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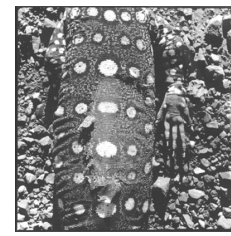

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Everywhere and nowhere:
Vancouver, fan pilgrimage and the urban imaginary

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ABSTRACT This article discusses fan pilgrimage, using as a case study the city of Vancouver, Canada – a location that has been used as the basis for several cult television series. It draws on theories of urban geography, particularly of postmodern suburbia (Edward Relph, Jean Baudrillard, Umberto Eco, Fredric Jameson, Edward Soja) to argue that while Vancouver may be valued by film and television producers as a generic, anonymous, 'flat' environment, to fan pilgrims who bring their own imaginary maps (based on the fictional geographies of *Smallville*, *The X-Files* and *Battlestar Galactica*), the city is a rich intersection of possible worlds. The article uses science fiction and superhero metaphors of parallel universes and 'infinite earths' to explore this fan experience, arguing finally that pilgrimage can be an act of creation, performance, disguise and carnival that symbolically transforms the location in question, temporarily inverting social structures and making the city into a liberating, playful space.

KEYWORDS carnival • city • cognitive mapping • fan • pilgrimage • postmodern • suburb • urban imaginary

> Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars; call it what you like. (D.H. Lawrence, cited in Relph, 1976: 49)

Welcome to Vancouver. Clicking a coordinate on Google Earth's three-dimensional map of the slowly spinning globe zooms you into the West Coast

Figure 1 Vancouver, by Matt *http://www.flickr.com/photos/mussels/196601725/*

of Canada, skidding you across the Pacific Ocean and up the edge of the United States to the silver sails and skyscrapers of the city's business district, Canada Place.

A block back from the waterfront, on West Hastings Street and Burrard, is the Marine Building, an Art Deco office tower accented with sea-green and gold. The guidebook will tell you its height (25 storeys), its build date (1930), its architects, materials and history. But to a fan of the Warner Bros TV show *Smallville* (2001–), this detail would be of secondary importance at best. Even the name, the Marine Building, would be a caption in parentheses. This tower – enhanced in the show with a CGI sphere on its pyramidal rooftop – is the headquarters of the *Daily Planet*.

So 355 Burrard is already two addresses, the real and the fictional; and a further layer is added if the *Smallville* fan is joined by an *X-Files* (1993–2002) aficionado. Meanings and priorities are shuffled: for this fellow pilgrim the Marine Building is first and foremost the location – indicated as Washington DC within the storyline – where Scully pursued her sister's assassin in the episode 'Apocrypha'.

Walking away from the coast and into town, down Burrard, the X-Phile passes Christ Church Cathedral, pausing to worship it as the spot in 'Conduit' (the episode sets it in Sioux City, Iowa) where Mulder cried for his lost sister. At the junction between Burrard and George Street, this fan sees not just the Hotel Vancouver but also the (fictional) Venerable Plaza Hotel, Boston, from 'Fire'. The hotel and cathedral are neighbours on the real map, but *X-Files* transplants them from Vancouver to the US, stretching geography and placing them miles apart, in different states.

Figure 2 The Marine Building, by Russ Dock *http://www.flickr.com/photo_zoom.gne?id=242052175&size=l*
Image of Marine Building as *Daily Planet building* is available at *http://images.wikia.com/smallville/images/thumb/3/31/Daily_Planet.jpg/275px-Daily_Planet.jpg*

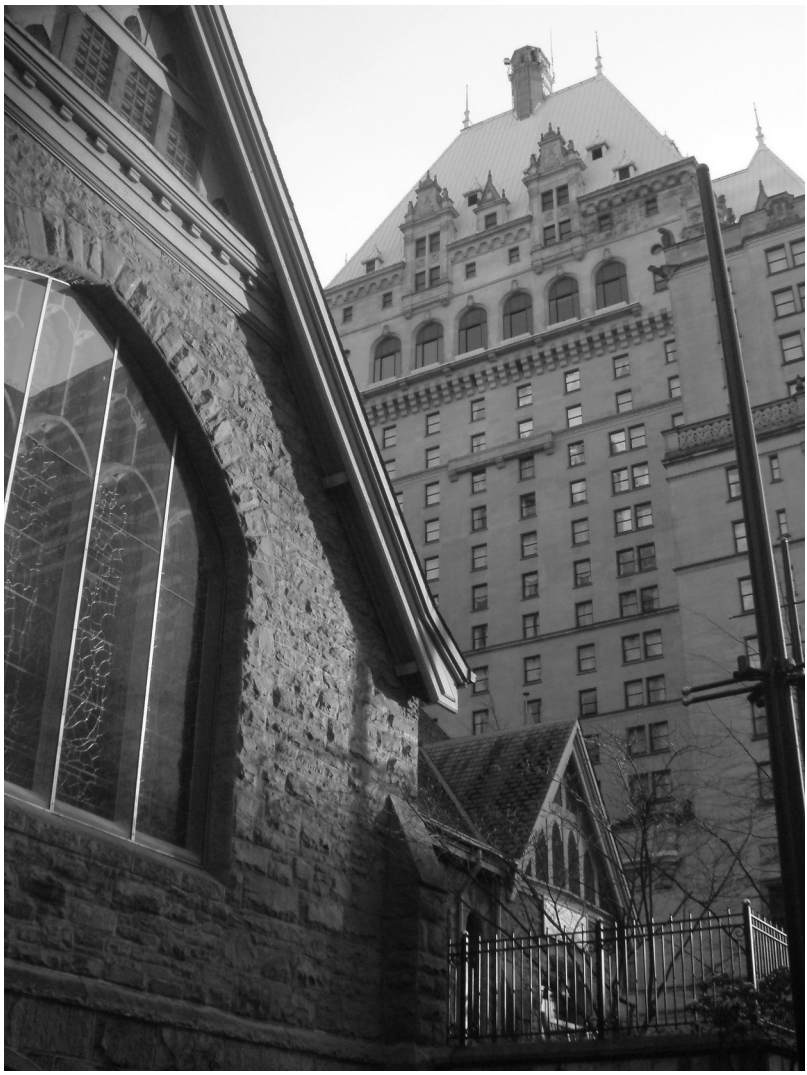

Figure 3 The Christ Church Cathedral and the Hotel Vancouver, author's photograph

Across Hornby Street and next to the Vancouver Art Gallery is Robson Square, the sunken area of shops and cafés that served as Washington DC, again in 'Apocrypha'. Robson Street leads to the Vancouver Public Library, a terracotta Colosseum. To the *X-Files* fan, it is architecturally striking but has no deeper significance; to the *Smallville* fan, it's the Metropolis Courthouse, another site of communion with the fictional text.

Figure 4 The Vancouver Public Library by Lindn, *http://www.flickr.com/photo_zoom.gne?id=236629656&size=o*

And to the fan of *Battlestar Galactica* (2004 –), who watched Sharon 'Boomer' Valerii and Karl 'Helo' Agathon trek past it on Cylon-occupied Caprica, the Vancouver Public Library is on another planet entirely.

Various factors contributed to recast Vancouver, in film industry terms, as 'Hollywood North': 'the favourable exchange rates, the cheap (and union-lite) labour, the easy flight from LA and, above all, the wide range of locations that easily double for [the] US. Tenements, skyscrapers, alleys – especially the alleys – docks, waterfront and more need little or no disguise to double for New York, Philadelphia, Chicago or other Stateside cities' (Jepson, 2004: 172).

So the city substitutes for the US partly for economic reasons, but also because of its perceived anonymity. Its streets are considered generic and unrecognisable to a US audience; it can be everywhere – Boston, Sioux City, Washington DC, Metropolis – because, to non-Vancouverites, it looks like nowhere in particular. 'Its production benefits', writes Matt Hills, 'beyond the weak Canadian dollar – depend largely on an assumed lack of identity' (Hills, 2002: 150). In contrast to the landmarks of New York and San Francisco, which star as themselves in movies from *Vertigo* (1958) and *An Affair to Remember* (1957) to *Just Like Heaven* (2005) and *16 Blocks* (2006) (and as CGI simulations in *X3* [2006] and *King Kong* [2005]), the Marine Building and Public Library are used in *Smallville* based on the assumption that they won't be recognized. The shots of 'Boston' and 'Washington DC' in

Figure 5 The Vancouver Public Library interior by Imran Ali, *http://www.flickr.com/photo_zoom.gne?id=115181088&size=o*
Image of Vancouver Public Library as it appears in *Battlestar Galactica* available at *http://pat.suwalski.net/film/bsg-locations/103–1.jpg*

The X-Files would be ludicrous if their real locations were identifiable to anything but a minority audience as only streets apart.

The geographer Edward Relph cites Philip Wagner's suggestion that 'America is a city and Canada struggles not to be its suburb' (Wagner in Relph, 1976: 92): the analogy is apt, recalling Relph's discussion of *subtopia* as 'an environment of few significant places … a placeless geography, a flatscape, a meaningless pattern of buildings' (1976: 117). Relph's photographs show the same bleak uniformity in Toronto, Ontario, northern France and South Wales: 'endless subdivisions of identical houses … It becomes virtually impossible to tell one locality from another, for they all look alike and feel alike' (1976: 105–9). The use of Vancouver as 'Hollywood North' relegates it to this flat anonymity, treating it as an all-purpose substitute city, a studio backlot.

But the sameness of suburbia now carries other, slightly different and more complex connotations. In *Thirdspace*, written two decades after Relph's account, Edward Soja selects a term to identify the new centres on the outside of the metropolis that buck the traditional urban pattern of 'tightly packed inner city' winding down into 'sleepy dormitory suburbs' (Soja, 1996: 239).

> Some have called these amorphous implosions of archaic suburbia 'Outer Cities' or 'Edge Cities'; others dub them 'Technopoles', 'Technoburbs', 'Silicon Landscapes', 'Postsuburbia', 'Metroplex.' I will name them, collectively, *Exopolis*, the city without, to stress their oxymoronic ambiguity, their city-full non-cityness. (1996: 238)

Exopolis, this late-twentieth-century subtopia, retains the clone qualities identified by Relph, but Soja reads the doubling, pastiche and copying of Orange Country's urban design through postmodern theory, linking it to Jean Baudrillard's theories of the image and Umberto Eco's tours of California's hyperreality. As such, the new suburbs have the slick flatness associated with postmodernism and its aesthetic of surfaces over depth, but also a richness of cross-references and quotation: what Soja (1996: 238) calls a 'resplendent bazaar of repackaged times and spaces'.

In this article I will draw these theories of urban geography into a study of fan pilgrimage, centred around Vancouver as an all-purpose generic location which, precisely because of its perceived anonymity, becomes rich, layered, a site to which fan pilgrims bring several maps, both real and fantastical. Vancouver, to visitors steeped in the various fictions filmed on its streets, is not a no-place but an intersection of multiple universes: a 'non-city', or not just *one* city, but also 'city-full', simulating Boston, San Francisco, Washington, Metropolis, even the science fiction city of 'Cylon-occupied Caprica' from *Battlestar Galactica*. In Matt Hills' neat phrase, almost a tourist-board slogan for the cult fan, 'Vancouver offers a gateway to innumerable other places and settings' (2002: 150).

Its *flatscape* qualities of suburbia make it the ideal studio set, but rather than placenessness, Vancouver embodies what Relph calls 'other-directedness': 'places [like Disneyland] made up of a surrealistic combination of history, myth, reality and fantasy that have little relationship with a particular geographical setting' (1976: 95), 'architecture which is deliberately directed towards outsiders, spectators, passers-by' (1976: 93) and, we should add, pilgrims (see Sandvoss, 2005: 58). Vancouver's supposed blankness lends itself to dress-up and disguise, and in turn the pilgrims who recognize and remember its disguises – seeing the Marine Building doubled as the *Daily Planet* building, for instance – experience the city not as the dully unremarkable subtopia of Relph's account or as the postmodern 'scamscape' Soja cautions against in Californian suburbs, but as several impossible cities laid over the real in a liberating geography.

Ultimately, I argue more broadly that the imaginative investment brought by media fans to sites that are often by definition unremarkable, generic and flat enriches them through 'other-directed' acts of textual communion, making them special and transforming them into sites of play and carnival, poetry and magic.

Although I draw context from the existing body of scholarship on fan pilgrimage – and supplementary material from several online fan testimonies – this article

is largely an auto-ethnography and a textual analysis of the city, examining my own experiences of Vancouver (as a former *X-Files* follower) during March 2006, in the company of a *Smallville* and a *Battlestar Galactica* fan. The primary data are collated from tapes, photographs and notes taken on location, resulting in a small but qualitatively rich body of evidence.

No fixed address

Some sites of fan pilgrimage – such as Graceland (see Doss, 1999: King, 1993) and the recreated 'Rover's Return' pub from *Coronation Street* (see Couldry, 2000) – are dedicated only to indulging one specific fandom, immersing the visitor in an experience of communion. Memphis, Tennessee's 'pseudo-Georgian structure of about 40,500 square feet and a teeny guitar shaped pool' (Doss, 1999: 89) signifies primarily as Graceland, Elvis' home, a museum and shrine to the King: it does not carry significantly different connotations for non-Elvis fans (although it may have slightly different associations for Memphis residents as the area's main tourist focus, and its role as a pilgrimage site may even be resented by local non-fans). Graceland is a single point on both the real and imaginary map. However, most geographical sites of media fandom are *multiply coded* (see Brooker, 2005); their fan significance is just one aspect of their identity. The *Blade Runner* pilgrim searching for the film's Los Angeles locations, for instance, finds that Rick Deckard's police HQ is a busy railway station in the Spanish Mission style, that Deckard's apartment signifies locally as a Frank Lloyd Wright building rather than a Ridley Scott set, and that the office workers in the Bradbury don't welcome tourists who want to see J.F. Sebastian's toy-making tenement. To experience any feeling of connection and communion, the *Blade Runner* pilgrim has also to make a symbolic journey, an imaginative effort to bridge the obvious gap between the Los Angeles of the present day and the set-dressed, matte-painted 2019, focusing on specific features (a tile design, a camera angle) and trying to ignore those elements that prevent immersion in the fiction. The *Blade Runner* pilgrimage involves working with two maps, a real plan of LA and an understanding of the alternative, fantastical, impossible geography of Ridley Scott's diegesis. The two cannot be reconciled: most glaringly, the police HQ and Deckard's apartment are skyscrapers, whereas Union Station and the Ennis-Brown House are one-storey buildings.

Vancouver's locations, as already indicated, fall into the second category: more than most sites of fan pilgrimage, they evoke other imaginary maps that have to be held in a double, triple, multiple vision alongside the real. Touring the city's *X-Files* sites involves an extreme case of this multiple mapping, for various reasons.

First, the show's conventions include a typewritten caption identifying the location in each new scene, often with a precise street name and number: so Eugene Tooms' apartment from 'Squeeze' is actually an alley off West

Hastings Street, but to the fan, it is also fixed firmly as '66 Exeter Street'. This custom of labelling a Vancouver location with a fictional address sometimes leads to ambiguities that *X-Files* fandom has to resolve through interpretive manoeuvres. For instance, the exterior of Scully's apartment is shot at 1419 Pendrell Street, Vancouver, but the character's address is given elsewhere within the show as 3170 W 53 Road, Annapolis, Maryland. However, '1419' is visible above her door in some shots, leading one fan site to offer the excuse that Annapolis 'is presumably a previous address. In [the episode] Milagro, we learn that she has, in fact, lived in Georgetown since at least 1993' ('Deep Background', http://www.keleka.net/deepbackground/xfiles/xfplaces.htm). Scully is therefore relocated, imaginatively, to 1419 on a street in Georgetown. This juggling of real location and two fictional places is further complicated when we consider that Annapolis exists, but (as a search of that city's map reveals) 3170 W 53 Road, Annapolis does not. As with the Venerable Plaza Hotel, Boston – presumably a reworking of the real-life Boston Park Plaza – the actual Vancouver locations are disguised as places in the United States that, while their addresses sound convincing, have no correspondence to physical geography themselves.

Second, Pendrell Street is only filmed as the exterior – the inside of Scully's apartment is a studio set – while other Vancouver locations, such as Christ Church Cathedral, were shot inside rather than outside. When a fan pilgrim stands before 1419 Pendrell and experiences it as 'Scully's apartment', then he or she is choosing to ignore the fact that the inside of the Vancouver building looks nothing like the interior as shot. In this case (as with many of the *Blade Runner* locations) there is a further juggling between inside and outside; a building is sacred in fan terms because its exterior was used in an establishing shot, even if the pilgrim knows – though again, perhaps pushes away the notion – that stepping through the entrance would destroy the illusion.

Sometimes the reverse is also true; for instance, X-Philes photograph Christ Church Cathedral from the street, although only its interior appeared in the show (Kristen W, http://pics.livejournal.com/frey_at_last/gallery/0000ddkb?page=2&.view=grid). While the most common fan practice involves taking photographs that attempt to recreate the angle and reconstruct the shot (see Brooker, 2005: 19–20; and Brooker, 2007), the entire location seems, here (again, the same is true of *Blade Runner* pilgrimage sites) to acquire an aura of significance. The exterior of the cathedral is made special through its association with what lies within.

Again, the discrepancy between inside and out – like entering *Doctor Who*'s TARDIS and discovering a vast space within a small blue box – can require the fan pilgrim to make a leap of imagination, a more challenging bridging of real world and fiction than simply standing at Robson Square and immediately being able to imagine oneself in the familiar scene from 'Apocrypha'. Rather than 'this looks like the place', the thought process here runs 'this doesn't look like the place, but it is'; a connection with the fiction based more on faith than on empirical evidence. Some locations on the *X-Files* tour are, therefore, of

note primarily because of their façades, and some because of the rooms inside: a further doubling of levels on the pilgrim's imaginary map.

Third, while Vancouver's *X-Files* sites are multiply coded in terms of having a real-world use (office buildings, railway stations), many of them are also, because of the city's role in film and TV production, significant within other media fandoms. This phenomenon is not unique to Vancouver – the Bradbury Building has been the location for various films including *Chinatown* (1974), *Wolf* (1994) and *Lethal Weapon 4* (1998), and of course the same applies to a *Vertigo* fan visiting the Golden Gate Bridge, or an *Affair to Remember* aficionado on the viewing deck of the Empire State – but again, Vancouver presents an extreme example of various fandoms converging on a select set of places. I noted above that the site where Scully confronts assassin Luis Cardinal will always, to *Smallville* fans, be the *Daily Planet* building; moving outside the town centre, the quadrangles of Simon Fraser University were regularly appropriated by *The X-Files* as the FBI headquarters, Washington DC, but were subsequently reused by *Battlestar Galactica* as locations in Caprica City. Two fans visiting the same coordinates of Vancouver may experience the real-life location as a conduit into two entirely distinct fictional worlds, drawing on a different set of memories – this was where Helo shot Sharon in 'Kobol's Last Gleaming'/this was where Mulder met Scully in the pilot episode (see, for example, Katie Dot Com http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Cavern/8434/season1.htm and Pat Suwalski http://pat.suwalski.net/film/bsg-locations/).

The territory we are entering here – the limbo-space between real, concrete geography and the way we experience or conceive of it – has been previously explored by cultural theory. Soja discusses this relationship as the 'urban imaginary', 'our mental or cognitive mappings of urban reality and the interpretive grids through which we think about, experience, evaluate and decide to act in the places, spaces and communities in which we live' (2000: 324). 'Cognitive mapping' in turn draws on Fredric Jameson, specifically his account of postmodern architecture's confounding of the human ability to make sense of contemporary space, 'to locate itself, to organise its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world' (Jameson, 1991: 44). Both of these concepts, as employed by Soja and Jameson, have a specific political (and polemical) spin, and I shall return to them in the final section.

Edward Relph also discusses the 'mental pictures people have of cities … a function of their experiences' (1976: 18–20) and the maps, not technically accurate but revealing of subjective priorities and emotional attachments, that people use when negotiating or describing their urban environments. The X-Phile's imaginary, or mental map of Vancouver might, therefore, prominently feature the Marine Building and Christ Church Cathedral, with the university marked as far closer to these landmarks than it is in real life; the *Smallville* fan's map would feature the Marine Building and the Public Library, ignoring the cathedral. Relph uses the term 'existential space' for these cognitive geographies. He describes

> *districts* or regions of particular significance, defined by the interests and experiences of the groups concerned … organised and opened up by *paths* or routes which reflect the directions and intensities of intentions and experiences, and which serve as the structural axes of existential space. They radiate from and lead towards nodes or centres of special importance and meaning … (1976: 20–21)

Fan pilgrimage provides a particularly vivid example of Relph's observation that different individuals can experience the same location in radically different ways. 'Every individual does have a more or less distinctive image of a particular place … everyone has his own mix of personality, memories, emotions, and intentions which colours his image of that place and gives it a distinctive identity for him. […] The identity of a place varies with the intentions, personalities and circumstances of those who are experiencing it' (1976: 56–7). In this case, fans bring stored memories of the fiction – a library of shots and episodes – to the physical location, viewing the present through an archive of the past.

However, Relph also stresses the role of community in the formation of existential space, defining the latter as 'the inner structure of space as it appears to us in our concrete experiences of the world as members of a cultural group … socialised according to a common set of experiences, signs and symbols. The meanings of existential space are therefore those of a culture as experienced by an individual …' (1976: 12).

Although his examples are drawn from non-literate aboriginal and islander cultures, and we should be cautious about applying models from religious belief systems to secular fan communities within capitalist society (see Hills, 2002: 117–30), the maps Relph reproduces – showing the lived space of an environment in terms of sacred areas, spiritual phenomena, taboo boundaries and forbidden zones – have a useful correspondence with the way fans, acculturated through their own communities (approaching a destination equipped with the amateur guidebooks and photo galleries of previous pilgrims), read a city in terms of its sites of textual significance, highlighting half a dozen key buildings and in a partial, blinkered mapping, deliberately leaving blanks between them.

Relph reminds us that the culturally defined existential meaning of places can often be contested and debated. Ayer's Rock, or Uluru, in central Australia, is to an Aborigine 'structured according to places of myth, ceremony, and ritual … full with significance … a record of mythical history' whereas a white European may see it as uniform and featureless (1976: 15). There are many other examples of this conflict of interpretation, based on different cultural groups approaching a site with different meaning-maps – Stonehenge and Seahenge in the UK providing just two instances (see Wallis, 2003: 159, 185).

Again, although it is wise not to be too hasty in mapping anthropological studies of tribes and spiritual communities on to the study of fan groups, there is an obvious relevance in the idea that a culture or subculture with an

investment in a specific system of symbolic meaning or myth may see richness (a glimpse of Caprica city) where others only see the pedestrian (a concrete staircase). A fan pilgrim's reading of a city can transform otherwise unremarkable, even ugly places into sites of wonder and worship (although the readings from different fandoms may clash). In the words of Richard Hoggart, who provides yet another example of hidden depths and distinctions in what, to the outsider, would seem a depressingly uniform suburb (in this case, northern England in the 1950s): 'To the insider, these are small worlds' (Hoggart, 1958: 42).

Bridging worlds, mapping hyperspace

After the physical journey to the correct coordinates of Vancouver's real-life map – 355 Burrard Street, 1419 Pendrell Street – the fan pilgrim has to make an internal leap of faith, a final *symbolic* journey that, as noted above, focuses on the connections and filters out any distraction or interference: in Los Angeles, for instance, 'if I squint, and imagine hard, from this angle … *I could be standing in Deckard's police HQ*' (see Brooker, 2007). Note that this squint – both a literal, deliberate blurring of the vision and a focus of the inner eye on one specific meaning – is not a broad embracing of multiple worlds but a narrowing down, a temporary reduction and occlusion of those other possibilities.

The fan's concentrated focus – this act of communion with and immersion in the cult text – attempts momentarily to replace the nondescript and actual, the banal, everyday 'nowhere' (*outopos*), with the preferred symbolic and fictional, the 'good place' (*eutopos*) of the cult text. This is estrangement, a ritual that reinvigorates and renews the taken-for-granted, and makes the familiar special and sacred. Paradoxically, though, to the fan visitor the real physical space is less familiar than its fictional representation: 'Union Station' is new and unknown, while 'Deckard's police HQ' is the recognizable destination, the already familiar end-point, a sort of homecoming.

In making this final connection, the X-Phile is crossing the threshold between the real and the (semi-)fictional worlds, between Vancouver and 'Boston', Vancouver and 'Washington DC'. I stress semi-fictional, and put the US locations in quotation marks, because of the ambiguous relationship between *The X-Files*' 'Boston', with its Venerable Plaza Hotel, and the real city, home to the Boston Park Plaza. Vancouver's geography, for the X-Phile, maps on to a broader map of the show's 'United States', with each *X-Files* site (such as 1419 Pendrell Street) corresponding to a specific address (which may not exist) in a specific state (which does exist). The 'US' of the *X-Files* is itself a slight variant on the US of our experience; it contains fictional streets, though is not so far removed as to include fictional *cities* like Smallville and Metropolis.

In symbolic terms, then, the X-Phile can travel across the United States (or the show's slightly modified version thereof) by walking a few blocks of

Vancouver's actual geography, simulating and re-enacting Dana Scully and Fox Mulder's weekly journeys (themselves a kind of pilgrimage) from the FBI to the sites of unexplained phenomena, and back again. A full tour around the *X-Files*' Vancouver locations would take the pilgrim, symbolically, on a cross-country trip. If we subscribe to the fiction, then Vancouver's Chinatown connects the fan to San Francisco's Chinatown ('Hell Money'). Stanley Park links to Idaho ('Fearful Symmetry'), the SeaBus terminal by Canada Square is in North Carolina ('Beyond the Sea') and the neighbouring Waterfront Centre is Virginia ('Duane Barry'). I noted above that Robson Square is labelled as Washington DC in 'Space'; the same location doubles as Rockville, Maryland in 'Apocrypha', and the Hotel Vancouver is also used twice, as Boston ('Fire') and Georgetown ('One Breath'). Factor in *Smallville* and the city stretches to Paris (filmed in a set-dressed Gastown, Vancouver's kitschy, touristy zone), while *Battlestar Galactica*, of course, extends the fictional map into outer space.

As already suggested, this dynamic whereby a real geographical site is significant because of its associations on a symbolic level, rather than because of its concrete physical presence, is described by Relph as 'other-directedness'. Relph's prime example is Disneyland and its imitators – 'idealised History-lands or futurist Expositions' (1976: 95) – where a visitor can wander through the 'vaguely imitation English or pseudo-European' architecture of Fantasyland and then, in neighbouring Adventureland, go 'back to America … one of those places you've seen a hundred times in old Grade B movies' (Ferritti, quoted in Relph, 1976: 95). Disneyland allows the tourist to symbolically 'visit' various places (or 'places', because again these are semi-fictional simulations, sometimes based on cinema stereotype rather than any real environment that ever existed) by walking a short physical distance.

The same applies to a number of other extraordinary geographies, most obviously theme parks but also tourist centres. Las Vegas enables the visitor to walk from 'New York New York', a recreation of Manhattan's skyscrapers looped with a roller-coaster track, to the cod-Egyptian grandeur of the Luxor Hotel and back down the strip to 'Paris Las Vegas', with its precise half-size replica of the Eiffel Tower. Dubai, which also boasts an Eiffel Tower, is currently constructing a 'full scale copy of Tower Bridge that will be used for offices. A few hundred years away, the foundations are being laid for a leisure park in the shape of the Houses of Parliament, and Big Ben is being re-imagined as a 60-floor apartment block' (Webb, 2006: 22).

Soja echoes the familiar idea that the Disney World tourist can visit 'ersatz Germany, Thailand, Mexico, etc., but adds that the new suburban communities of Los Angeles mimic this aesthetic of pastiche:

> there are residential developments and 'urban villages' for those who may wish to live in replicas of Cervantes's Spain, a Greek Island ('Welcome to Mykonos', one advertisement proclaims), Nashville or New Orleans, lily-white suburbia, old New England, or any number of Spanish Colonial revivals. In both places, one can visit Thailand or Germany or Mexico without having to travel long distances. […] One can taste the food, observe the

> customs, hear the language, and sense the traditions of nearly every culture on earth without leaving Los Angeles County. (Soja, 2000: 341–2)

Clearly, we are back in the postmodern realm of simulation and pastiche. Soja's description closely echoes Jean-Francois Lyotard's famous account of 'eclecticism' – 'McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner … Paris perfume in Tokyo and "retro" clothes in Hong Kong' (Lyotard, 1994: 76) – while the simulation of New York in Las Vegas would surely be embraced by Jean Baudrillard as another 'imagination station' and 'deterrence machine' (Baudrillard, 1994: 13), like Disneyland, designed to protect the illusion that New York itself is a real place, rather than a hyperreal simulation.

Like Adventureland, based on a mythical America that never existed, the Californian communities that Soja describes embody Baudrillard's hyperreal, and are even promoted in terms of their science fiction falseness. CityWalk is described as 'idealised reality, LA style … the unkept promise of Los Angeles' (Soja, 2000: 342) and Orange County advertised as 'the most like the movies, the most like the stories, the most like the dream' (Soja, 1996: 237). Similarly, many of Vancouver's pilgrim locations are steeped in one or more level of simulation. It goes without saying that shots of SFU disguised as Caprica are a CGI-aided illusion aiming to convince the viewer that this science-fiction invention really exists. However, *Smallville*'s *Daily Planet* building is equally false, the globe on its roof another computer-generated creation. This is a simulation with no referent, Baudrillard's third-order where the image masks the absence of a basic reality (Baudrillard, 1994: 6) – there is no Metropolis with this building in it, any more than there is a Venerable Plaza Hotel in Boston. Scenes of Smallville itself are also enhanced, the skies recoloured to fit a Kansas climate, and Vancouver's mountains digitally removed; but again, there is no such place as Smallville. Superman's home-town is part of a mythical America, like Adventureland: a place 'most like the movies', a place that never really was.

Vancouver is a slightly different case to the more obvious simulation cities and suburbs. Unlike theme-park worlds, its other-directedness and points of connection are visible only to those pilgrims with specialist knowledge and fan investment. The passages to other worlds – the Marine Building as part of Scully's Washington DC, the cathedral as a route to Mulder's Iowa – are hidden to the non-fan. However, the idea of a city-sized physical space (Dubai, Disney World, an Orange County community) that provides, at its various points, connection to or immersion in (simulated, semi-fictionalized) places from around the world ('New York', 'Nashville', 'London'), is useful for understanding the pilgrim experience of Vancouver.

Images of cloning, duplication, replication and simulation circulate in Soja's discussion of these postmodern geographies; the same analogies recurring, like replicants themselves, in slightly different forms. These SF metaphors move us further towards a model for understanding and explaining the fan experience of negotiating multiple maps, where a single site of

concrete physical geography can represent two or more places at the same time.

In his 1996 work *Thirdspace*, Soja cites Peter Halley's 1987 reference to

> cities that are also doubles of themselves, cities that only exist as nostalgic references to the idea of the city and to the ideas of communication and social intercourse. These simulated cities are placed around the globe more or less exactly where the old cities were, but they no longer fulfil the function of the old cities. They are no longer centers; they only serve to simulate the phenomenon of the centre. (Halley, cited in Soja, 1996: 194)

Soja's own description of suburban development suggests another type of clone city – copies spawning across the country, based on an original Orange County that was, true to Baudrillard's analysis, already the realization of a dream that never existed outside the cinema.

> To its avid promoters, Orange Country is a theme park-themed paradise where the American Dream is repetitively renewed and made infinitely available: as much like the movies as real-reel life can get … If any other place is still in the running, it is purely through faithful simulations of the original. And every day more simulations of Orange County are springing up – around Boston, New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington, Dallas-Fort Worth, Miami, Atlanta … (Soja, 1996: 238)

A quotation from Iain Chambers heads the same chapter, echoing Halley's language but suggesting a slightly different kind of mirroring – his second city is not a ghost of the old, but exists alongside it and inside it, created by those who inhabit it:

> The city exists as a series of doubles; it has official and hidden cultures, it is a real place and a site of imagination. Its elaborate network of streets, housing, public buildings, transport systems, parks, and shops is paralleled by a complex of attitudes, habits, customs, expectancies, and hopes that reside in us as urban subjects. We discover that urban 'reality' is not single but multiple, that inside the city there is always another city. (Chambers, cited in Soja, 1996: 186)

Of these various clone cities and 'sim cities' (see Soja, 2000: 339), Chambers' model has the most resonance with the fan-pilgrimage experience, where an imaginative push and creative shift give a city hidden levels and secret depths, and opens gateways at key points in the real street-map to several science-fictional worlds. Soja cites the same passage again in his later work *Postmetropolis*, but this time couples it with an observation from Umberto Eco's tour of 1980s California's hyperreal waxwork museums and theme parks: 'the logical distinction between Real World and Possible Worlds has been definitively undermined' (Eco, cited in Soja, 2000: 325). Again, the idea of blurred boundaries between physical and fictional seems particularly apt.

Hyperreality and simulation come together in Soja's metaphor of *hyperspace*, an image that draws on similar ideas of clone-copies, ghost-cities, geographies that bridge, flatten or compress time and space, and the relationship between the urban imaginary and the real.

> The 'once' and the 'there' are being increasingly played with and packaged to serve the needs of the here and now, making the lived experience of the urban increasingly vicarious, screened through *simulacra*, those exact copies for which the real originals have been lost … the hyperspace of the city of Los Angeles, described as 'A City Divided and Proud of It.' (Soja, 1989: 245)

The SF concept of hyperspace, a limbo between coordinates in real-space that, through a cunning use of maps, allows the traveller to cross long distances in a short space of time, offers another close analogy with the experience of walking a single real-world block and travelling from 'Boston' to 'San Francisco'. However, the best model for exploring and explaining the experience of Vancouver and sites like it – *Blade Runner*'s Los Angeles, *Star Wars*' Tunisia, *Lord of the Rings*' New Zealand – is another key concept in science fiction: the parallel universe.

The idea of alternative earths and multiple worlds, each slightly different from the next, existing alongside each other and separated by a boundary that only the adept can cross, forms the basis of several science fiction texts. In Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* novels (1997–2000), the walls between parallel worlds are cut with a unique weapon, the Subtle Knife. In Grant Morrison's *Zenith* comic books (1987–1992), a succession of alternative universes are traversed through Einstein-Rosen bridges. In Bryan Talbot's 1997 graphic novel, *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright* (itself inspired by Michael Moorcock's novels), the eponymous hero has the rare ability to travel from one 'parallel' to the next. The BBC television series *Doctor Who* introduced the same idea in its 2006 season, with disc-shaped devices transporting the Doctor and his allies from the 'real' world to an alternative where history developed on slightly different lines.

However, the most elaborate and sustained fictional use of parallel worlds can be found in DC superhero comics. The concept was first introduced in a 1960 issue of *The Flash*, where the titular character meets his counterpart from 'Earth-2'; other parallels followed in subsequent stories, including Earth-3 (a reversed universe where the familiar heroes are villains), Earth-S, Earth-5, Earth-K and Earth-Sigma. In the grand tradition of hokey SF-science, these parallels are separated by a 'vibratory shield', which can, naturally, be breached by vibrating at certain frequencies.

This conceit of many worlds, parallel earths, alternatives and infinite earths helps us to understand the experience of fan pilgrimage to sites like Vancouver, where a single point of geography – an alley, a building, a street – can, with an adjustment of 'frequency' – a certain way of looking, a stretch of imagination and a leap of fan faith – transport the visitor to another,

fictional world. One pilgrim sees this quad of Simon Fraser University as Earth-*X-Files*; the other sees it as Earth-Caprica; and the same pilgrim is quite capable of switching between the two, with a reprioritizing of investment, a different imaginary angle, a shifting of vision, a change in 'vibration', a retuning.

Carnival on infinite earths

The accounts of postmodern architecture discussed above – from Relph through Eco, Baudrillard and Jameson to Soja – view the aesthetic of simulation, cloning, hyperreality and pastiche with at best amusement and at worst hostility. Jameson's report on the Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles, starts with bewilderment and builds up to alarm:

> I am more at a loss when it comes to conveying the thing itself … such space makes it impossible for us to use the language of volumes or volume any longer, since these are impossible to seize. […] You are in this hyperspace up to your eyes and your body … what happens when you get there [to the central lobby] is something else, which can only be characterized as milling confusion, something like the vengeance this space takes on those who still seek to walk through it. Given the absolute symmetry of the four towers, it is quite impossible to get your bearings in this lobby … (1991: 42–43)

Jameson concludes that this 'mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world'. The Bonaventure, a case (for Jameson – the actual building isn't nearly as daunting as he suggests) of architecture evolving to a point where it resists human comprehension, becomes the 'symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects' (1991: 44).

Soja revisits the same ideas, adopting Celeste Olalquiaga's term 'psychasthenia' – 'a disturbance in the relation between self and surrounding territory' (Olalquiaga, cited in Soja, 2000: 331) – to describe the postmodern condition of feeling 'lost in space':

> This virtual and spatial identity crisis is thus associated with a blurring of the distinctions between the body, the self, the city, and each of their represented spaces, their imagined or simulated forms. Increasingly our imaginary maps of the real world appear to 'precede', and fuse with, rather than simply mirror or mask, the real geographies of everyday life, to refer back to Baudrillard's terms. (2000: 331)

The phenomenon Soja describes is slightly different from that identified by Jameson – Jameson warns that postmodern architecture evades the

human ability to map and make sense of it, while Soja's worry is that simulation and image substitute for the concrete experience of place (and of past). However, both view the shifting relationship between people and their hyperreal environments as symptomatic of a broader crisis. Jameson treats the impossibility of negotiating the Bonaventure as a symbol of our disempowered and alienated position within global capitalism. Soja sees the contemporary sim-city suburb, based on a theme-park aesthetic of flat image and pastiche, as a tempting but reactionary choice that threatens to neutralize any possibility of political resistance, subversion or progression.

Soja offers case studies in the 'scamscape' (2000: 343) of sim cities – a zone where 'actual urban life is being replaced by especially thick layers of simulations'. In one example, the metaphor of thick layers is made physical: the dream-come-true community of CityWalk, mentioned above, was originally meant to include 'candy wrappers and chewing gum embedded into the terrazzo flooring to give … "a simulated patina of use" ' (Soja, 2000: 342). However, the simulated 'realism' of CityWalk had its limits, and surveillance systems coupled with security teams made sure that black teenagers were prevented from intruding upon this suburban paradise. Orange County's tax scams, Soja claims, were also handled like the game *Sim City* 'until the game crashed', resulting in desperate spin-doctoring to restore the public image and a simulated search for 'evil perpetrators' (2000: 344). This 'trajectory of hypersimulations' shaped political responses on a local level – a 'war on poverty' that was spun into a struggle against the (black, young) 'enemy within', and a 'new prosperity' in late 1990s LA built on welfare cuts and salary reductions (2000: 347) – and globally, in America's 'hypersimulated' military spectaculars (2000: 346). Writing in the late 1990s, Soja's example is the first Desert Storm, but the following years would provide even more vivid examples: the post-9/11 'war on terror' against a simulated enemy, and the 'shock and awe' invasion of Iraq in 2003:

> What can be seen in these quick glimpses of emergent SimAmerica is a place where conventional politics is being increasingly emptied of substance and any presumption of factuality or objectivity; where a powerfully conservative hyperreality absorbs the real-and-imagined in its own skein of simulations … (Soja, 2000: 347)

In practice, then, Soja sees city-simulations as part of this broader trend of conservative imagineering, a flattening and faking that continues to serve the status quo. However, he allows for another possible way of spinning psychasthenia.

> … we may turn the process around, taking advantage of its expanded spatial scope, its blurred boundaries, its breakdown of rigid hierarchies, its flexibility and fragmentation, to engage in a more creative *spatial praxis of transgression, boundary crossing, border work, and commitment to the right to be different* that can redirect the diffusion of hyperreality from its primarily conservative channels to more progressive objectives. (2000: 331)

Elsewhere in the same chapter, Soja summarizes the 'new urban "hyperspace" of invisible cities, postmodern urbanism, electronic webs, virtual communities, nowhere geographies, computer-generated artificial worlds, Cybercities, Sim-cities, Cities of Bits'. The 'postmetropolitan transition' into this new kind of lived environment has

> significantly reconfigured our urban imaginary, blurring its once much clearer boundaries and meanings while also creating new ways of thinking and acting in the urban milieu. We live as never before in instantaneously global city-spaces where the frictions of distance appear to be receding … (2000: 324)

What I want to argue in this concluding section is that the fan's experience of a pilgrim site like Vancouver – which, as we have seen, involves precisely those phenomena of nowhere-geography, computer-generated simulated cities, warped distances, multiple geographies, and the challenge of developing new cognitive maps to negotiate those levels of real and imaginary parallel spaces – involves a form of carnival, a creative use of the city that invests the real spaces with mythology and uses this crisis in the urban imaginary as a liberating breakdown of boundaries between real and fictional worlds.

I noted above that DC superhero comics, with their complex system of parallel universes, provide a vivid model for understanding the fan-pilgrim experience of seeing a single building as two or more locations, each within its own fictional, alternative world. The same comics offer a revealing angle on the concept of a 'crisis' and its playful potential. In the DC universe, a 'crisis' signalled a crossover between Earth-One and its counterparts, as an emergency that required the assistance of heroes from various parallels: *Crisis on Earth Two!* (1963) led inevitably into *Crisis on Earth-Three!* (1964) and so on until, in 1986, all the alternative worlds were drawn into a *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, an interaction and collision between the various possibilities in the 'multiverse', on a grand scale (12 comics spanning a year's publication).

A comic-book crisis across multiple earths, then, presents the blurring of barriers Soja discusses – the warping of distance, the crossing of lines between real and mythical – as a form of *carnival*, a get-together of teams in bright costumes. To continue the analogy, what the Marine Building-as-*Daily Planet*, gleaming in CGI, offers the *Smallville* fan is not the uniformity of cloned architecture but a glimpse into a parallel world through a building *in disguise*, a building dressed up, a building in drag.

Multiple earths, in the DCU universe, are characterized by reversals, inversions, 'bizarro' interpretations of the characters and places from the central, core reality of Earth-One. Similarly, Vancouver's sites of 'Smallville' and 'Metropolis' present richly mythological what-if versions of the real America's Kansas and New York – just as Gotham City in the various *Batman* movies is another what-if, a *what if it all went wrong* version of New York. Even the 'United States' that the pilgrim visits through Vancouver's *X-Files* locations – with its slightly variant versions of 'Boston', 'Maryland',

'North Carolina' and 'Idaho' – can be seen as a kind of alternative earth, where streets and hotels were named differently.

The very act of fan pilgrimage, too, is an expression of liberation. It liberates the city-spaces that the pilgrim visits – giving them multiple identities and bringing out their secret, superhero drag, coaxing the costume out of Clark Kent. The Marine Building and the Bradbury Building are offices, centres of routine, everyday work, nodes in the networks of global business. The pilgrim frees those buildings, treating them as sacred and special instead of pedestrian, quotidian workplaces; his or her imaginative effort dresses them up in their CGI or matte-painting from *Smallville* and *Blade Runner* respectively and reconfigures them, in the pilgrim's mind at least, as sites from cult fiction.

By definition, the pilgrim's visit to the fan site tends to be a holiday – a removal from the habitus and the structures of everyday social life into a liminal, in-between state (see Turner, 1969). Especially when conducted in a group, a tour of media fan sites can become a carnival (the online report 'A Pilgrim's Progress', by the self-appointed Sisters of St Scully, provides a raucous example: http://www.obsse.com/oct97.htm) – a form of 'work' (research, study, analysis, detection, exercise) that feels like play, and takes place during a break from normal life. Just as the pilgrim's viewpoint symbolically frees up other people's workplaces, treating them as fictional locations and gateways into alternative worlds, so too the pilgrimage offers its participants an escape from, even a reversal of, normal routines, structures and priorities. Sometimes this involves literally dressing up; more often, re-enacting poses in a (light-hearted) attempt to enter the fiction (see Brooker, 2007), or simply trying to capture the location from the angle seen in the film or television show (see Brooker, 2005: 19–20).

As such, fan pilgrimage to a city-site like Vancouver suggests Soja's third way out of 'crisis'. Rather than mourn the lack of progressive politics in postmodernity, or succumb to a flat scamscape, Soja suggests we look to Celeste Olalquiaga's celebration of 'the new possibilities for creative resistance and subversion opened up by the precession of simulacra, the spread of hyperreality' (2000: 331). Olalquiaga's vision of (specifically Latin American) 'magical hyperrealism' (Olalquiaga, cited in Soja, 2000: 332) draws on costumes of 'brightly colored sneakers and phosphorescent feathers', 'Chilean punk' and the local, real-life superhero 'Superbarrio' – an aesthetic of dress-up, parade and precession that weaves a carnival route through the everyday urban environment. Even those pilgrims who don't wear costumes for their visits to Vancouver's sites are still symbolically transforming the city through the way they see it and respond to it; photographing alleyways as special places, treating office blocks as playgrounds.

Vancouver is an extreme example; a prime example, partly because of its 'flatness' and perceived anonymity, its role as a blank canvas for several cult media texts. The model of parallel earths and carnivalesque 'crisis' – the blurring of boundaries between the actual and the invented; the inversion of social structures like work and play, everyday and sacred; mythical worlds

converging at a key geographical location; cityscapes overlapping with simulations or alternative what-if versions, or playfully dressed up – applies, to a lesser degree, to many other sites of media pilgrimage. The Bradbury Building and Union Station in Los Angeles offer obvious parallels. *Star Wars* fans can also identify one spot on a stretch of unremarkable, 'flatscape' Tunisian desert and transform it into a sacred place, the site of Luke Skywalker's homestead; *Vertigo* aficionados find the exact corner of a San Francisco street where Hitchcock's camera filmed James Stewart and in doing so, travel through time (see Brooker, 2007). Pilgrims tracking the locations of *The Lord of the Rings* films (2001–2003) can stand at the right coordinates of a vast New Zealand plain and enter another world; Bruce Springsteen followers pick one suburban house in New Jersey and sit outside it, revering it as the former home of their idol (Cavicchi, 1998: 171).

We can consider the pilgrim's progress in the light of Michel de Certeau's discussion of walking in the city, and the way this wandering can follow (and plot) new, imaginary maps, 'a strange toponymy that is detached from actual places and flies high over the city like a foggy geography of "meaning" held in suspension […] a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning' (De Certeau, 1988: 104–5).

Fan pilgrimage can be a game of let's pretend, around the city – a performance, a creation, a making-new of the familiar and quotidian. Media fans, as a group approaching the location with their own agenda, are able to transform 'flatscape' into a place of wonder. They bring their own urban imaginary, their own maps of fiction and their own angles on the everyday – and through their wandering, they create their own city poetry.

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