
Television Form: Past, Present, Future

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The 1960s' series *The Twilight Zone* is a monument in TV history. First, it pioneered the genre of science fiction on television. Most importantly, it addressed social issues and taboos of the time. Embedded in a cold-war context it deals with racial tension, fear of war, dictatorship and communism. In setting stories in another world, creator of the series Rod Serling was able to address those tensions and fears while avoiding the ominous censoring of sponsors whose only goal was to sell commercial goods at the expense of potentially controversial content of TV shows.

If television reflects the society and captures the zeitgeist of the time, *The Twilight Zone* really epitomizes the mood of the 1960's. Comparably, revivals depict original narrations in a re-contextualized society. They provide us with an opportunity to do comparative analysis to trace the manifestations of historical, sociocultural, and technical changes in television.

Set in a post-cold war and so-called "post-racial" era, in a society crippled with fear of terrorism (post-9/11), the 2003 version of *The Twilight Zone* paints the ambience of its time. The remake also epitomizes the new production techniques and the liberalized television market more open to controversial topics.

Despite the different context, *The Twilight Zone* remains relevant nowadays. Not only because US society is still crippled with anxiety and fear of the enemy, but because it deals with human emotions such as selfishness, narcissism and paranoia. In sum, *The Twilight Zone* talks to what is fundamentally and universally human.

I will analyze two specific episodes of *The Twilight Zone* from 1960s and their remakes in 2000s: "The Monsters are Due on Maple Street" and "The Eye of the Beholder". Using a combination of software analysis programs, such as Multimodal Analysis, Final Cut, and Cinemetrics, my presentation explores shifts in narrative structure, self-representations of the U.S., and cinematographic techniques.

Among the notable cultural differences between the two periods, racial representation of the U.S. society is probably the most salient. In the 1960's all the characters were white actors, whereas 2003 episodes feature black people. Additionally, black actor Forest Whitaker replaces host Rod Serling. Such cast choices herald the rise of a multi-ethnic society.

"The Monsters are Due on Maple Street" exemplifies the switch between fear of communism to fear of terrorism. The episode depicts the members of an otherwise quiet and peaceful neighborhood who mutually accuse each other for causing multiple power failures and other unexplained phenomena. The neighborhood turns into an angry and hysterical mob and people end up killing each other. The 2003 remake tells the same narrative story except that, at the end, we learn that terrorists created the discord. In the original version, aliens representing communists are the threatening force. Despite contextual difference people's paranoia and hysteria remains identical.

“The Eye of the Beholder” addresses the concept of beauty and conformity. Janet Tyler is at the hospital with her head covered with bandages as she undergoes her umpteenth treatment to become physically “normal”. During the whole episode, no doctors and nurses’ faces are visible on screen. Only at the end, when the attempt finally fails, does the audience realize that Janet Tyler is quite attractive but that everybody else’s face is deformed. She is eventually cast away from society to live with people of “her own kind”. The 2003 episode follows meticulously the same narrative structure and dialogues. However, while the original allegorically refers to racial segregation, the newest version may refer to the diktat of beauty industry.

Besides cultural differences, those episodes witness a change in cinematographic style. New technologies in sound production, computer-generated imagery (CGI), and high-definition television have all modified the modus operandi of TV production. This evolution generates a change in aesthetics between both versions.

The most obvious change lies in the passage to color. In the 1960’s, shooting *The Twilight Zone* in black and white was a deliberate choice. It exhibited its noir style and showcased the artistic effort to use lighting. While the use of colored images in the 2003 episodes might contribute to the realism of the shows, it dilutes the dark mood of the original.

The difference of cutting rate is less obvious to the audience. Typically, in the 1960’s, average shot length (ASL) of films and TV series was about 6-8 seconds. ASLs have continually gradually shortened over the past decades. For instance, *The Monsters are Due on Maple Street* features a 6.5 seconds ASL compared to 2.9 seconds in 2003. Such dichotomy showcases not only a different mode of production but also reflects the viewing habits of the audiences at different time periods.