

Archive  
LB  
2322  
.A9x  
T-813

JOSS WHEDON'S *Dollhouse* AND THE POSTHUMAN HERO'S TALE IN THE  
TELEVISION NARRATIVE

Devon E. Anderson

Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* and the Posthuman Hero's Tale in the Television Narrative

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The College of Graduate Studies

Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Devon E. Anderson

December, 2013

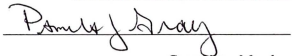
December, 2013

To the College of Graduate Studies:

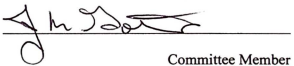
We are submitting a master's thesis written by Devon E. Anderson entitled "Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* and the Posthuman Hero's Tale in the Television Narrative." We have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content. We recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



Research/Committee Advisor/Chair



Committee Member



Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate and Research Council



Dean, College of Graduate Studies

### Statement of Permission to Use

In presenting this master's thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts at Austin Peay State University, I agree that the library shall make it available to borrowers under the rules of the library. Brief quotations from this field study are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgement of the source is made.

Permissions for extensive quotation or reproduction of this field study may be granted by my major professor, or in his/her absence, by the Head of the Interlibrary Services when, in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.



Signature



Date



## ABSTRACT

DEVON E. ANDERSON. Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* and the Posthuman Hero's Tale in the Television Narrative. (Under the direction of DR. CHRISTINA HICKS-GOLDSTON).

This research applies the elements of the mythic hero's journey shared across the lore of multiple cultures as outlined in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* to a digital-age television narrative to show the ways in which these television narratives map out a path to individuation in the context of today's technology. Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* was analyzed with a three-level model using a mythological approach within a framework of posthuman theory. The analyses revealed that the narrative studied does follow the form of the mythic hero's tale, and that other mythological and posthumanist themes are present to provide context for the digital age. These narratives are relevant to the ways in which humanity seeks individuation amongst ubiquitous technologies such as the Internet and computer mediated communications. The researcher discusses online identity, physiological effects, and the benefits of the television medium for these purposes. The research concludes that (1) Posthuman heroes achieve individuation just as the heroes of myth did, by transforming themselves through the stages of the hero's journey, (2) As in mythology, posthuman heroes' journeys serve as a template for the achievement of individuation in the digital age; and (3) The posthuman television narrative reflects the digital age transformation of humanity through computer-mediated communication and the Internet.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Joseph Campbell and The Hero's Journey.....	2
The Posthuman.....	4
Individuation.....	4
Chapter II: Review of the Literature.....	6
Posthuman Theory.....	6
Cybernetics.....	6
The Cyborg.....	7
Dissolution of Opposites.....	8
The Mortality Problem.....	9
The Posthuman Narrative.....	10
The Internet and Computer Mediated Communication.....	11
The Effects of Social Media.....	14
The Avatar.....	15
Chapter III: Method.....	16
Narrative Analysis.....	17
Intimation.....	18
Illustration.....	19
Innovation.....	20
Chapter IV: Results.....	21
Level 1: Intimation.....	21
Disembodied Information and the Posthuman.....	25

Level 2: Illustration and the Hero's Journey.....	26
The Hero's Journey.....	26
The Call to Adventure.....	26
Refusal of the Call.....	27
Supernatural Aid.....	28
Crossing of the First Threshold.....	28
The Belly of the Whale.....	29
The Road of Trials.....	30
The Meeting with the Goddess.....	31
Woman as Temptress.....	31
Atonement with the Father.....	32
Apotheosis.....	33
The Ultimate Boon.....	33
Refusal of the Return.....	34
The Magic Flight.....	34
Rescue from Without.....	35
The Crossing of the Return Threshold.....	35
Master of the Two Worlds.....	35
Freedom to Live.....	36
Mythic Forms.....	37
The Cosmogonic Cycle.....	38
Reflexivity and the Role of the Observer.....	41
Level 3: Innovation.....	43

The Cyborg.....	44
Dissolution of Opposites.....	47
Becoming Through Compassion.....	50
Embodiment and Emergence.....	51
Chapter V: Discussion.....	55
The Prosthetic Consciousness.....	55
The Changing Brain.....	58
The Narrative of the Posthuman.....	59
Chapter VI: Conclusion.....	61
References.....	63

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The hero's narrative has long formed the backbone of cultural tales, myths and legends. In the decades surrounding the turn of the twenty-first century, leaps in the advance of digital technology, specifically in computer mediated communication and Internet uses, coincided with an increase in the number of science fiction and fantasy series on broadcast television. This research examined the posthuman protagonist's narrative in early 21st century television series by exploring the following questions: (1) How do posthuman heroes achieve individuation? (2) How does humanity, in a digitally "plugged in" culture, achieve individuation? and (3) How does the former relate to the latter? The research applied a narrative analysis based on the writings of Joseph Campbell within a framework of posthumanist cultural theory to Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*, a live-action science fiction series aired in the United States between February 2009 and January 2010.

This paper discusses the ways in which the posthuman hero's narrative as portrayed in the digital age television series serves as a reflection of a cultural reaction to advances in digital technology and computer mediated communication, and its implications on the definitions of identity and humanity. Early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, viewers were introduced to an archetypal protagonist who exhibited elements of the posthuman. N. Katherine Hayles wrote, "As we accelerate into the new millennium, questions about the posthuman become increasingly urgent. Nowhere are these questions explored more passionately than in contemporary speculative fiction" (1999, p. 247). The decades surrounding the year in which *Dollhouse* aired are important for the study of

communication, signifying a global cultural shift in computer mediated communication, particularly social media. This development is a fascinating subject, and is reflected culturally through popular television narratives and themes. While many television series of this time period and genre explore these themes, *Dollhouse* is a prime example for analysis because of the limited run of the series, allowing it to be analyzed as a whole rather than as a sample of episodes, and because it speaks to the idea of creating an individuated identity from a multitude of sources. This concept is increasingly important culturally as the digital lifestyle involves multiple platforms through which personas are formed. This research proposes that the rise of the posthuman narratives in the prime-time television series signifies a cultural shift in perspective regarding the elements that constitute human identity and the paths to individuation.

### **Joseph Campbell and The Hero's Journey**

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) studied comparative religion and mythology and found strikingly consistent similarities among the myths and legends of peoples, regardless of location or era. One of these similarities is the Hero's Journey. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell outlined the elements of the mythic hero's journey in three stages (separation, initiation, and return) shared across the lore of multiple and diverse cultures and times. These elements are as follows: (1) The Call to Adventure, (2) Refusal of the Call, (3) Supernatural Aid, (4) Crossing of the First Threshold, (5) The Belly of the Whale, (6) The Road of Trials, (7) The Meeting with the Goddess, (8) Woman as Temptress, (9) Atonement with the Father, (10) Apotheosis, (11) The Ultimate Boon, (12) Refusal of the Return, (13) The Magic Flight, (14) Rescue from Without, (15) The Crossing of the Return Threshold, (16) Master of the Two Worlds, and (17) Freedom

to Live (1949). Campbell asserted that there is surprising little variation on this "monomyth" across vastly diverse civilizations separated by time and geography. He noted, "If one or another of the basic elements of the archetypal pattern is omitted from a given fairy tale, legend, ritual, or myth, it is bound to be somehow or other implied – and the omission itself can speak volumes for the history and pathology of the example" (1949, p. 38).

In addition to addressing the specific elements of these sections of the narrative repeated across ages and cultures, Campbell also described mythological symbols and archetypes (1949). He argued that the cause of these uncanny similarities in myth is the shared human unconscious of which each culture is a part. One application of these lies in the human subject's quest for individuation. This paper will show that the construction of the self and individuation is a critical motif in the digital age.

In Campbell's work, one sees that the dissolution of opposites, a common theme in posthuman theory, finds its root in ancient mythology. Yin and yang, thanatos and eros, and destrudo and libido are presented as paired opposites in myth. Campbell described deities from many cultures that embody both masculine and feminine experience. The yin and yang of T'ai Yuan illustrates the integration of opposites, and with integration comes dissolution of polarity. In the same vein, the hero and his quest are two sides of the same coin: "The two – the hero and his ultimate god, the seeker and the found – are thus understood as the outside and inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery" (Campbell, 1949, p. 40).



## **The Posthuman**

Posthuman theory represents a large collection of concepts (much like Humanism or Postmodernism before it) addressing the concurrent evolution of humans and the tools they use. Many elements of Campbell's work are echoed in the literature of posthuman theory, including dissolution of opposites, mortality, and human individuation. One relevant focus of posthuman research is the application of technoscience and its effects on both society and the individual. In the narrative of the digital age posthuman hero's journey, a link between ancient mythology and present-day communication technologies is exposed.

## **Individuation**

Throughout his lectures and writings, Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung used the term "individuation" to denote the "psychological process of achieving individual wholeness" (Campbell, 1972, p. 66). For Campbell, this process is incorporated into the initiation ritual analogized in the hero's journey. The concept of individuation and the construction of self is a critical theme in the digital age and one that the science fiction television series of this time period seek to explore. In his text *Myths to Live By*, Campbell attested, "To become – in Jung's terms – individuated, to live as a released individual, one has to know how and when to put on and to put off the masks of one's various life roles" (1972, p. 67). But he went on to write, "The aim of individuation requires that one should find and then learn to live out of one's own center, in control of one's for and against" (1972, p. 68). As more and more of one's identity is pieced together through computer mediated communication and the use of the Internet and mobile devices, how does one reconcile that with the desire to be the master of his or her

own identity? Though few posthumanist scholars would look for the answer to this question in ancient mythology, this thesis shows that answer to be found there, employing a three-tiered analysis that sought mythological intimation, mythological illustration, and mythological/posthuman innovation in the posthuman television narrative.

## CHAPTER II

## Review of the Literature

A review of the literature provided both context for the study and the building blocks for the model that was later created to facilitate the narrative analysis. Though frequently overlapping, the reviewed material can be divided into three categories: the writings of Joseph Campbell discussed previously, posthuman theory literature, and research into the effects of the internet and computer mediated communication.

**Posthuman Theory**

A broad survey of posthuman literature, including literature concerning posthuman fiction theory, constituted this segment of the review.

**Cybernetics.** In N. Katherine Hayles' influential text, *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), she recorded the history of Cybernetics, beginning with the post-World War II Macy conferences. The interdisciplinary conferences worked to define and advance the field of Cybernetics, and thus began the first of Hayles' three overlapping waves of Cybernetic research. In the first, information came to be viewed as disembodied and then, even superior to the body. In the second, Cybernetic theorists began to question the role of the observer. Perception became detached from reality and the concept of reflexivity moved into a central position. The third wave came to focus on materiality, emergence, and embodiment of energy and information. Through the course of the text, she illustrated each wave with an analysis of contemporary fiction that represents the key concepts. In addition to *How We Became Posthuman*, the review included other works of Hayles that deal with the embodied posthuman narrative.

**The Cyborg.** In his 1988 interview series with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell called myth “the interface between what can be known and what is never to be discovered.” The interface is a key concept in the idea of the cyborg. Several researchers have examined the notion that humanity has evolved simultaneously with the tools it uses, and with the advance of prosthetics and other biological enhancements, the research has expanded to include posthuman theory. Donna Haraway’s 1991 text *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* was particularly influential in developing the concept of the Cyborg, specifically, the chapter she titled *A Cyborg Manifesto*. In this chapter, Haraway aimed to create “an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism” (p. 149). A newly created myth from the viewpoint of the posthuman theorist provides an excellent springboard for the study of the posthuman narrative in mythological terms. She implied that myth is used as a tool, as a technology, referring to told and retold stories as “technologies that write the world” (p. 175). Like other authors of this bent, including Gordon Calleja and Anne Kull, she addressed topics such as the dissolution of opposites, informatics and communication, and creating one’s own identity in the digital age.

Calleja (2004) explored integrating concepts of Posthumanism and hypertextuality, including Internet culture and cyborg theory. He found evidence showing that new methods of writing and otherwise using language have effects on cognition. And Kull (2002) theorized that, as self-interpretation evolves to include the concept of the cyborg and the co-creator, humans become interested in crossing traditional boundaries between themselves and nature, constituting a “technonature.” She argued that Haraway’s

cyborg is an effective model in responding to ontological questions about the world and constructing the self.

How does one become the Cyborg? Gallon (2010) hypothesized that changes in behavior constitute the only path to transformation. He found evidence to support this idea by studying behavioral aspects of social media and music, analyzing the behavior of media as tools, systems, and environments; and the behavior of people as users, participants, and members of systems and environments. In a similar study, Toffoletti (2003) used a posthuman framework to analyze a print advertisement. She discussed embodiment, virtuality, and transformation of the self, among other ideas. She argued that digital technologies have the effect of shifting and expanding these concepts.

**Dissolution of Opposites.** As in Campbell's work in mythology, dissolution of dichotomies plays a key role in posthuman theory. In the hero's journey, these dualities are often represented by obstacles to be overcome: "The pairs of opposites (being and not being, life and death, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, and all the other polarities that bind the faculties to hope and fear...are the clashing rocks...that crush the traveler, but between which the heroes always pass" (1949, p. 89). According to Haraway, "among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man" (1991, p. 177). Though most, if not all, of the posthuman theory research reviewed addressed the dissolution of opposites, perhaps the most comprehensive of these was Robert Pepperell's 2003 text, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain*. He argued that, during the time when relativity theory, quantum physics, and cubism were first being explored,

humanity began to view reality and the human perception of reality differently than it had in the past. This shift influenced communications, media, science, art, literature, mathematics, phenomenology, and other disciplines. Joining Haraway and others, he echoed Campbell's notion of the dissolution of opposites. In the third chapter, *entitled Order and Disorder, Continuity and Discontinuity*, he also reiterated Hayles' analysis of Cybernetic themes, including probability theory and the concept of noise versus pattern.

**The Mortality Problem.** As theology is important to both posthumanist theory and myth, the review included scholarly articles from posthumanist theologians such as Elaine Graham, Philip Hefner, and Elizabeth Drescher. Graham (2006) argued that the idea of personas made in the image of God is relevant to the posthuman discourse. She questioned whether this idea supported or subverted technological advancements. She found two themes to be central to her theory: the co-evolution of humanity with the tools it uses, and human hybridity and interdependence with external stimuli.

Heffner (2002) analyzed two science fiction films with posthuman themes, focusing on the ways in which identity is shaped by technology and vice-versa. He determined that survival, pleasure, mortality, and imagination are the drivers behind technological endeavor and compared the rituals of Christian initiates to virtual reality.

Drescher (2012) studied illness, death, and bereavement in relation to social media. She paralleled the virtual life after death afforded by social media and other computer mediated communication platforms to the proliferation of vampire, zombie, and undead characters in popular television series. Her research led her to further questions surrounding the embodiment of the consciousness, and the finality of death in the digital

age. An interesting question raised by these studies, and one addressed in this paper, is that of digital technology as a means to an immortality of sorts.

**The Posthuman Narrative.** Posthumanism in fiction was another subject of the review. Miller (2005) hypothesized that films and novels shape humanity's anxiety regarding artificial intelligence and subjectivity. He analyzed three novels in depth, and discussed several films. He concluded that the novels he studied provided a fascinated point of view on the capabilities of computers rather than one of revulsion; and that the films he discussed do perpetuate the idea that computers signal a threat to humanity.

While Hayles' fictive parallels to Cybernetics in *How We Became Posthuman* were helpful in this section of the review, other articles on the role of the cyborg and other posthuman concepts in fiction were reviewed as well. In her 2004 article, *Print is Flat, Code is Deep*, Hayles advocated media-specific analysis. She argued that texts are embodied, and should therefore be analyzed with an integrated method that considers both instantiation and signification, both physical form and narrative content. In *Narrating Consciousness: Language, Media and Embodiment* (2010), Hayles and Pulizzi analyzed two works of fiction with an aim to "reintroduce context and narrative as crucial factors in the processes of meaning-making" (2010, p. 131), through the lens of second order cybernetics and autopoietic theory, which, they argued, remains incomplete. They provided a theoretical framework wherein context plays a central role. Similarly, Julie Hawk's 2010 article, *Object 8 and the Cylon Remainder: Posthuman Subjectivization in Battlestar Galactica*, offered an analysis of the series' character(s) of the Eight Model and addressed agency and subjectivity from a posthuman perspective. Hawk analyzed the different iterations of the Eight Model characters' personalities and found representations



of subjectivization, the psychic remainder, and the rejection of opposites that resolve into posthuman conceptualities.

An additional analysis reviewed was Laura Shackleford's *Subject to Change: The Monstrosity of Media in Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl* (2006), in which she analyzed, from the posthuman media theorist's perspective, a hypertext novel. She explained that this type of fiction, in itself, symbolizes the posthuman because the story can be crafted by the reader as he or she builds on choices offered by the author.

While the posthuman narrative in fiction is largely relegated to fantasy and science fiction texts, in his 2008 article, William S. Haney predicted, "As we move from the contemporary/postmodern to the posthuman as a cultural construct, stories depicting posthuman experience will no longer be confined to the subgenre of science fiction but will increasingly extend to all types of short fiction" (p. 157). Haney examined short fiction by authors such as James Joyce, Kate Chopin, William Gibson, and Kurt Vonnegut. He found evidence to support his belief that the epiphanies experienced by both characters in and readers of these works are associated with a form of consciousness that extends across spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries. He compared this to the ability of technology to accomplish the same effects. He argued that cyborg characters are less likely to encounter mythic experiences in short fiction than their strictly human counterparts.

### **The Internet and Computer Mediated Communication**

This research presents how the digital age television narrative relates to the evolution of the internet, virtuality, and computer mediated communication. Riva and Galimberti (2001) hypothesized that the diffusion of the Internet would lead it to fill the

role of a psychosocial space in which to facilitate relationships and the construction of identity. They argued that, to study the Internet, one must study the communicators who use it and the ways in which they interact with the system environment. They predicted that new systems would change the relationships between these two elements.

If one ascribes to the idea that the liberal humanist subject is quickly becoming (or has become) the cyborg, it has never been so apparent as in the digital age human's daily interaction with computers. Scientists and journalists are only now beginning to report the effects of a digitally "plugged-in" lifestyle. In the July 16, 2012 issue of *Newsweek*, Tony Dokoupil investigated the potential of Internet usage to "rewire" the human brain. He cited a 2008 study by Gary Small of the UCLA Memory and Aging Research Center that found "fundamentally altered prefrontal cortexes" among web users (p. 28), and a Chinese study that found extra nerve cells in the areas of the brain that control attention and executive function, and gray matter shrinkage in the areas responsible for speech, memory, motor control, and emotion, among others. Through his investigation, he found that "The current incarnation of the Internet – portable, social, accelerated, and all-pervasive – may be making us not just dumber or lonelier but more depressed and anxious, prone to obsessive-compulsive and attention-deficit disorders, even outright psychotic" (p. 26). In fact, he noted that the 2013 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders will include "Internet Addiction Disorder" for the first time (p. 27). He reiterated the theme of the cyborg when he confirmed that Americans spend more time using a computer or mobile digital device than performing any other activity: "In less than the span of a single childhood, Americans have merged with their machines, staring at a screen for at least eight hours a day, more time than we

spend on any other activity including sleeping” (p. 27). He even called attention to the “phantom vibration syndrome” reported by many smart phone users. This recent terminology recalls the phantom limb syndrome experienced by amputees. As such, the ubiquitous smartphone has now been given the same identity status as a body part. In March of 2012, a *TIME* magazine article by Tim Newcomb reported on Nokia’s patent for a ferromagnetic device that could be “tattooed, sprayed, stamped, taped, drawn or applied as a decal” to the body and vibrate in conjunction with digital device activity. In the case of this “vibrating tattoo,” elements of the digital device do, in fact, become body parts.

Further illustrating the potential biological effects of computer mediated communication and Internet use, in 2012, Anderson and Rainie published the results of a Pew Research Center study regarding future effects of the Internet and computer mediated communication on young people. The survey was administered to technology experts, asking them to imagine what life is like for teens and young adults in the year 2020 who are “‘wired’ differently from those over age 35” (Anderson & Rainie, 2012, p. 2). Fifty-five percent of respondents thought that the difference would be advantageous, and forty-two percent surmised that the constant multitasking of the 2020 teen or young adult would be detrimental; however, in the open-ended elaboration segment of the survey, a large number of respondents noted that if an in-between option had been granted, that would have been their selection. These and other elaborative comments well-illustrate the expert predictions on this topic. While some pictured a benevolent step in human evolution, others bemoaned the loss of attention and depth of thought. Overall,

they reflect a sense of excitement and anxiety that may prove to be an effect of the Internet and computer mediated communication.

Marshall McLuhan seems to have predicted the events of the digital age in his 1964 text *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McLuhan theorized that media are extensions of human sensory functions. Additionally, McLuhan provided theories concerning the ways in which humans interact specifically with television. Of special interest is his view that television, by its low definition nature, requires participation from the viewer to “fill-in” the missing pixels. Though McLuhan’s 1964 text predates the Internet as it is known today, his ideas on the uses and effects of television and automation are uncannily relevant to the study of computer mediated communication.

**The Effects of Social Media.** Of special interest in the realm of computer mediated communication is the advent of the social networking platform, which has become sensationally popular in a very short period of time. In a 2010 study, Kim, Kim, and Nam sought correlations between personal identity and social media usage. They posited that Facebook and other social networking systems (SNSs) offer a conduit for self-expression and for the construction of identity through the user’s interaction with other users around the globe. They found that the subjects who most identified themselves through their relationship to others, what they termed “strong interdependent self-construal” expressed strong motivation and satisfaction when interfacing through SNSs (p. 1094). Why do users feel so rewarded when they feel “connected”? Tamir and Mitchell (2012) sought cause for the fact that over 80% of posts on social media platforms are broadcasts of the users’ immediate, personal experiences. They conducted a study to determine the level of reward experienced by subjects communicating personal

thoughts and events. They found that subjects were willing to forego money for the opportunity to disclose information about themselves. They also found that both thinking about the self and communicating those thoughts to others caused robust neural activity in the regions of the brain associated with reward. In their words, “humans so willingly self-disclose because doing so represents an event with intrinsic value, in the same way as with primary rewards such as food and sex” (p. 8041). They proposed that the feedback generated in reaction to these self-disclosures may serve as an interface for self-knowledge.

**The Avatar.** One concept that strongly connects computer mediated communication with the posthuman cyborg is that of the avatar, what Sviltana Matviyenko called “a prosthetic consciousness and unconscious, a user’s virtual ‘Self’” in her article, *Cyberbody as Drag* (2010, p. 39). The idea of the avatar conjures the doll/maker, puppet/master imagery that is so important to this analysis. In creating an avatar, the user creates an identity. But if the technology exists for each individual to create his/her own avatar, or multiple avatars, how does the avatar, the created self, achieve individuation? This research argues that the answer to that question can be found in myth, in the oft told tale of the Hero’s Journey.

## CHAPTER III

## Method

A narrative analysis was used to study Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*. The analysis tracked the series through the steps of Campbell's Hero's Journey.

A digital-age network television series concerning posthuman themes, and featuring a posthuman protagonist, the first twelve-episode season of *Dollhouse* aired from February 13, 2009 to May 8, 2009. The thirteenth episode, *Epitaph I*, did not originally air in the United States, but did air in Singapore and was released as a canonical episode on the first DVD issue in July of the same year. The second and final season aired from September 25, 2009 to January 29, 2010. The events take place in the United States, predominately in Los Angeles. With the exception of time-jumping segments and *Epitaph I* and *Epitaph II*, the temporal setting for the series is the year 2009.

While several series of this time period exemplified the themes of both the Hero's Journey and posthuman theory, including *Battlestar Galactica*, *Fringe*, *Heroes*, and a host of others, *Dollhouse* in particular was chosen because its limited number of episodes allowed the analysis to cover the series as a whole. Additionally, *Dollhouse* focuses on creating an individuated self from disparate personas – something this research sought to explore in the world of computer mediated communication and the internet.

The plot revolves around neuroplastic technology that allows certain people to be imprinted with alternative personas to fit a specific need or desire. This technology is pioneered by the Rossum corporation which, in addition to researching and developing scientific techniques to contribute to the medical community, operates several facilities

throughout the world that use the imprint technology commercially. These dollhouses, as they are called, boast a wealthy and influential clientele who are able to, for a significant fee, request that an “active” be imprinted with a specific persona. The dollhouses’ actives have been stripped of their original personas and live in a doll-like state until they are chosen to be imprinted. . Echo, formerly Caroline, is one of these actives and the hero of the narrative. Episode by episode, imprint by imprint, Echo evolves her own identity, completely distinct from Caroline, the persona that first set foot in the dollhouse. Throughout this evolution, *Dollhouse* explores topics such as the interaction between humanity and technology and where that interaction might lead.

Echo’s bunkmates, Sierra and Victor, share in many of her trials. Supporting and subverting her journey are Adelle DeWitt, head of the L.A. dollhouse, Boyd, her handler, Topher Brink, house programmer, Lawrence Dominic, chief of security, and Paul Ballard, an F.B.I. agent determined to uncover the “urban legend” of the dollhouse despite derision from his colleagues.

### **Narrative Analysis**

According to McLuhan, “the latest approach to media study considers not only the “content” but the medium and the cultural matrix within which the particular medium operates” (1964, p.11). This study accomplished this by applying a thorough narrative analysis to the series, and then by coding items into categories within a framework informed by a selection of the mythology studies of Joseph Campbell and posthuman theory. The Hero’s Journey as an analytical model recognizes the fundamental symbols and archetypes of the collective culture. One important aspect of this research was discovering how popular narratives and viewers interact. Posthuman theory addresses the



concurrent evolution of humanity and the tools it uses. Elements of this theory such as dissolution of opposites, self-constructed identity, and the co-evolution of humanity and technology become increasingly relevant in the digital age. The analysis was applied to the series on three levels: Intimation, Illustration, and Innovation. These levels, in turn, correspond to the stages of evolution that the protagonists and their tools move through, as well as the central concepts of posthuman theory. The series, and others in the genre, make allusions to myth within their text, represent myth as their text, and create new mythology for other texts to embody.

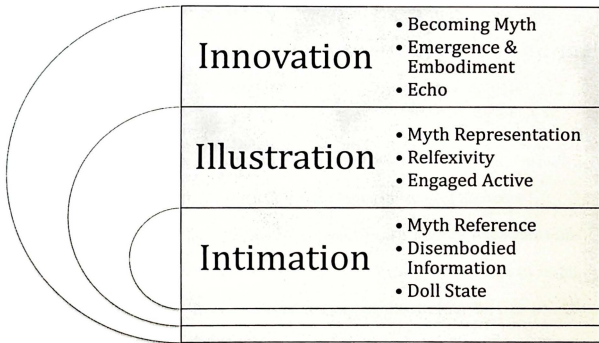


Figure 1

### Intimation

Formalistically, intimation pertains to classical, religious, folk, and popular mythology references in the series. *Dollhouse* is particularly adept at using fairy tale allusions to relate to its viewers. For example, the episode *Briar Rose* opens with Echo

reading the story aloud to a group, and the story's events are referenced throughout the next forty minutes. Here, the references occur within the text, but are also removed from it. The allusions serve to transport the viewer to the referenced material, rather than to engage the viewer in a narrative that is representative of the referenced material. On the same level, Echo begins as a doll with multiple consciousnesses stored on hard drive devices, or wedges, and loaded into her brain when they are needed. This level corresponds to an idea shared by Claude Shannon and Norbert Wiener, the forefathers of cybernetics research and, by extension, posthuman theory, that information was "an entity distinct from the substrates carrying it" (Hayles, 1999, xi). At this level in the narrative analysis, the myth allusions are just that – they are integrated into the text of the series but are not embodied in the narrative.

### **Illustration**

In the second level of analysis, instances of illustration of mythological narratives and forms were studied. Here, the research tracked the progression of the series' protagonist through each of these stages of Campbell's Hero's Journey. Over the course of the hero's journey, the hero leaves the world he or she knows and enters a new realm. The hero meets with extraordinary forces and escapes victorious. He or she then returns to the world of the known having gained a special knowledge or power to share with others (Campbell, 1949). Additionally, the illustration level analysis reviewed mythological forms that are represented in the series. On the second level, Echo is an active, programmed and imprinted with a persona created to accomplish a task, achieve a goal, or solve a problem. A central concept in posthuman theory is reflexivity and the role of the observer. Just as it disguises mythic forms to adapt them to the current cultural

climate, this series consistently illustrates discrepancies between perception and “reality,” another actor behind the scenes.

### **Innovation**

Campbell called the hero the “champion of things becoming” (1949, p. 243). On the Innovation level of analysis, the research focused on the transformative elements of posthuman theory that constitute the results of the hero’s journey. According to Campbell, “What all the myths have to deal with is transformation of consciousness” (in Konner & Perlmutter, 1988). The same is true for Posthumanism. When *Dollhouse* protagonist Echo compiles her imprints and her original personality into her own super-identity, she is transformed. She is transcended. As the posthuman protagonist becomes something more than what she was and a legend in her own right, the text itself blossoms into its own myth, preparing to start the cycle anew. This is emergence, one of Hayles’ central concepts of the third wave of cybernetics, and a recurring theme in posthuman research. Hayles defines emergence as the concept by which new software properties and programs evolve on their own in response to a combination of simple rules and multiple, recursive feedback loops, often “developing in ways not anticipated by the person who created the simulation” (Hayles, 1999, p. 225).

## CHAPTER IV

## Results

**Level 1: Intimation**

*Dollhouse* relies on fairy tale analogy and science fiction reference to link the posthuman hero to the narrative of human history, though references to ancient, biblical, and classical myth are also present. Following are the results of the first level analysis, in which the researcher studied direct textual references to external mythologies within the series.

The name of the protagonist of *Dollhouse*, Echo, is derived from Greek mythology, providing an interesting mix of ancient and contemporary allusion; all of the Los Angeles dolls are named for military alphabet codes, including Echo. Names from Greek mythology make up a part of the mythological references found in the series. In the Washington D.C. dollhouse introduced in the second season, the actives are referred to by the names of ancient Greek gods and goddesses including Athena, Hades, and Aphrodite. Several other ancient mythological references are present in the series. In the episode, *Ghost*, the viewer glimpses the memory wipe process in a scene in which house programmer Topher Brink declares, "the new moon has made her a virgin again" (Whedon, et al, 2009, episode 1.1), referring to the virginal moon goddess, Diana. In the fourth episode, Echo joins a team of thieves in stealing an invaluable piece of the Athenian Parthenon, the temple built to honor the Greek goddess Athena. In *Echoes*, the protagonist's original persona, Caroline, in an earlier chronological scene, or analepsis, refers to her "Odyssey" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.7), recalling Homer's epic account of the trials of mythic hero Odysseus.

Symbols from Greek mythology are also a part of the mythological references found in the series. In the second episode, protagonist Echo must learn how to bow hunt, allowing her to use the ancient weapon-of-choice of the goddess Artemis. The image of Romulus and Remus suckling the wolf appears as a statue on D.C. house programmer Bennett Halverson's desk. The prevalent tree motif is a core mythic symbol. According to Campbell, "The Buddha beneath the Tree of Enlightenment (the Bo Tree) and Christ on the Holy Rood (the Tree of Redemption) are analogous figures, incorporating an archetypal World Savior, World Tree motif, which is of immemorial antiquity" (1949, p. 33). This tree is represented in *Dollhouse* by the snow-covered tree that dominates Echo's dreamscape when she is forced to journey into the subconscious Rossum network known as the Attic.

The character Alpha, a former dollhouse active who suffered a "composite event" and escaped the dollhouse after murdering several other actives and staff members, delivers an example of ancient mythological allusion in the episode entitled *Omega* (which, paired with the character's name, is a myth reference in itself: the biblical book of Revelation refers to God as the "Alpha and the Omega"). He has abducted a shopkeeper and imprinted her with the persona of Caroline, Echo's original consciousness. His plan is to "composite" Echo and instruct her to kill Caroline, her old self. He explains:

That's what we need, a blood ritual. The Aztecs knew it. The Pre-Hellenic Minoans knew it for gods' sakes. From the moment man first clawed his way out of the primordial ooze and kicked off his fins he's understood that the gods require blood. New life from death. (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.12).

In ancient Greek and Phrygian mythology, the savior Attis was crucified and resurrected in the same way that the heroes in the instant research experience the Hero's Journey. The naming of the Attic, the section of the dollhouse reserved for damaged actives where their brains serve as the Rossum Corporation's computer mainframe, may not only serve to facilitate the doll imagery of the series, but may also be a reference to this ancient "Attic tragedy."

Biblical references were another element of the intimation level analysis. *Dollhouse* references the Garden of Eden in the fifth and eleventh episodes. While some of these references occur in relation to the dollhouse itself, others take place in the episode *True Believer*, in which a government client engages dollhouse active and protagonist Echo to infiltrate a religious cult. In this episode, Echo is imprinted with a persona of a blind devotee named Esther Carpenter, alluding not only to the Persian queen, but also to the occupation of Jesus. *True Believer* is rife with Biblical allusions: Esther references the biblical story of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, Jonas, the cult's leader, baptizes Esther and welcomes her to the temple, and when he decides his followers will be tested with fire, he instructs Esther to read the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. When she regains her sight, Esther continues the Judeo-Christian theme when she thinks Boyd Langton, Echo's handler, is an angel. In subtext, the operations of the cult are compared to those of the dollhouse, and the same allusions apply in both environments.

The episode *Briar Rose* provides an excellent example of the intimation level. The title itself refers to the popular fairy tale, also known as "Sleeping Beauty." When Alpha, a homicidal genius former active, wakes the sleeping princess (Echo) with an

must navigate a path of dreams and mythic imagery to advance her journey. This is the stage of the hero's journey wherein he or she is engulfed by the unknown, venturing into the realms of the unconscious and even into death itself (Campbell, 1949).

Echo's experience in the whale's belly is foreshadowed in the second episode of *Dollhouse*. Echo hallucinates the image of her original persona, Caroline, from a college video yearbook that Alpha possesses, herself in tabula rasa state, and her own innate image of Caroline, foretelling the fact that she will have to face and come to terms with these three levels of her consciousness.

**The Road of Trials.** The Road of Trials is the first step in the Initiation portion of the Hero's Journey. For Echo, the road to follow is the one that leads her and her aids out of the Attic. On the road the hero "discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed...Then he finds that he and his opposite are not differing species, but one flesh" (Campbell, 1949, p. 108). To do this, Echo must first face her own nightmare scenario. She re-enacts a Sisyphian scene in which she is unable to rescue her friends and former dollhouse actives Anthony (Victor) and Priya (Sierra). She meets the former dollhouse head of security and secret N.S.A. mole Lawrence Dominic (now another guide) on her road and explains that, because she embodies multiple personas, she is experiencing multiple dreamscapes – multiple roads of trials. She and Dominic continue on this road, journeying through the hells of other Attic residents and narrowly escaping the chasing death blows of a mysterious figure. On the Road of Trials, Echo learns that she must embrace the parts of herself that she most fears. She must transform and transcend her past-selves (Campbell, 1949). This leads her to the goddess.



multiple references to science fiction series *Battlestar Galactica*, and the characters mention films *Soylent Green*, *The Matrix*, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, and the Norman Bates character from the film, *Psycho*. The series also contains cloaked allusions to two of Whedon's other television creations, *Angel* and *Firefly*. More than once, the dolls are referred to as zombies, and the characters use the vocabulary of *Star Wars* multiple times as well: Genius house programmer Topher insists, "Darth Vader kills lieutenants, not storm troopers" (Whedon, et al, 2009, episode 2.10), and, in the post-apocalyptic *Epitaph II*, one of the few remaining "actuals" (people who have retained their original personalities), refers to Neuropolis, formerly Tucson, Arizona as the "Death Star" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.13). In *Haunted*, Topher imprints dollhouse active Sierra as his perfect best friend, a birthday gift to himself, and they debate "classic sci-fi errors" (Whedon, et. al., 2009, episode 1.10).

### **Disembodied Information and the Posthuman**

In the same way that these allusions are entities of their own accord, simply being referenced rather than represented, the prominent theorists in the first wave of cybernetics, the forefathers of posthuman theory, viewed information as existing apart from context. Hans Moravec, known for his work in the field of artificial intelligence, took this notion a step further by visualizing human identity as a pattern of information, and proposed that, following this theory, a human consciousness could be downloaded onto a computer (Hayles, 1999). Of course, this is precisely the theory that the dollhouse exploits.

## **Level 2: Illustration and the Hero's Journey**

### **The Hero's Journey**

The following pages contain the results of the illustration analysis, which studied representations of series protagonist Echo's progression through the stages of the hero's journey as outlined by Joseph Campbell.

**The Call to Adventure.** The hero is called to adventure because he or she is ready to hear it (Campbell in Konner & Perlmutter, 1988). This is especially true for both Echo and her original persona, Caroline. Caroline ends up in the dollhouse after failing in her terrorist attack against the Rossum Corporation. She claims that she was "trying to take my place in the world" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.1). As Caroline is shown in analepsis throughout the series, the viewer notes that Echo shares many character attributes with her original persona, including compassion and a strong will. In the second season, in fact, D.C. dollhouse programmer and Caroline's college roommate, Bennett Halverson, argues that Echo and Caroline are one and the same, protesting, "Caroline has a power over people and however well you wiped her she clearly still does" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.6).

One characteristic of the mythic hero is an exceptional gift or unusual trait. Though Echo is repeatedly referred to by other characters as "just a girl" she is certainly not average. Throughout *Dollhouse*, Echo is referred to as "perfect," "special," "not normal," and in her handler, Boyd's words, "definitely interesting, at least on a microscopic level" (Whedon et al., 2009). On a physical level, Echo's special power lies in her spinal fluid, which allows her to resist the memory wipe process.

According to Campbell, the hero can begin his or her journey through any of a number of mythic mechanisms (1949). In *Dollhouse*, the hero is called to adventure somewhat unwillingly. Caroline's adventure begins when she submits to the dollhouse in order to save her friend, and the call is heralded by Adelle DeWitt, who solicits her "volunteer" participation.

**Refusal of the Call.** In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell used the Briar Rose fairy tale to illustrate the Refusal of the Call (1949, p. 62-63). In this story, a jealous witch condemns princess Briar Rose (or Sleeping Beauty) and all the inhabitants of her castle to an eternal slumber that can only be ended by a prince's kiss. In the *Dollhouse* episode of the same name, Echo is imprinted with the persona of an adult, psychologically healed version of an actual traumatized child. She reads the story of Briar Rose to the girl's class and, seeing her violent reaction, explains that the princess in fact dreamed the rescuing prince. She saved herself and her kingdom by creating him. In this instance, both Echo and her original persona Caroline represent the sleeping princess, but Echo's sleep is the result of Caroline's spindle-prick. In the next episode, Echo reflects that Caroline abandoned her. By choosing to submit to the dollhouse, Caroline refused the call and chose the sleeping castle. However, Echo's adventure never would have commenced had she not made that choice. For Campbell, the fact that Briar Rose is ultimately rescued by a prince points to the fact that "Not all who hesitate are lost" (p. 64). Compare this to Echo's affirmation in *Vows* that "We are lost but we are not gone" (Whedon et al., 2009, episode 2.1). It is not until *Epitaph II*, the final episode of the series, that Caroline, her wedge (the hard drive containing her persona) left in the

dollhouse to guide others like Hansel and Gretel's breadcrumbs, ultimately accepts the Call to Adventure.

**Supernatural Aid.** The hero is provided with a guide on his or her journey, often a wise old man or woman. For Echo, this is Boyd Langton, her handler. Echo is also helped along in her journey by head of the L.A. dollhouse Adelle DeWitt, who, somewhat unwittingly, allows her to evolve: "We all know Echo's special. Let's see what she's capable of" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.7).

An amulet or talisman given to the hero by a wise or protective figure provides supernatural aid (Campbell, 1949). Echo receives two talismans. In the pilot episode, the client gives Echo a necklace (a heart) with all it signifies (including love as well as embodied consciousness from the posthuman perspective). In this case, the amulet is lost. Echo drops the heart as she is wiped, losing the memory of the client. Reflecting this later in the series, the former dollhouse active Anthony (known in the dollhouse as Victor) drops his dog tags as he is absorbed into the hive mind of other soldiers with active architecture in episode nine, *Stop-Loss*. Echo's second talisman is a leaf that she uses as a bookmark (a signifier of her evolving capacity to retain memories). Boyd recognizes this and confiscates it, but later returns it to her, offering it as Supernatural Aid. It is interesting to note that, though Echo does receive the leaf from Boyd in the end, she initiated its function. Echo's ability to instigate her own symbols and schema plays a major role in the series.

**Crossing of the First Threshold.** Protagonist Echo's spontaneous memory flashes early in the series represent the crossing of the first threshold. Her first memory occurs at the end of the first episode, when she experiences an image of fellow dollhouse

active Sierra being painfully mapped for active architecture, but perhaps the most poignant evidence for Echo's crossing of the first threshold takes place at the end of the second episode, *The Target*. During the course of the episode, a dollhouse client tells Echo that she must prove that she deserves to survive. He illustrates this concept with a gesture: he strikes his shoulder with the opposite fist and declares, "Shoulder to the wheel" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.2). After Echo narrowly survives the engagement and her memory is wiped, she is able to repeat this gesture, signifying that she has crossed the threshold of the serene, childlike realm of the dolls and has begun to progress on her journey. Because the first myths came out of primitive hunting rituals (Campbell in Konner & Perlmutter, 1988), it is interesting that Echo experiences the crossing of the first threshold after a hunting excursion (first she is the hunter, then the hunted).

**The Belly of the Whale.** In the Belly of the Whale, the hero leaves the realm of light and confronts the creatures of the unconscious (Campbell in Konner & Perlmutter, 1988). When it becomes clear that protagonist Echo has established her own personality by combining her multiple imprints, the head of the L.A. dollhouse, Adelle DeWitt, orders she be sent the Attic. DeWitt refers to this section of the dollhouse where damaged or uncontrollable actives (or sometimes dollhouse staff) are sent as "whatever hell you imagine" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.10). The actives' bodies are incapacitated, hooked up to input and output feeds, and surrounded with blue liquid. Their psyches are in the true Attic – multiple unconscious minds networked to serve as the computer mainframe for the Rossum Corporation, the parent company of the dollhouses. For the Attic's residents, this means a labyrinth of riddlesome dreamscapes (or nightmares). Echo

must navigate a path of dreams and mythic imagery to advance her journey. This is the stage of the hero's journey wherein he or she is engulfed by the unknown, venturing into the realms of the unconscious and even into death itself (Campbell, 1949).

Echo's experience in the whale's belly is foreshadowed in the second episode of *Dollhouse*. Echo hallucinates the image of her original persona, Caroline, from a college video yearbook that Alpha possesses, herself in tabula rasa state, and her own innate image of Caroline, foretelling the fact that she will have to face and come to terms with these three levels of her consciousness.

**The Road of Trials.** The Road of Trials is the first step in the Initiation portion of the Hero's Journey. For Echo, the road to follow is the one that leads her and her aids out of the Attic. On the road the hero "discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed...Then he finds that he and his opposite are not differing species, but one flesh" (Campbell, 1949, p. 108). To do this, Echo must first face her own nightmare scenario. She re-enacts a Sisyphean scene in which she is unable to rescue her friends and former dollhouse actives Anthony (Victor) and Priya (Sierra). She meets the former dollhouse head of security and secret N.S.A. mole Lawrence Dominic (now another guide) on her road and explains that, because she embodies multiple personas, she is experiencing multiple dreamscapes – multiple roads of trials. She and Dominic continue on this road, journeying through the hells of other Attic residents and narrowly escaping the chasing death blows of a mysterious figure. On the Road of Trials, Echo learns that she must embrace the parts of herself that she most fears. She must transform and transcend her past-selves (Campbell, 1949). This leads her to the goddess.

**The Meeting with the Goddess.** In myth, the image of woman represents all that can be known, and the hero's goal is to attain this knowledge (Campbell, 1949). In *Dollhouse*, the goddess is both the universal mother and personal mother figure for Echo. Caroline, Echo's original persona, is representative of the universal mother with her exceptional compassion for living creatures. As Echo's origin, Caroline is also her progenitor.

Echo experiences her meeting with the goddess when she concedes to integrate her original persona into her self-engineered consciousness. This is difficult for Echo, as she explains, "I'm afraid of Caroline. If she comes back, where do I go?" (Whedon et al, 2009, episode 2.6). Echo's first opportunity to meet Caroline is thwarted when the psychotic former active Alpha shoots the shopkeeper he has imprinted with Caroline's identity. Still, the last word Echo utters before going to sleep (and after being wiped) that evening is "Caroline." When Echo finally does assimilate her original persona into her consciousness, she learns of Rossum's, and her handler Boyd's, deepest secret. The knowledge she gains is the key to saving the world.

**Woman as Temptress.** In the second season of the series, Echo is sometimes waylaid in her journey by her attraction to Paul Ballard, the F.B.I. agent who sought to save her and destroy the dollhouse, but who then became Echo's handler. When Paul confronts Alpha, programmer Topher is forced to construct active architecture in his brain in order to save his life. In doing so, he must also remove the code in Ballard's brain that represents his love for Echo. He is lost to her. He becomes a version of the goddess for her in the final episode, when he is killed and Echo imprints herself using the wedge that stores his persona. They are reunited in Echo's psyche.

**Atonement with the Father.** Part of the hero's mission to cast off the attachment to the ego is the resolution of the father image with the self. Campbell called this the "umbilical point," the hero's weakness, the singular part of the hero's being that he or she must destroy or resolve in order to achieve perfect knowledge (1949). L.A. dollhouse programmer Topher Brink is Echo's father, her creator. He represents Campbell's ogre-tyrant image of the father with his arrogance, his devotion to technoscience above all, and his uninitiated adolescence, symbolized by the juice boxes and video games in his office. Because it is Topher's job to keep the program running smoothly, Echo's journey as a hero is directly at odds with his mission. After Echo's memory wipe in the fourth episode, Topher guarantees that there are "No pesky human evolution bits lingering around" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.4).

In *Needs*, Topher conducts an experiment by imprinting some of the actives with their original personas, only withholding their memories. This allows Echo/Caroline the chance to confront Topher for the first time. When he protests, "Look, I'm just the science guy," she responds, "Up here, looking down on everyone. Playing God" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.8). Watching the dollhouse from his lofty glass box, he is the creator.

Echo's evolution of identity is mirrored by Topher's evolution of morality. He must come to terms with this fact in the season two episode *Belonging*, in which he is ordered to imprint dollhouse active Sierra and permanently send her to Nolan, the influential client and neuropharmacologist who drugged Priya (Sierra's original persona) into insanity so that she could be "saved" by the dollhouse. Topher's choice leads to Nolan's death and his duty to dismember the body. Echo's handler Boyd sums up



Topher's narrative in this episode with his line: "You had a moral dilemma, your first. And it didn't go so well" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.4).

Echo begins to achieve atonement with Topher when he begins to accept her emergence. When Echo and her new handler, Ballard return to the dollhouse after she has amalgamated her personas into a functional identity, he finds himself in on their secret. When they infiltrate Rossum, they are all standing with Echo, including Topher. Illustrating the cosmogonic cycle, at the end of *Epitaph II*, Topher himself becomes a hero, sacrificing himself to reverse the consequences of his inventions.

**Apotheosis.** In the posthuman television narrative, the hero becomes god-like in her own right because her ultimate decisions affect the continued existence of humanity (or posthumanity). In *The Hollow Man*, Clyde 2.0, a copy of one of the founders of Rossum who proved too scrupulous, calls Echo, "our savior," but Echo's path is not to save only the "deserving few" that he has in mind (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.12). Echo becomes god-like when she accepts her other and combines with Caroline. The Rossum founders recognize this and seek to harvest this divine power to defend themselves against the coming apocalypse. In *Epitaph II*, the final episode of the series, it is clear that Echo leads the rebellion against Rossum and the dystopian world their technology has created.

**The Ultimate Boon.** Campbell viewed the hero's crucifixion - his breaking through of personal limitations into spiritual awareness - as the path to Ultimate Boon. As the mythic hero's crucifixion often leads to the realm of death, limbo, or the underworld, Echo's crucifixion leads her to the Attic. After being condemned to the strange facility, she is rendered unconscious, restrained, and pierced with electric

impulses and equipment. Yet, Echo comes out of the experience with a knowledge she did not possess when she entered into it. The boon she receives is the knowledge that Caroline, her original persona, her other self, is the only person to have met the secret founder of Rossum, and that this is the one secret that can prevent the destruction of humanity.

**Refusal of the Return.** After escaping from the dollhouse in the second season of the series, Echo experiences what the refusal of the return would mean for her, but her compassionate need to rescue those who shared her fate in the dollhouse outweighs any hesitation she may have. In fact, it is her handler and admirer Ballard who is reluctant to return, having gotten a glimpse of what life would be like with Echo, away from the hero's path. Echo corrects this misstep, "I can't train forever...we have to go back inside the dollhouse" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.7).

**The Magic Flight.** If the triumphant hero is blessed by the goddess or god, his return to the realm of the known is supported. However, if the hero has thwarted a heavenly patron, or if a supernatural being has denied the hero's return to the world of the known, he or she is often forced to flee these forces (Campbell, 1949). To escape the Attic and return from the realm of the unknown, Echo must die and resurrect herself in her physical body. A skeptical Dominic, the former head of dollhouse security who was condemned to the Attic after being discovered to be an N.S.A. spy, asks, "Your plan is to come back from the dead?" (Whedon, et al., episode 2.10). She accomplishes this seemingly impossible feat, reviving the others and paralleling Ballard's return from brain death via active architecture in the same episode.

**Rescue from Without.** The client in the second episode of *Dollhouse* questions whether or not Echo deserves to live. He tells her to “Prove you’re not just an echo” (Whedon, et al., 2009). As she pieces together her identity throughout the series, Echo personifies this idea of proving her own individuation. In order to complete Echo’s journey, however, Caroline must be resurrected as well. With the wedge that stored her persona missing, L.A. house programmer Topher Brink and D.C. house programmer Bennett Halverson must team up to reconstruct the backup wedge that the murderous escaped active Alpha all but destroyed. Only then can Caroline be imprinted onto Echo.

**The Crossing of the Return Threshold.** When the hero crosses over from the unconscious to the world of the known, he or she must bring back what he or she has learned. This is a difficult step in the hero’s journey, for the realm of the unconscious is not easily described (Campbell, 1949). Echo returns from the Attic knowing she must assimilate Caroline because she is the only known person to have ever met the mysterious founder of Rossum. Even after Caroline’s wedge is restored, Boyd, once Echo’s protector and now dollhouse head of security, drugs Echo so that she can’t reveal his secret – that he is in fact the unnamed founder of the Rossum corporation. It is not until the team has infiltrated Rossum headquarters in Tucson that Echo is able to share what she has learned, at gunpoint.

**Master of the Two Worlds.** By joining with Caroline, Echo is ultimately able to relinquish her attachment to her ego and, by doing so, her personal limitations. Thus, she is able to experience what Campbell referred to as “the great at-one-ment” (1949, p. 237). Echo gives a good rationale for her decision to complete the path to individuation. When she imprints fellow dollhouse active Sierra with her original personality, Priya, in *Stop-*

*Loss*, Priya asks why she didn't just take her in her doll state, "with all the complications stripped away." Echo explains that she'd "still be figuring out how to buckle your seatbelt" (Whedon, et al, 2009, episode 2.9). Though dolls may appear blissfully ignorant in their tabula rasa state, the hero of this series, just as the heroes of myth did, decides that individuation is superior to this comfortably ignorant existence.

Before becoming Master of the Two worlds, Echo must relive some stages of her journey. Revisiting the crucifixion, she is restrained and her spinal fluid is painfully extracted. She is rescued (from without) by her friends Anthony and Priya. But Echo alone has resigned all ego attachment and has experienced the "terrifying assimilation of the self into what formerly was only otherness" (Campbell, 1949, p. 217). Of course, she had the power to succeed within her all along. In the penultimate stage of the hero's journey, he or she comes to realize that the special knowledge or power won and returned to the world of the known is actually a part of him or herself (Campbell, 1949).

**Freedom to Live.** The hero must experience death and be reborn in the knowledge of it, but she must also resolve her victory within the greater cosmogonic cycle. The mythic hero's journey involves leaving the expectations of society behind and being initiated into bliss (Campbell, 1949). Heffner proposed defining freedom as "behaving in unprogrammed ways" (2002, p. 663). This definition certainly applies to Echo's journey in *Dollhouse*, as well as the posthuman applications of the Internet and computer mediated technology.

Echo first demonstrates her ability to defy programming in the second episode of the series when she reverses the handler/active script, asking her handler, "Do you trust me?" (Whedon, et al., 2009). But for Echo/Caroline, it is not enough to be free herself. In

*Needs*, her goal, though she has no memories of her own, is to set all the inhabitants of the dollhouse free. Adelle DeWitt, head of the Los Angeles dollhouse, comments in the final episode of the series that her fantasy has come true. Echo herself is finally free when she imprints Paul Ballard's consciousness onto herself and is able to experience a love of her own.

### Mythic Forms

In addition to addressing the specific elements of these sections of the narrative repeated across ages and cultures, Campbell also described the mythological symbols and archetypes that present themselves in legends and lore across many eras and cultures (1949, 1988). One such common element is the house of sleep. "The sleeping castle is that ultimate abyss to which the descending consciousness submerges in dream, where the individual life is on the point of dissolving into undifferentiated energy" (Campbell, 1949, p. 173). In *Dollhouse*, protagonist Echo's original self, Caroline, is the "the Lady of the House of Sleep." Echo reflects this by becoming whatever the client needs her to be, and later, whatever the situation demands.

The blue liquid that surrounds the bodies in the Attic equates to the water of transformation, another common mythological motif (Campbell, 1949, p. 251). These liquids facilitate the baptism of the posthuman hero. By breaking the surface of this water, she crosses the threshold into the unknown and begins her transformation. This imagery is repeated with scenes of Echo swimming. In the following line, Echo uses this motif to explain her constructed identity to her admired handler, Paul Ballard:

It wasn't like a glitch, the skills. It was like a wave – just everything washing over me. And then the wave pulled back and you see what it washed up – picking up the shells and smooth stones from the shore, collecting myself (Whedon et al., 2009, episode 2.7).

In the second episode of season two, programmer Topher imprints Echo with the persona of a new mother, altering her brain in such a way that her body is actually able to produce milk. This represents the virgin birth, a common theme in myth that, in turn, represents the emergence of spirit from matter.

According to Campbell, "The motif of the difficult task as prerequisite to the bridal bed has spun the hero-deeds of all time and all the world" (1949, p. 344). That is certainly the case in this narrative. In the second season of the series, Ballard implies that he may feel better about the idea of taking advantage of Echo's attraction to him after they succeed in freeing the dollhouse's inhabitants, and, after kissing collaborative D.C. house programmer Bennett Halverson, Topher says, "More of that if we prevent the end of the world" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.11).

### **The Cosmogonic Cycle**

In *Haunted*, Echo's handler Boyd asks, "Life after death – where does that end?" and house programmer Topher responds, "Same place it begins – death" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.10). The "cosmogonic cycle" described by Campbell as pervading myth "with astonishing consistency" (1949, p. 39), is especially apt in the study of the postmodern television narrative. One recurring motif of the series *Battlestar Galactica* was the mantra: "All this has happened before, and all this will happen again" (Moore & Eick, 2003-2009, episodes 1.8 and 1.10). When the homicidal escaped active Alpha imprints Echo with all her personas, he names her Omega, signifying the beginning and the end. In the hero's tale, the cosmogonic cycle allows the hero to return from his or her

journey and play supporting roles in another hero's journey, as Echo does for Topher in *Epitaph II*.

Campbell illustrated the cosmogonic cycle, or "universal round" with the idea of three stages of consciousness: sleeping, dreaming, and waking. This cycle is represented in the Hindu AUM, where A corresponds to waking consciousness, U to dreaming, and M to deep sleep (Campbell, 1949). Campbell also equated the three syllables to birth, becoming, and resolution (Konner & Perlmutter, 1988). In the dollhouse, A is represented by the doll's original personalities ("actuals"), or, in the special case of Echo, her self-constructed individuation. The U syllable, the dream, is illustrated by the programmed or engaged actives. Finally, the doll, or "tabula rasa," state signifies the M, or deep sleep syllable. As if he knew Echo, Joseph Campbell referred to the mythic hero as the "waker of his own soul" (1949, p. 260).

There are many representations of this cycle in myth; death, burial, and resurrection, the sleeping princess woken by a prince, and the sacrifice for a bountiful harvest all allude to this. Religion or myth uses ritual as the instrument of these representations. Ritual is a topic of interest for Campbell, including cultural rites of passage and initiations. He argued that rituals serve to allow practitioners to cross both conscious and unconscious thresholds (1949). The concept of ritual is relevant in the digital age as well. In a 2002 article, Heffner compared the rituals of Christian initiates to virtual reality.

Call and response is representative of the cosmogonic cycle and is a popular ritual in the dollhouse. When a handler is paired with an active, he must look into his or her eyes and ask, "Do you trust me?". The active responds, "With my life" (Whedon, et.al.

2009, episode 1.2). After the memories are wiped from each active in the dollhouse, they muse, "Did I fall asleep?" and house programmer Topher responds, "For a little while" (Whedon, et.al, 2009, episode 1.1). Another ritual represented in *Dollhouse*, quite gruesomely, is the eating of the sacrifice. This idea comes from agricultural myth of death and renewal and is represented in Christian mythology by the sacrament of the Eucharist. According to Campbell, this act represents eating from the tree of immortal life, dying to dualities and physical existence, and waking to the identity of the consciousness (Konner & Perlmutter, 1988). As Echo journeys through the Attic, she finds herself in a Japanese teahouse with a former Rossum executive who is forced, in his nightmare, to "stay here and enjoy [him]self" (Whedon, et al, 2009, episode 2.10). The viewer discovers what he means when the camera leaves his smiling, feasting face and reveals his bloody stubs of legs under the low table. When the man is killed, Echo, as the hero, realizes she can't move on from that part of the Attic until she completes the act herself.

Rebirth is referenced several times in the series. The fourth episode of *Dollhouse* opens on a scene of Echo imprinted as a midwife delivering a baby. While illustrating the cosmogonic cycle, it is important to note that here, Echo has the power to give life, or at least facilitate it. House programmer Topher compares the imprint and wipe process itself to childbirth in *Gray Hour*, and Echo's handler Boyd, in *Omega*, argues, "I think it's more like watching someone die" (Whedon et al., 2009, episode 1.12). Because Alpha can wipe and imprint others, he also has the ability to reproduce.



### Reflexivity and the Role of the Observer

The concept of reflexivity is an important one in posthuman theory. Taking the role of the observer into account, a reflexive point of view weakens any notion of objectivity. Campbell seemed to agree with this view. In his 1988 interview series with Bill Moyers, Campbell argued that people all operate in relation to a system (Konner & Perlmutter), and Pepperell stressed the importance of the observer in his 2003 text. Because the dollhouse is home to multiple layers of reflex and observational differences, illustration of this concept abounds. The very first shot of the series appears to be security camera footage, implying another level of observation outside that of the visible characters and the viewer. When F.B.I. agent Ballard is introduced to Echo, it is first through the video yearbook footage the psychopathic Alpha sends him. His second sighting occurs when she appears in a television newscast fleeing from a cult raid. In *Man on the Street*, the audience is introduced to three more levels of observation: the opinion of the passerby, the news crew that films that opinion, and that of the presumed news audience.

The first line of *Dollhouse* is "Nothing is what it appears to be" (Whedon et al., 2009, episode 1.1). Truly, in the dollhouse, people who appear to be real are actually actives who are actually dolls who are actually people who have signed five years of their lives away. Some of the staff members (Echo's handler, Boyd Langton, and head of security, Lawrence Dominic in particular) are living double or triple lives. Even the clients are pretending that the scenario they ordered is real. In *The Target*, the client acts as if he is a thrill-seeking lover to Echo, but she, and the viewer, soon learn that what he really seeks is the thrill of hunting her. When Dominic learns that his background check

had been fabricated, he admits that he'd never seen something so intricate, implying that Alpha is behind the plot.

The references to acting illustrate this reflexivity in *Dollhouse*. During the handler/active call and response ritual, programmer Topher hands Echo's handler Boyd a "script," calls him "Brando," and announces, "Take two!" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.2). In the viewer's first introduction to the homicidal ex-active Alpha, he is posing as the paranoid and phobic marijuana-growing environmental enthusiast who designed the dollhouse to be a self-sustaining closed system. As Stephen Kepler, Alpha is "forced" to help agent Ballard break into the dollhouse where Ballard disguises him as one of the actives. Here the viewer (end-observer) sees actor Alan Tudyk playing Alpha (originally a criminal named Kraft) playing Stephen Kepler playing a doll. Similarly, in *Gray Hour*, actor Eliza Dushku plays Caroline who, without her consciousness, is Echo, who is imprinted with the persona of an expert thief who pretends to be an escort during the engagement; and in *Vows*, Echo's imprint is an F.B.I. agent who marries the subject of an investigation under a false identity in order to advance the case against him. In *Needs*, some of the actives (Echo, Victor, Sierra, and November) are given their original personalities without memories. To avoid detection, they must pretend to be mindless dolls. In *Haunted*, Echo is imprinted with the persona of a deceased client, who plays the role of her own friend in order to observe her family's reaction to her death. In the second season, Echo, having constructed a functional identity from her personas, gets a job as a nurse at a hospital under a false name in order to set up the elaborate rescue of her friend.

Reflexivity and the role of the observer are important to myth as well. Campbell reminded his reader that mythological symbols are just that – they are not intended to be

taken as the final term, but as a metaphor designed to be comprehended as such (1949). This corresponds fully to the notion of reflexivity and the role of the observer in Hayles' second wave of cybernetic theory and in posthuman theory in general (1999), and the concept is a vital one. Campbell warned, "Wherever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history, or science, it is killed" (1949, p. 249).

### **Level 3: Innovation**

One characteristic of the posthuman narrative is the idea of becoming something else or something thought to be new. Because of this, the quest for the self is a staple of posthuman fiction. The television audience relates to this aspect because there is a parallel quest for the self occurring in the world of the virtual and computer mediated communication. This is the same quest that is mapped out in the hero's narrative, and it is one that posthuman theorists seek to diagram with their research. While the illustration level showed how the mythic hero achieves individuation, the results of the innovation level evidence the posthuman hero's individuation in particular – the victory that serves as new myth in itself – using the framework of posthuman theory.

*Epitaph I* and *Epitaph II* serve to define the new posthuman mythology for *Dollhouse*. A new vocabulary is introduced including words like "actuals" dumbshows" and "butchers" to describe original personas, dolls, and actives controlled by the Rossum corporation. The characters in these episodes explain that Rossum began offering its clients physical "upgrades" – fresh and nubile bodies of their choice, without regard for the embodiment of the original consciousness. Topher, driven mad by guilt, explains how the remote-wipe technology he designed was weaponized by Rossum to begin a war with a robocall. "And then the war has two sides: Those who answered the phone and those

who didn't" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.13). By answering the phone, half of humanity joined the dollhouse actives in becoming cyborgs.

### The Cyborg

In his 1988 interview series with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell called myth "the interface between what can be known and what is never to be discovered." The interface is a key concept in the idea of the cyborg, a recurring theme in posthuman theory. It is not only the actives in *Dollhouse* who exhibit ingredients of the cyborg. House programmer Topher Brink, though not an active, is so involved in the technology of the dollhouse that he sleeps in the server room. In *Briar Rose*, an interesting interchange takes place between Alpha (pretending to be the designer of the L.A. dollhouse, Stephen Kepler) and F.B.I. agent Paul Ballard.

Alpha: We're all just cells in a body.

Ballard: Just cells in a body? That's the future? We're all functional, interchangeable?

Alpha: We already are, man! (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.11).

Alpha is describing the cyborg. As Ballard becomes more and more involved with the dollhouse, he becomes more and more what Alpha describes. From desperately tracking down the dollhouse to finding it to making a deal with Adelle DeWitt for one of the active's freedom to using Echo to help him work an F.B.I. case to becoming her handler to becoming an active himself, Ballard takes the viewer through several stages to become the posthuman. Former active Anthony (known in the dollhouse as Victor) more willingly becomes a cyborg. In *Epitaph II*, the viewer learns that he has abandoned the group from the dollhouse to become the leader of a gang of "tech-heads" who use "mods" to upload specific skills into their brains. (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.13).

One of them explains, "We changed ourselves to survive up there, to thrive" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.13). The third episode of *Dollhouse*, *Stagefright*, is particularly interesting because it parallels two types of dolls: the actives Sierra and Echo, and a major pop star – Rayna, who has created a persona to match the fantasy of her fans. Ironically, at one point she tells Sierra (active name, Audra) to stop acting like a fan and to "turn on Audra mode," implying that she has different personas that can be switched on and off (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.3). Of course, that's true.

The posthuman concept of the cyborg is further represented through the images in the series. As one might expect, doll and puppet imagery pervades in *Dollhouse*. One term that frequently surfaces is "broken." Protagonist Echo proclaims more than once that she's "not broken" (episodes 1.4, 1.9, 2.7), but other characters refer to themselves or others as "broken" several times throughout the series. In *Gray Hour*, remotely-wiped Echo looks at a Picasso painting and calls it "broken," and one of her fellow thieves concurs that Picasso painted things as they are, and humanity is broken (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.4). In Tony Dokoupil's feature Newsweek article on the effects of Internet usage, he asks, "Does the medium break normal people with its unrelenting presence, endless distractions, and threat of public ridicule for missteps? Or does it attract broken souls?" (p. 30). When ex-actives Anthony and Priya return to the dollhouse, she wants to avoid the chair altogether, while he uploads new enhancements to aid them in their fight. He is certainly attracted to the tech, and it leads him down a road she cannot follow.

This idea of being "broken" contrasts with the concept of being "real," bringing to mind images of Pinocchio. In the first aired episode, Echo returns from an engagement in

which she has fallen in love with the client. Just before she sits in the chair to be wiped, she beams, "I think I found something real" (Whedon, et al, 2009, episode 1.1). Head of the L.A. dollhouse Adelle DeWitt refers to Roger, the imprint she uses to fulfill her own romantic desires, as "the most real person I've ever met," and the irony of this does not escape her (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.9). In *Omega*, an analeptic scene recalls one of active Alpha's engagements in which a tortured client protests, "You're not real" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.12). When F.B.I. agent Ballard breaks into the dollhouse and learns that Victor, whom he had thought to be one of his informants, is one of the actives, he is struck by the realization that his life isn't real. Because most of his connections are contrived by the dollhouse, he is correct. When Echo first admits that she remembers her varied personas she explains, "I'm all of them, but none of them is me," and asks, "Do you know who's real?" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.1). Seeing Echo struck with grief after being taken away from the child she was imprinted to love as his mother, Ballard explains to former dollhouse active Madeline that "It wasn't real." She responds, "But it was for her – all that emotion, all that pain" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.2). Before she dies in *The Hollow Man*, Madeline's imprint Mellie has some final words for Paul Ballard: "When we were together, you made me feel like a real person" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.12).

Another doll/puppet image is that of play. In *Ghost*, Echo's handler Boyd asks, "What are we playing at?" (Whedon et al., 2009, episode 1.1), in *Needs*, a memory-less Caroline accuses house programmer Topher of "playing God" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.8), and in *Belonging*, Adelle DeWitt, head of the L.A. dollhouse, tells Topher why he was chosen for his position: "You have always thought of people as playthings,"

and that he always takes “very good care of his toys” (Whedon, et al, 2009, episode 2.4). When former active Madeline finishes her first diagnostic test after being released from the dollhouse, Topher offers her some “additional enhancements” and asks how she feels about “ventriloquism” (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.2). In the same episode Topher admits, “I outplayed myself. Just like in chess” (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.2). *Belle Chose* opens with a serial killer creating a tableau with what appear to be mannequins but who are actually women whom he has abducted and drugged. He poses them to play the roles of some of his family members – a microcosm of the dollhouse which, ironically, works to end his misdeeds. While he is away, one of the abductees reminds the others, “we’re not his toys” (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.3).

### **Dissolution of Opposites**

According to Campbell, leaving the plane of transcendence – or eating from the tree of knowledge – leads to a life of dualities (Konner & Perlmutter, 1988). Part of the posthuman innovation is the dissolution of opposites, where boundaries once thought clearly defined are called into question or disappear completely. House programmer Topher Brink claims, “You don’t know me and I don’t know you. Not fully. Not ever” (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.1).

As opposites resolve into one another so too do temporal objectivities. *Dollhouse* represents this concept formalistically in time jumping – expanding bits of the story in an order other than chronological through analepsis and prolepsis. In one such flashback in *Epitaph I*, Topher explains his idea for imprinting the actives in mere seconds, as opposed to the hours it took before he arrived at the dollhouse: “They can experience it

teleologically and the imported memory can sort it out for you" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.13). The past and future only exist in their relation to the present.

With the dissolution of dichotomies comes the extinction of absolutes, ushered into scientific thought with Einstein's theory of relativity (Pepperell, 2003). For the humanist, mortality may play the role of the ultimate absolute, but posthumanists call even that into question. This is readily reflected in the posthuman television narrative:

These popular works, along with the proliferating number of vampire- and zombie-themed television programs and movies, do seem to represent the extremes of a re-mediation of end-of-life illness, dying, death, and bereavement that is increasingly influenced by our participation in social networking communities like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs. (Drescher, 2012, p. 205).

Drescher argued that the experience of death both for the dying and for those who interact with them is changing because, as dollhouse client and Internet mogul Joel Minor states, "You can't really ever delete a program. Once it exists, it's alive" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.8).

*Dollhouse* pointedly addresses the mortality question through technoscience themes. From the outset, the technology that makes the dollhouse work causes questions to surface regarding the life of the consciousness outside of the physical body. According to the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, this technology is one proposal of trans- and posthuman theorists. Here, the not-so-distant future technology would "enable individuals to completely read the synaptic connections of the human brain, enabling an exact replica of the brain to exist and function inside a computer" (Hook, 2003, p. 2517). This is house programmer Topher Brink's forte, constructing a composite consciousness by making his own enhancements and adjustments wherever they are beneficial to the engagement.



The imprints that reside on Topher's "self shelf" (Whedon et al., 2009, episode 1.12), however, in addition to a few others, are unaltered. They are precise replicas of an individual's consciousness at the time it was stored. According to Campbell, this concept, while new to the technological means, is not new to humanity. He described a common theme in folklore concerning a double soul existing outside of the body and therefore protected from any harm that may come to the body (1949). For one dollhouse client, a few of its inhabitants, and multiple Rossum executives, this external soul is found on the hard drive-like wedges used to store imprints. This external soul renders the fear of death powerless. Like the Cylons in *Battlestar Galactica*, they are "backed up" and can be imprinted on another body if they are killed (Whedon, et al, 2009, episode 2.13).

The *Dollhouse* episode that best represents the mortality problem is entitled *Haunted*. A dollhouse client and personal friend of DeWitt's has regularly scheduled back-ups as a sort of insurance policy. This foresight seems to pay off when she dies and her imprint (personality, memories, consciousness, identity) is loaded into Echo. Suddenly, death is not permanent. The client is able to attend her funeral, hear her family's true feelings about her, and, in the end, solve her own murder. Boyd Langton, Echo's handler and the moral center (for now) warns DeWitt, "You realize that's the beginning of the end. Life everlasting, it's the ultimate quest. Christianity, most religion, morality doesn't exist without the fear of death" (Whedon, et al., 2009, 1.10). Another episode that addresses the mortality problem is *Man on the Street*. In this episode, an Internet mogul client engages Echo and she is imprinted with the persona of his deceased wife. Annually, he relives the moment when he purchased their first house and wanted to surprise her with it. When he uses the dollhouse, however, he can see the look on

Rebecca's face instead of learning that she died in a car accident on the way. This is the episode in which F.B.I. agent Ballard sees Echo in person for the first time, the episode in which he (and the audience along with him) is forced to dissect the ethical issues involved in the field of technoscience. In *Epitaph II*, after Ballard is killed, Alpha (now on the side of good) leaves Paul's wedge for Echo so that he can live on in her consciousness.

### **Becoming Through Compassion**

Campbell reminded the viewers of his 1988 interviews that the word compassion means "with suffering" (Konner & Perlmutter). Because Echo is the Eros to Alpha's Thanatos, she has the advantage in accomplishing the tasks of the hero and becoming the innovation. Until Alpha is able to find compassion, he is unable to resolve his personas into a unified identity (by the end of the series, he has accomplished this). Echo is the hero that is needed. She is the "perfect human spirit alert to the needs and hopes of the heart" (Campbell, 1949, p. 317). She proves this many times. One example occurs in the episode *Meet Jane Doe*, wherein Echo is homeless and helpless, but steals food for a stranger who doesn't have the money to buy it. Echo is often more sensitive to the pain of those around her than to her own. In fact, the first memory Echo retains is one of fellow active Sierra in pain.

While dollhouse programmer Topher is the champion of the brain, as the viewer hears time and again, Bennett, his counterpart in the Washington D.C. dollhouse, is more concerned with the heart. She tells her assistant, "we have the privilege of living inside the human heart for which we give up everything" (Whedon, et al, 2009, episode 2.5). While this could be read as dollhouse propaganda, much like the L.A. version's

insistence that they give people what they need, Bennett also shows strong emotional ties to her work. She is driven by anger forged by her perception of Caroline's betrayal. Echo too explains the difference when then handler Ballard tells her that he knows she remembers all of her personas' experiences. She corrects him, "Not remember. Feel" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.2). The posthuman goal of the narrative is to unite these two views. In *Epitaph I*, the last remaining active in the dollhouse, Whiskey, describes the area of the desert its inhabitants have retreated to, Safehaven, as a place "where no one can be changed. You die as you were born – heart in concert with mind" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.13).

### **Embodiment and Emergence**

According to Pepperell, "both consciousness and human existence can be considered as emergent properties arising from the coincidence of a number of complex events" (2003, p. 30). Campbell referred to humanity as "the consciousness of the earth" (Konner & Perlmutter, 1988). He believed that consciousness and energy are one and the same, and that plants, animals, and the physical body all experience consciousness in some form. In much the same way that ritual enacts myth and touches the unconscious, embodied processes sink "below conscious awareness" (Hayles, 1999, p. 204).

While house programmer Topher is convinced that his memory wipe technology is foolproof, agent Ballard believes that there is a core consciousness that remains within the actives' bodies. Foreshadowing this in the first episode, Echo's original persona, Caroline, asks the head of the dollhouse, Adelle DeWitt, "You ever try and clean an actual slate? You always see what was on it before" (Whedon, et al., 2009). Ballard is the advocate of the soul. After breaking into the dollhouse, he says to Topher, "So this is it.

This is where you steal their souls,” which receives a mocking reply (Whedon et al, 2009, episode 1.12). Later, he goes on to assert, “I still don’t believe you can wipe away a person’s soul...who they are at their core. I don’t think that goes away” (Whedon, et al, 2009, episode 1.12). The series provides evidence to support Ballard’s view. When actives Echo, November, Sierra, and Victor are given their original personalities without the memories in *Needs*, they all allude to their past in some way, without any knowledge of it. Escaped active Alpha also seems to retain more than a little of Kraft, the criminal sociopath he was before he signed his brain away. When Ballard and Boyd visit one of Kraft’s victims, she bears the same scars Alpha considers his art.

As Pepperell put it, “given a simple behavior pattern multiplied through a large set of operands, each of which can affect the other, global behavior will emerge which is essentially unpredictable (2003, p. 124). Unpredictability is the essence of emergence. It cannot and will not, as is seen in Echo, be controlled. In *Omega*, Alpha plans to construct Echo’s evolution: “You can ascend. You can evolve. It’s in you – I’ve seen it” (Whedon et al, 2009, episode 2.12). He wants to force the creation of the posthuman. Echo evolves, but not in the way Alpha intends. It is up to Echo to piece images and memories together to create her own unified conscious identity. Compare this to Campbell’s notion that, while priests are ordained (created), the Shaman gets his authority from psychological experience (Konner & Perlmutter, 1988). Or, as Echo succinctly puts it, referring to Alpha, “I’m like him, but not” (Whedon et al., 2009, episode 2.8). The blending of different consciousnesses in the series signifies a type of emergence. Echo, though picking up multiple personas along the way, poignantly uploads Paul Ballard’s

consciousness saying "You wanted me to let you in" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.13).

Echo is not the only dollhouse inhabitant to experience emergence. Fellow dollhouse actives Victor and Sierra are drawn to one another in spite of repeated memory wipes. Topher refers to this behavior as "grouping" and fears the outcome particularly when Victor's unanticipated erections are linked to Sierra. These emergent properties threaten some of the characters who witness them. The character of Lawrence Dominic, the Los Angeles dollhouse head of security, often warns the others that Echo's differences make her dangerous. When DeWitt marvels that "she's demonstrated a talent for adaptability," Dominic responds, "They shouldn't be adaptable. They should be predictable" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.5). In *Needs*, he warns the staff, "Any developmental progress an active makes is dangerous to the house," and advises them to think of the actives as pets rather than as children. He explains, "If you child starts talking for the first time, you feel proud. If your dog does, you freak the hell out" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.8). Here are just two of the many times that Dominic reflects humanity's apprehensions surrounding the accelerating advance of the tools it uses daily. While one might feel the need to be "plugged-in" in order to accomplish expected communication tasks, the same soul might feel uneasy about the current state of Internet privacy or about artificial life and intelligence that may be perceived as unpredictable. Internet mogul and dollhouse client Joel Minor alludes to these apprehensions in his conversation with F.B.I. agent Paul Ballard in episode six, *Man on the Street*. He tells Ballard, "The first hurdle in my business is the people who will not accept the change that's already happened" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.6).

To examine these ambiguities of emergence in the series, the research applied the following questions to the *Dollhouse* narrative: (1) Are these apprehensions warranted? and (2) When “anything in the name of progress” (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.7) is the motto, are personal identities in danger? The research indicates that, in the case of *Dollhouse*, the answer to both of these questions is yes. In the *Man on the Street* episode, a news crew gathers opinions about the “urban legend” of the dollhouse. In one scene, the interviewee appears to be a neurology professor. He is adamant that “If that technology exists, it will be used. It will be abused. It will be global. And we will be over as a species” (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.6). Echo’s former handler and secret Rossum founder Boyd confirms this in *The Hollow Man*: “It can’t be uninvented. Once it gets out there, it will be abused. None of us can prevent that from happening” (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.12). From *Epitaph I* and *Epitaph II*, it is apparent that his prediction was on the right track. Only the posthuman hero can save humanity. Not by fighting the tech, but by evolving alongside it. Echo reflects the advance of artificial life and computer mediated communication technology with this capacity to evolve. When house programmer Topher expresses his concerns to Adelle DeWitt, she responds with one side of the human response: “She might be useful to us in ways we haven’t yet imagined” (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.9). In the second season, Topher questions this ability’s effects on her classification: “What does that make her? What is she?” (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.8).

## CHAPTER V

## Discussion

The hero's journey serves as a pattern for humanity to follow (Campbell, 1949). One application of this myth lies in the posthuman subject's quest for individuation. It holds the "keys that open the whole realm of the desired and feared adventure of the discovery of the self" (Campbell, 1949, p.8). The construction of the self and individuation is a critical motif in the digital age. Here, Campbell's work and the whole of mythology easily works its way into posthuman theory. The different stages of consciousness represented by the AUM mantra discussed earlier (Campbell, 1949) are similar to the stages of the life cycle of insects that experience metamorphosis such as moths and butterflies. The doll in the tabula rasa state recalls the larval stage. The doll in the active state, controlled by the selected imprint represents the pupal stage (interestingly, the term "pupa" is the Latin word for "doll"). Finally, the adult, imago phase reflects the actual, constructed persona that Echo invents for herself. One aim of this research is to show how the posthuman hero's narrative relates to individuation in the age of the Internet, virtuality, and multi-way, computer mediated communication.

**The Prosthetic Consciousness**

According to Calleja, "Cyborgs are not only those of us in fact or fiction that have machines penetrating their skin but all of us who form a feedback loop with the machines we use" (2004, p. 5). Technology is no longer a tool to be used by humans but a means to transform them (Graham, 2006). One concept that strongly connects computer mediated communication with the posthuman is that of the avatar, what Svitlana Matviyenko called "a prosthetic consciousness and unconscious, a user's virtual 'Self'" in her article,

*Cyberbody as Drag* (2010, p. 39). The idea of the avatar conjures the doll/maker, puppet/master imagery earlier noted in this analysis. In creating an avatar, the user creates an identity. But if the technology exists for each individual to create his or her own avatar, or multiple avatars, how does the created self achieve individuation? Technology has, according to Hayles, "become so entwined with the production of identity that it can no longer be meaningfully separated from the human subject" (1999, xiii). The two are so inextricable, Miller (2005) argued, that computers should be integrated into a definition of intelligence and Graham (2006) agreed that humanity can no longer be ontologically separated from the technology it uses.

The social media profile, then, can be compared to one of the dollhouse's actives. The user imbues the profile with an identity – an imprint. What happens when the imprinted profile generates its own identity, as Echo did by using her imprints as building blocks? Campbell said, "The hero is the man of self-achieved submission. But submission to what? That precisely is the riddle that today we have to ask ourselves" (1949, p. 16). The case of Notre Dame football star Manti Te'o may provide a preliminary answer to this question. In January of 2013, the sports website Deadspin.com reported that Te'o's girlfriend, who had tragically died after a severe car accident led her medical team to discover her leukemia, was fictional (Burke & Dickey). Te'o admitted that he met Lennay Kekua and maintained their relationship online, and it appeared she solely existed on social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Te'o claimed that he was the victim of an elaborate hoax – an apparently complete human identity created online and over the telephone. Just as ex-active Madeline (known in the dollhouse as November) explained to Ballard that Echo's motherly instincts and emotions were



real, Te'o told Katie Couric in an interview, "What I went through was real. You know, the feelings, the pain, the sorrow -- that was all real, and that's something that I can't fake," (McLaughlin, 2013). Much like the mythology of *Dollhouse*, the digital age offers the ability to create a complete persona through technology.

Nearly sixty percent of adults in the United States alone frequent at least one social networking site (Drescher, 2012). As Pepperell noted, "we can increasingly socialise [sic], work and communicate in a way that, strangely, diminishes human contact, while simultaneously extending it. In telepresent environments it will be difficult to determine where a person 'is', or what distinguishes them from the technological form they take" (2003, p. 5). One of the topics this research sought to explore is the extent to which consciousness is embodied in computer mediated communication. As more and more of humanity's manifestations of consciousness (ideas, thoughts, etc.) are communicated via the Internet, specifically, how much of this consciousness can be said to reside in fiber-optic cables and on hard drives? Additionally, with more faculties created to share one's consciousness with others, how much does identity rely on the other participants, and how much is created from a personal hero's narrative? Are these two concepts mutually exclusive?

In the narrative of *Dollhouse*, the characters begin with a false identity and the hero finds the truth. All of the actives' personas exist to fulfill a particular need or desire. It is the transcendence of that superficial purpose that makes these heroes Posthuman heroes. Echo was originally created as a puppet to be controlled and had to forge her own identity through the interactions between multiple personas, to construct her individuation through feedback loops. Echo wouldn't exist without her imprints.

November's imprint Mellie wouldn't exist without Ballard. Rayna (the pop star) wouldn't exist in the form she does without her fans. According to McLuhan, "A work of art has no existence or function apart from its effects on human observers. And art, like games or popular arts, and like media of communication, has the power to impose its own assumptions by setting the human community into new relationships and postures: (1964, p. 242). When Ballard is researching Kepler, the environmental systems contractor who designed the dollhouse, it is a photo of Alpha that accompanies the online article. The article only exists for Ballard's benefit. However, because these existences interact with others, much like Manti Te'o's girlfriend, they have very real effects. When D.C. dollhouse active Senator Perrin asks, "They didn't create me, only parts of me. How can I ever untangle it?" Echo replies, "Does it matter?" (Whedon et al., 2009, episode 2.6). How important is individuation in the digital age? In *The Hollow Man*, when Mellie laments that "I'm a program," Ballard responds, "So am I, but I decided it doesn't matter anymore. We feel what we feel" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.12).

### **The Changing Brain**

How real is too real? While house programmer Topher asserts that "Brain science is all about the hardware and software" (Whedon et al., 2009, episode 2.8), Pepperell objected, "it is mistaken to assume that the brain alone contains the 'hardware' or 'software' of the mind" (2003, p. 29). Can the posthuman, then, share her consciousness with an online persona, or is it stripped away, transferred onto the net? According to McLuhan, "a conscious computer would still be one that was an extension of our consciousness, as a telescope is an extension of our eyes, or as a ventriloquist's dummy is an extension of the ventriloquist"(1964, p. 351). In contrast, after Alpha composites Echo

with all her personas, she comments, "I somehow understand that not one of them is me. I can slip into one – actually, it slips into me. They had to make room for it. They hollowed me out. There is no me. I'm just a container" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.12). Hayles asked, "If our body surfaces are membranes through which information flows, who are we?" (1999, p. 109). Perhaps the answer lies somewhere in between these two perspectives. Experts are evenly divided as to whether the digital lifestyle will have a detrimental or beneficial effect on young brains (Anderson & Rainie, 2012). Former active Anthony and his pack of tech-heads in *Epitaph II* may foretell what is in store for digitally plugged in youth. By uploading skills straight to their brains, they "skip learning the hard way – skip the long hours, the sweat, the training – just to feel the thrill of perfection" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.13). Digital technologies produce a kind of global cognition, maintaining a pool of collective intelligence that the individual relies on to function (Krzych, 2010).

### **The Narrative of the Posthuman**

McLuhan (1964) used the Greek myth of Narcissus and Echo to describe the numbness caused by humanity's fixation with an extension of itself – in this case, the medium of television. Drescher (2012) asserted that McLuhan's numbing effect doesn't apply to computer mediated communication because a significant amount of agency is involved. How then, is the viewer affected when media converge and the television broadcasts material so deeply entwined with digital age technologies? McLuhan himself answered this question:

The hybrid or the meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. For the parallel between two media holds us on the frontiers between forms that snap us out of the Narcissus-narcosis. The moment

of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses (1964, p. 55).

While computer mediated communications and the Internet might be considered the primary medium of Posthumanism, television (or a combination of the two) is the primary medium for projecting the growing pains experienced by the transforming subject. There is viewer-agency involved in television as well, and the best series are those that leave bits of the narrative for the viewer to complete (McLuhan, 1964, p. 319). As if commentating on the similarity of McLuhan's analysis of television as a medium to the posthuman narrative, Echo explains, "there are gaps, things that aren't filled in" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 2.5).

While the posthuman narrative on television is largely relegated to fantasy and science fiction, in his 2008 article, William S. Haney predicted its move to the mainstream as Posthumanism becomes the predominant cultural construct. While these narratives support Miller's assertion that posthuman films perpetuate technology anxiety, they also provide rescue. According to McLuhan, "The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He, then, builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change that is at hand" (1964, p. 64).

## CHAPTER VI

## Conclusion

The results of the study show that (1) The posthuman hero achieves individuation just as the heroes of myth did, by transforming herself through the stages of the hero's journey, (2) As in mythology, the posthuman hero's journey serves as a template for the achievement of individuation in the digital age, and (3) The posthuman television narrative reflects the digital age transformation of humanity through multi-way, computer mediated communication and the Internet. While Robert Pepperell (2003) believed that the posthuman identity includes a cultural shift in the way reality is perceived, these conclusions show that this shift, rather than creating a new cultural climate, revisits ancient and ancestral views that were forgotten in the Age of Reason. The digital age posthuman doesn't need to enter the realm of the unknown unguided. A vast collection of stories from the ancient and recent pasts, including the television narratives of this era, take their places in Campbell's "monomyth," and serve as supernatural aid for the hero – the individual who has chosen to distinguish herself as such in the digital age.

The cultural relevance of this research lies in the ways the self is created from various uses of computer mediated communications and the Internet. The *Dollhouse* narrative is just one example of the digital age posthuman hero's narrative as portrayed on television. But as the creation of posthuman identity through computer mediated communication and other technologies continues to become more and more a part of daily life for more and more people, the technological themes of this series in particular become more cogent. Just as Echo pieced together her individual identity through bits and pieces of personas that were assigned to her, the posthuman identity in the digital age

is an amalgam of perceptions gleaned from digital technologies. A user of Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Instagram, and other computer mediated communication platforms pieces together an identity through the feedback-loops generated by these uses and the responses of other users. Just as it happens in *Dollhouse*, individuation in the digital age must depend on the way in which these pieces are put together.

Future analyses of this series would be beneficial. A critical feminist approach would address the prominent themes of objectification of women in the series. And certainly there are other critical models that would explore other elements of the narrative and form not addressed in this analysis. Further research on the cultural significance of computer mediated communication and technology as seen on television could be applied as a measurement for gauging public acceptance or rejection of new technologies or new uses for technological tools. Additionally, it is a worthwhile academic endeavor to explore the ways in which a culture's (or multiple cultures') myths reinvent themselves through art and media. This research is significant because it provides a model through which humanity can better understand itself and its changing shape in the digital age. "That's what art's for – to show us who we are" (Whedon, et al., 2009, episode 1.4).

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, J. Q., & Rainie, L. (2012, February 29). *Millennials will benefit and suffer due to their hyperconnected lives*. Pew Research Center: Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved from <http://www.pewInternet.org/Reports/2012/Hyperconnected-lives.aspx>
- Burke, T. & Dickey, J. (2013, January 16). Manti Te'o's dead girlfriend, the most heartbreaking and inspirational story of the college football season, is a hoax. *Deadspin.com*. Retrieved from <http://deadspin.com/manti-teos-dead-girlfriend-the-most-heartbreaking-an-5976517>
- Calleja, G. (2004). Rhizomatic cyborgs: Hypertextual considerations in a posthuman age. *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research*, 2(1), 3-15. doi: 0.1386/tear.2.1.3/0
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Campbell, J. (1972). *Myths to live by*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Dokoupil, T. (2012, July 16). Tweets. Texts. Email. Posts. Is the onslaught making us crazy?. *Newsweek*, 24-30.
- Drescher, E. (2012). Pixels perpetual shine: The mediation of illness, dying, and death in the digital age. *Cross Currents*, June 2012, 204-218.
- Gallon, R. (2010). Media behavior: Towards the transformation society. *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research*, 8(1), 115-122. doi: 10.1386/tear.8.1.115/1
- Graham, E. (2006). In whose image? Representations of technology at the 'ends' of humanity. *Ecotheology*, 11(2), 159-182.

- Haney, W. S. (2008). Cyborgs, Posthumanism, and short fiction. *Atenea, XXVII*(2), 157-167.
- Hawk, J. (2011). *Object 8 and the cylon remainder: Posthuman subjectivization in Battlestar Galactica. The Journal of Popular Culture, 44*(1), 3-15.
- Hayles, N. K., & Pulizzi, J. J. (2010). Narrating consciousness: Language, media and embodiment. *History of the Human Sciences, 23*(3) 131-148.
- Hayles, N. K. (2004). Print is flat, code is deep: The importance of media-specific analysis. *Poetics Today, 25*(1), 67-90.
- Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How we became posthuman*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Haraway, D. (1991). A cyborg manifesto. In *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature* (pp. 149-181). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hefner, P. (2002). Technology and human becoming. *Zygon, 37*(3), 655-665.
- Hook, C. C. (2003). Transhumanism and Posthumanism. In Post, S. G. (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Bioethics, 2517-2520*. New York, NY: Macmillan Reference USA.
- Kim, J. H., Kim, M., & Nam, Y. (2010). An analysis of self-construals, motivations, Facebook use, and user satisfaction. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction, 26*(11-12), 1077-1099. doi: 10.1080/10447318.2010.516726
- Konner, J. (Executive Producer), & Perlmutter, A. H. (1988). Joseph Campbell and the power of myth [Television miniseries]. New York, NY: WNET, & Chicago, IL: WTTW.



Krzych, S. (2010). Phatic touch, or the instance of the gadget in the unconscious.

*Paragraph*, 33(3), 376-391. doi: 10.3366/E0264833410000969

Kull, A. (2002). Speaking cyborg: Technoculture and technonature. *Zygon*, 37(2), 279-287).

Matviyenko, S. (2010). Cyberbody as drag. *Digital Creativity*, 21(1), 39-45. doi: 10.1080/14626261003654269

McLaughlin, E.C., (2013, January 24). Te'o to Couric: My emotions were real.

*CNN.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2013/01/23/us/teo-hoax-abc/>

McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Miller, D. Q. (2005). Deeper blues, or the posthuman Prometheus: Cybernetic renewal and the late-twentieth-century American novel. *American Literature*, 77(2), 379-407.

Moore, R. D., & Eick, D. (Executive Producers), (2003-2009). *Battlestar Galactica* [Television series]. Vancouver, Canada: Sci-Fi Channel.

Newcomb, T. (2012, March 21). Vibrating tattoo could send text alerts straight to your skin. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/03/21/vibrating-tattoo-could-send-text-alerts-straight-to-your-skin/>

Pepperell, R. (2003). *The posthuman condition: Consciousness beyond the brain*. Bristol, UK: Intellect.

Riva, G., & Galimberti, C. (2001). The mind in the web: Psychology in the Internet age. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior*, 4(1), 1-5.

- Shackelford, L. (2006). Subject to change: The monstrosity of media in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl; or, A Modern Monster* and other posthumanist critiques of the instrumental. *Camera Obscura*, 21(3), 63-101. doi: 0.1215/02705346-2006-012
- Tamir, D. I., & Mitchell, J. P. (2012). Disclosing information about the self is intrinsically rewarding. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 109(21), 8038-8043. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1202129109
- Toffoletti, K. (2003). Media implosion: Posthuman bodies at the interface. *Hecate*, 29(1), 151.
- Whedon, J., Solomon, D., & Minear, T. (Executive Producers), (2009). *Dollhouse* [Television series]. Los Angeles, CA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.