

**Introduction to Part one: Cultural legacies: landscape,
environment, technology**

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Part one

Cultural legacies: landscape, environment, technology

James Fenwick

Key to the legacy of *The X-Files* is the series' aesthetic style: it's 1990s-era fashion trends, its use of the wild, brooding landscape of British Columbia, and the brutalist, urban exteriors of downtown Washington D.C. The series—particularly the first five seasons—utilize a distinct visual palette: grey, washed-out hues; beige and grey interiors; dark underground corridors; secret passageways, and hidden rooms. The environments that Mulder and Scully inhabit include woods, forests, urban back alleys, bureaucratic office spaces, mortuaries, scientific laboratories, military bases, and more besides. In these spaces, a range of technology often aids (or impedes) their quest for the truth: mobile phones; surveillance equipment; cars; aeroplanes; military vehicles; UFOs; torches; guns, and extra-terrestrial weapons.

In part one of this edited collection, contributors analyze the legacy of the depiction of landscape, environment and technology. In chapter one, Matt Melia considers the ways in which the built environment and architecture are depicted in the series, analysing space and location to understand the ways in which *The X-Files* provides a cultural history into the landscapes and environments of the contemporary USA. Melia focuses on the 'monster-of-the-week' episodes in order present a taxonomy of built environments, architectures, terrains and landscapes, which he argues are organized thematically and are key to understanding the series' organization as a whole.

In chapter two, Victoria Scrimmer and Nicholas Stanton focus on the use of the mobile phone (or cell phone in the USA) in the series and the way in which it is a vital

communicative tool not only in the context of the relationship between Mulder and Scully, but as a plot device to move the story forward in any given episode. Scrimmer and Stanton have compiled a publicly available dataset (bit.ly/x_files_telecomm) that documents every instance of telephone and radio communication across the entire series. In doing so, they present a clear argument as to how communication technology was vital to the series, to the plot, but more broadly to the cultural contexts of the era. As such, Scrimmer and Stanton—like Melia’s history of the built environment—are presenting a cultural history of communication technology.

In chapter three, Alex Goody and Antonia Mackay focus on surveillance technology and artificial intelligence in the series, analysing the cultural anxieties that existed in the 1990s about such technologies. Their analysis discusses the ways in which *The X-Files* was consistently looking towards the future and a ‘post-human technological world’. Goody and Mackay place *The X-Files* within the broader cultural and research landscape of surveillance technology and artificial intelligence to demonstrate how it has contributed to the wider discourse of a post-human technological world, and continues to do so.

In chapter four, Chantelle Mitchell and Jaxon Waterhouse focus on the ecological legacy of *The X-Files*, centring their analysis on the presence of the ‘Black Oil’ in the series – the alien substance first used in season three and which becomes central to series’ myth-arc. Mitchell and Waterhouse provide an analysis of the Black Oil through a new materialist framework and contemporary petrocultures to argue that *The X-Files* has, and continues to contribute to, discourse on fossil fuel extraction, oil disasters, and the climate crisis. As such, just like Goody and Mackay, Mitchell and Waterhouse demonstrate how the series has become a cultural historical object that now directly comments on contemporary politics, society, and the environment.

In chapter five, Tom Livingstone provides a detailed analysis of the special effects technology employed (or, rather, not) in *The X-Files*. Livingstone argues that the series played a vital role in the history and evolution of special effects technology, but more importantly subverted the increasing dominance of special effects in the television and film, preferring practical effects over the ‘illusory affordances of digital effects’. In doing so, Livingstone positions the series as an important cultural object in wider histories of digital technology in contemporary storytelling.

Taken together, these chapters provide illuminating arguments as to how *The X-Files*’ primary legacy is now as a cultural and historical object, either for its representations and depictions of landscape and technology, or for the way in which it has contributed, and continues to do so, to debates about technology, the environment, and broader histories and theories of film and television.