins DVD set from *A & E Television Networks* with retrospective documentary.

³ Much of this vision is clearly evident in the views of principal writer Bruce Stewart. See Robins, T. 'Timeslip' *Starburst* No 91: Time Travel Special, 8(7) (March 1986) pp.8-11.

⁴ Fairley's popular science books include *Project X: The Exciting Story of British Invention* (1970) with a foreword from Harold Wilson whose 1963 'White Heat' speech famously codified the technological optimism of British society's modernizing aspirations.

⁵ *Tomorrow's World* used a similar title font to *Timeslip (Data 70)* as opposed to what appears to be *Moore Computer* for the latter), sharing connotations of technology; their Magnetic Ink Character Recognition format being designed for computers.

⁶ According to Boon: 'The petitioning by scientific organizations of the BBC in the quarter century from 1941 and especially from 1949 was second only to their approaches to government.' This lobbying peaked by time of the Pilkington Committee in 1960, but as he points out 'the scientific elite need not have been concerned about how broadcast showed science because, far from representing it incompetently or in a negative fashion, television producers were keen to convey a view of science that scientists approved of' (237).

⁷ Popular narrative tropes of 'back room boys' magically producing technological wonders from minimal resources have also been contradicted by revisionist work which persuasively argues that Britain was, on the contrary, a powerfully well-resourced nation led by a technocratic elite whose prime minister considered technical innovation paramount. See Edgerton, David, *Britain's War Machine* (London, Penguin, 2012).

⁸ Simon's horror of being the 'first man-machine in the history of the world' is notably the reverse of the concept's heroic reinvention for Lee Majors in *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-1978).

⁹ A development also identified by Christopher Frayling in *Mad, Bad and Dangerous? The Scientist and the Cinema* (London: Reaktion, 2005). See p. 224.

¹⁰ The demystification of post-war consensus myths such as 'Blitz Spirit' has been undertaken by Angus Calder in *The Myth of the Blitz*, (London, Jonathan Cape, 1991) but had already surfaced in SF films as noted by I. Q. Hunter regarding *Till Day the Earth Caught Fire's* (1962) questioning of 'the Dunkirk spirit' in Hunter, I. Q. ed., *British Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1999). See also Daniel O'Brien's 'Forward to the Past: Anti-Fascist Allegory and "Blitz Spirit" Revisionism in Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150' A.D. In 'Neighbours', R.C. ed. *The Galaxy is rated G: Essays on Children's Science Fiction and Television* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011) pp. 97-110.

¹¹ Kim Newman, drawing on Brian Aldiss's term 'cosy catastrophes', notes how many British SF dystopias from Wyndham to Ballard are 'about that national obsession, the weather', Introduction to O'Brien, Daniel SF:UK *How British Science Fiction Changed the World* (London: Reynolds & Hearn Ltd., 2000).

¹² One of several unfortunate colonial tropes, as the jungle also provides the setting for *Timeslip's* only black character, Vera.