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Deconstructing the Dream Factory: Personal Fantasy and Corporate Manipulation in Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*

Slayage
The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association

"There are a lot of [Dolls] in L.A., and they all go to the gym."
Olivia Williams (Adelle DeWitt), "A Private Engagement,"
Dollhouse Season One DVD Extra

[1] Imagine a place in Los Angeles full of young, beautiful, vacuous people who strive to achieve physical perfection through constant exercise and massages. Every so often these people are sent out, dressed by a wardrobe department and accompanied by bodyguards, to play roles in other people's fantasy scenarios. As this brief summary of its premise suggests, Joss Whedon's most recent TV series *Dollhouse* (U.S. 2009-2010) is, among other things, a more-or-less blatant allegory for Hollywood. This parallel is occasionally acknowledged within the program itself (as well as by those involved in its production such as Williams, quoted above) and predictably for a Whedon series, played for laughs. For instance, an emergency in the episode "Belle Chose" (2.3) means that one of the "Dolls," Victor (Enver Gjokaj), is going to be left alone on the streets of LA in the blank, personality-less state in which they are normally kept when inside the eponymous House. Boyd Langton (Harry Lennix), the head of security, expresses concern about Victor's vulnerability and conspicuousness, the Dollhouse being a secret, illegal organization. But Topher Brink (Fran Kranz), the neural programmer who uses a hi-tech "imprint chair" to "wipe" the Dolls' personalities and "imprint" them with new ones, blithely reassures him, "He'll be an empty-headed robot wandering around Hollywood; he'll be fine."

[2] Yet beyond such flippant, superficial comparisons, a closer examination of *Dollhouse* yields several further layers of commentary on the American entertainment industry and the capitalist infrastructure which supports it. While a certain amount of criticism, or at least investigation, of these institutions appeared in the series from the beginning, unequivocally attacking them was not Whedon's original intention for his show. Comments made by Whedon in interviews and on DVD extras--as well as analysis of certain key episodes, including the unaired first pilot--reveal that he initially set out to explore both the good and bad sides of working in the entertainment industry. Furthermore, he was also interested in probing more general psychological issues relating to individual fantasy and universal emotional needs. However, constant interference with and mishandling of the program by its network, Fox, meant that, in Whedon's words, many of the themes that he "was interested in . . . kind of got shunned to the side" (qtd Sullivan). This article starts by pinpointing exactly what these themes were and to what extent they did make it into the series as broadcast despite Fox's intervention. However, I also suggest that, in addition to the issues mentioned by Whedon, there was always an element of criticism of the entertainment industry and its ties with other capitalist institutions, particularly the pharmaceutical

industry, inherent in *Dollhouse's* premise. Unsurprisingly, given that they were working *within* the Hollywood studio system, this subtext was never explicitly referred to in interviews by Whedon or his creative team. Nevertheless, I will go on to show how, as Fox continued to interfere with creative decisions on *Dollhouse*, cut its budget, and finally announced its cancellation midway through the second season, the narrative mounts an increasingly apparent and hostile critique of the Hollywood dream factory and the corporate power behind it.

"Everybody's fantasy:" performers struggling for self-definition

[3] The premise of *Dollhouse* was conceived at a lunch meeting between Whedon and Eliza Dushku, an actress with whom he had previously worked on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (US 1997-2003) and *Angel* (US 1999-2004). In the first season DVD Extra "Finding Echo," Whedon describes how the idea emerged from a discussion of Dushku's career:

> [The] kind of characters she's expected to play, the kind of characters she has played--the tough girl, the girl who's made mistakes, the addict--all that stuff, and I just think there's a lot more . . . to her. There's a lot of comedy there, . . . there's a lot of elegance there, . . . there's a lot of different people there.

The outcome of this conversation was the creation of the character of Echo (Dushku), the heroine of *Dollhouse*. Echo is a Doll who, due to a genetic peculiarity, has a special ability to retain memories of the "engagements" on which she has been sent despite having her mind wiped between them, and thereby gradually builds a sense of her own identity. Duskhu herself views Echo's position as a critical reflection of the social pressures facing all women, but especially those in the public eye: "That feeling as an actress, and as a young woman, of who does society, who does the media, who do my family and friends want me to be versus my authentic self" (qtd Farley 109).

[4] This theme is addressed most obviously early on in the series in the episode "Stage Fright" (1.3), in which Echo is imprinted as a backing singer/bodyguard called Jordan for a spoilt young pop singer, Rayna Russell (Jaime Lee Kirchner). Rayna is a Britney Spears or Christina Aguilera surrogate who started her career as a child performer on the Mickey Mouse Club variety show: "Singing for the Mouse," as her manager, Biz (Jim Piddock), puts it. Although successful and adored, Rayna is not happy because she feels, as she explains to Jordan, as though she has been "grown in the lab." She has been forced throughout her life to be "everybody's fantasy," to the extent that the "real" Rayna "do[es]n't exist."

[5] "Stage Fright," written by Jed Whedon and Maurissa Tancharoen, is clearly critical of an entertainment system that makes its young stars "feel . . . like . . . prisoner[s]"[1] and forces them into the position of commodities. For example, spending time with Rayna at an after-show party has apparently been offered as a prize in an "online video contest." Rayna meets this news with a world-weary, "Why do you always try to hurt me?" directed at Biz,

before dutifully turning to greet the competition winner with a smile.[2] However, the episode does not portray Rayna simply as a helpless victim to be pitied. Jordan's role is ultimately to make her realize, during a run-in with an obsessed fan who tries to kill the star, that she is not really, as she previously believed, so unhappy that she wants to die. The implication is that her near-death experience will be the impetus for Rayna to do as Jordan had urged earlier in the episode and stop taking out her self-indulgent misery on those around her ("spreading [her] pain around"). Perhaps she will even take steps to end her own exploitation, as Jordan insisted she could: "You don't like your life, change it."

[6] Joss Whedon, for his part, shared Dushku's original conception of *Dollhouse* as a program that would comment on her situation as an actress. But he explains in an interview with Maureen Ryan that as he developed the show he realized that its themes equally applied to other people working in the entertainment industry, including (male) writers such as himself:

> [The show] was created around the concept of, "Who do they want me to be?" . . . When I broke down the idea for [Eliza] she said, "Well, that's my life." But then as I broke it down more, I realized, well, actually, it's kind of mine too. It is sort of about the creation, but also the removable self. And the idea of becoming somebody else for a little while, which the writer gets to do all time if he is lucky.

Evidently, Whedon did not initially see the premise of the show as unambiguously critical of the domain in which he works. His remarks remind us that the creation of fictional characters and their world is, in theory at least, an enjoyable process for both writers and actors, just as Topher Brink enjoys concocting new personalities for the Dolls. Indeed, in the Ryan interview and elsewhere Whedon jokes about how people often compare him to Topher ("Everyone thinks, 'Oh, Joss is Topher because he plays with the toys, he creates these personalities and then he wipes them away and he's amoral'" ("Vows" DVD Commentary)). However, while he can see the similarities between himself and the immature programmer, Whedon personally thinks he has more in common with Adelle DeWitt, the director of the Dollhouse, because she is the "leader, [who] makes the hard choices" (*ibid.*).[3]

The Rossum Corporation and the "Culture Industry"

[7] Adelle DeWitt may be the "leader" of the Los Angeles Dollhouse, but she is, in fact, a relatively minor factor in the parent company of which it is a part. In the fourth episode, "Gray Hour" (1.4), we see the usually imperious DeWitt talking somewhat nervously on the phone to someone she addresses as "sir," who is clearly reprimanding her and whom she promises to "keep informed." We learn soon afterwards, in "Man on the Street" (1.6), that the L.A. branch is just one of more than twenty Dollhouses worldwide and, in "Echoes" (1.7), that they are all owned and controlled by a pharmaceutical, medical research, and technology conglomerate called The Rossum Corporation.[4]

[8] Before Rossum is even mentioned by name, an undercover NSA operative programs Echo to inform FBI agent Paul Ballard

(Tahmoh Penikett) that the Dollhouses' owners "have ties to every major political power on the planet" and, implicitly, far-reaching and sinister plans ("Man on the Street"). In Season Two, it is revealed that these plans involve seizing control of the country by getting a Doll elected as President ("The Left Hand" (2.6)) and ultimately using the Dollhouse technology to take over the world ("The Hollow Men" (2.12)). Interestingly, according to Joss Whedon, it was an executive from "the network" (i.e. 20th Century Fox Television, which financed *Dollhouse*) who ordained that Rossum should have a larger nefarious agenda beyond the Dollhouses themselves ("Man on the Street" DVD Commentary). Originally, it seems that Whedon had simply intended to explore the moral ambiguity of a medical research company secretly using the "tawdry" Dollhouses to finance its "good works" (*ibid.*). The irony here, of course, is that if Whedon happily casts himself as DeWitt or Topher, then surely, by extension of the same metaphor, Fox--the larger organization which supervised *Dollhouse*'s production and held ultimate decision-making power over it--can only be seen as Rossum. Indeed, the developments in the series' narrative during Season Two make it tempting to surmise that the writers intentionally began to play up this parallel in reaction to Fox's treatment of the show. But we will return to this issue later.

[9] As Zalina Alvi points out, it was hardly out-of-keeping for *Dollhouse* to feature "an institutionalized, Big Brother-type-organization . . . characterized by bureaucratic hierarchy . . . and executives with seemingly limitless power" (37), as similar entities appear in every other television series Joss Whedon has created: "In *Buffy*, there was the Initiative, an underground military operation . . . In *Angel*, it was the legal firm of Wolfram & Hart . . . In *Firefly* [(U.S. 2002)], it was the all-encompassing, supra-government organization called the Alliance" (37). Rossum, though, in keeping with *Dollhouse*'s present-day, non-magical setting, is by far the most easily relatable to real-world institutions. With scandals involving international pharmaceutical giants--such as the recent *WikiLeaks* disclosure that Pfizer used "dirty tricks" to try to escape legal action over a controversial drug trial in Nigeria (Boseley)--regularly in the headlines, Rossum makes for a uniquely recognizable kind of villain. Its plans to literally "manufactur[e] a President," as Boyd puts it in "The Left Hand" (earning the response from Topher, "Wouldn't be the first time"), bring to mind the hundreds of thousands of dollars paid to Members of Congress by lobby groups from the health insurance and pharmaceutical industries in order to ensure that bills favourable to their interests are passed ("Buying a Law"). [Editors' note: See Bussolini on pharmaceuticals and *Firefly / Serenity*.]

[10] One might even view Daniel Perrin (Alexis Denisof), the hard-drinking playboy whom Rossum select to transform, by means of the Dollhouse technology, into an ambitious senatorial candidate because he comes from a famous political dynasty, as a fictional counterpart to former American President George W. Bush. The story of how Bush spent his youth partying and drinking to the brink of alcoholism before effecting an apparently sudden and drastic change of lifestyle at the age of forty and following his father into politics is an oft-told tale in the American media, including the Oliver Stone biopic *W* (US/Australia/Hong Kong/Switzerland/China 2008; see also, for example, Romano and Lardner). The Bush

Administration's particularly close relationship with the pharmaceutical sector is also well-known, especially since Michael Moore drew attention to it in his documentary *Sicko* (US 2007). The eleven government officials who drew up the 2003 Medicare Prescription Drug Modernization and Improvement Act received a total of $14 million in campaign contributions from the healthcare industry, of which almost $9 million went to Bush himself ("Buying a Law"). The Act was created with the ostensible aim of reducing prescription drug costs for the elderly, but contained a clause prohibiting the government from using its purchasing power to negotiate discounts from drug companies. It also--as a direct result of pressure from the pharmaceutical industry--failed to include a previously proposed provision which would have allowed the re-importation of drugs from abroad at cheaper prices ("Buying a Law").

[11] Unlike Rossum and its network of Dollhouses, real-world pharmaceutical firms do not also operate entertainment businesses, though in the United States, where it is legal to advertise medicines to the public, they often use celebrity endorsements and product placement in films and television programs to market their drugs (see O'Dwyer). However, by making the Dollhouses part of a larger, multi-faceted conglomerate, the series highlights the interconnection of the entertainment industry with other branches of the Western capitalist infrastructure. This phenomenon was famously described by Adorno and Horkheimer in their essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception (1944):" "The dependence of the most powerful broadcasting company on the electrical industry, or of the motion picture industry on the banks is characteristic of the whole sphere [of cultural production]" (123). Indeed, at times, *Dollhouse* can seem like a science fiction allegory for Adorno and Horkheimer's bleak image of an entertainment system created primarily to serve the interests of big business, using technology (or "psychotechnology" (163)) to organise the workers' leisure time (137) and turn them into identical, passive consumers (144-145).

[12] The Dolls in their wiped condition are supposedly mentally identical to one another and completely passive. As Tom Connelly and Shelley S. Rees discuss, their state of "regressive infancy" (6) and lack of a continuous "dialectical Self" that advances through history (4), as well as the fact that they have been "coerced" into their disempowered position through the promise of a pay-check (2-4), makes them comparable to the "alienated" workers which Marx identifies as an inevitable result of capitalism (Connelly and Rees 2). They are not consumers themselves, granted;[5] more, as Connelly and Rees put it, "commodities for consumption" (6). However, they are explicitly compared to consumers within the program on more than one occasion. One of the *vox pop* interviewees (Dalton Grant) asked whether he believes in the existence of the Dollhouse in "Man on the Street" responds, "You think they're not controlling you?... Just sit back and let them tell you what to buy." Furthermore, in the unaired pilot, "Echo," Topher justifies the Dollhouse's treatment of the Dolls to a qualm-struck Boyd thus: "You wear [a] tie because it never occurred to you not to . . . You feel excitement and companionship when rich men you've never met put a ball through a net. . . . And your stomach rumbles

every time you drive by a big golden arch even if you weren't hungry before. Everybody's programmed, Boyd."

[13] According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the way in which the culture industry "deal[s] with consumers' needs [by] producing them, controlling them [and] disciplining them" (144) extends to emotional needs as well as material ones. For them, the depiction of characters' psychological states is included in cultural texts so that the "personal emotion" of the viewers "can be all the more reliably controlled," a contemporary equivalent of the "purgation of the emotions which Aristotle once attributed to tragedy" (144). Even sexuality is repressed through the "mass production" of suggestive images on the screen (140). In these respects too the Dollhouse often seems like an extension of the culture industry. DeWitt regularly repeats the mantra, part of her sales pitch to prospective clients, that the organization's aim is to give people "what they need" and yet many of the apparent "needs" which the clients display in their choice of engagement seem to have been produced by popular culture in the first place. Sometimes this goes as far as the Dolls being imprinted as specific characters from films. Tango (Emma Bell) is seen going out on an engagement in "Needs" (1.8) dressed as Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli) from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse US 1972) and the "Bobby" and "Crystal" imprints which appear in "Omega" (1.12) are clearly versions of Mickey and Mallory Knox (Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis) from *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone US 1994), or other similar white trash serial killer couples.[6] More often, though, as Tami Anderson points out, the engagements simply conform to recognisable genres: "Matt Cargill [(Brett Claywell)] in 'Ghost' [(1.1)] . . . lived out his own romantic-comedy storyline" (165) involving a weekend of adventure with a girl he had only just met, while "Professor Gossen's [(Arye Gross)] story in 'Belle Chose' . . . was more of an erotic fantasy staple. [Echo's imprint] Kiki was the hot student who came into his office for some one-on-one tutoring--wink, wink" (165).

[14] It is not only the desires of its clients that the Dollhouse strives to fulfill. Controlling people by giving them "what they need" is Rossum's general *modus operandi*, even when it comes to potential threats. One such threat is Paul Ballard, an FBI agent on a quest to uncover and bring down the Dollhouse. The character of Ballard could easily have provided a moral center for the show--the casting of Tahmoh Penikett, known to regular science fiction viewers as supremely honorable pilot Helo in the "reimagined" *Battlestar Galactica* (US 2003-2009), certainly leads us to believe he will--but he is gradually revealed to be just as influenced by his own desires and fantasies as any Dollhouse client. He becomes obsessed with Caroline Farrell, the woman Echo used to be, after he receives a photograph of her from an anonymous source, and increasingly views his mission against the Dollhouse through the framework of that oldest of cultural myths, the damsel in distress scenario. In particular, as Renee St. Louis and Miriam Riggs point out, many parallels are drawn within the show between Ballard's quest to rescue Caroline/Echo and the story of Sleeping Beauty/Briar Rose (7-8). This occurs most explicitly in the episode "Briar Rose" (1.11), in which Ballard finally succeeds in breaking into the Dollhouse. That he is confusing real life with fairytale is made clear through the ironic juxtaposition of shots of illustrations from a book of the

titular story with scenes from his endeavor (see St. Louis and Riggs 8).

[15] From the beginning of Ballard's self-set quest, DeWitt uses his "needs" to manipulate him. A recent divorcé whose obsession with the Dollhouse, which most people believe to be an urban legend, has made him a figure of fun among his colleagues, Ballard is clearly lonely. It is not surprising that he is soon recounting the details of his work to the one person who seems to care about him, Mellie, his adoring neighbour and, later, girlfriend. But in "Man on the Street" the audience learns that Mellie is actually a Doll called November. DeWitt has sent November to glean information about the progress of Ballard's investigation into the Dollhouse and presumably, as Peter Tupper notes, "divert [him] from [it] by setting up sincere, vulnerable Mellie as another damsel in distress" (55). This plan is not successful, though, as Ballard discovers that Mellie is a Doll (although she does not know it herself), leaves her and locates the Dollhouse. Even when she begs him not to go, pointing out, truthfully, that she has never "told [him] anything [she] didn't believe with all [her] heart" ("Briar Rose"), Ballard, catching on to how the Dollhouse operates, responds, "You just said exactly what I needed to hear. And that's why I'm leaving." Ballard does not, however, manage to rescue Caroline/Echo because he is captured by Boyd Langton and brought to DeWitt ("Omega"). Her solution to the problem of Ballard's knowledge of the Dollhouse's existence is, once again, to give him what he desires by offering him a deal: she will release November from her contract early and let her go free if Ballard agrees to work at the Dollhouse as Echo's "handler."[7] Thus Ballard is permitted to save one damsel, Mellie/November, while remaining close to Echo, the one he cares about more. Even before he is offered this deal, Ballard volunteers to go outside and get rid of some fellow FBI agents who have arrived at the building, presumably for fear of being separated from Echo. While he is out of the room, Boyd asks DeWitt if she trusts Ballard and she replies confidently, "I trust that I know what he wants."

[16] A more serious threat to the Dollhouse than the rather inept Ballard is the growing self-awareness of some of the Dolls, especially Echo. Yet again, the solution that DeWitt chooses, suggested by Dollhouse physician Claire Saunders (Amy Acker) in the episode "Needs," is to "give them what they need." The Dolls are not supposed to have any will of their own but Saunders explains that if they have "particularly poignant or reoccurring experiences, these can cause desires, emotional needs, or reactivate old ones that existed before they came [to the Dollhouse]." So, DeWitt follows her advice and concocts a plan to allow the four Dolls who are showing signs of having such desires--Echo, Sierra (Dichen Lachman), Victor and November--to achieve "closure." They are re-imprinted with their original personalities (though not their memories) and allowed to escape from the Dollhouse for long enough to do whatever it is they are yearning to do. The Dolls' desires, with the arguable exception of Victor's, prove to be less hackneyed than those of Ballard and the majority of the clients. Echo, conforming to the personality of human and animal rights activist Caroline, wants to free the inhabitants of the Dollhouse; November wants to grieve for the young daughter her original self lost to cancer; Sierra wants to confront the man who

had her put in the Dollhouse against her will; and Victor, who is in love with Sierra, wants to help avenge her wrongs and ultimately, as Boyd puts it, "get the girl."

[17] However, these characters' trajectories in "Needs" play out like an illustration of the way the culture industry deals, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, with the threat of autonomous thought, "individuality" and even potential "rebel[lion] against the pleasure industry" (144-145). They argue that the system deliberately "inculcate[s]" consumers with "feeble resistance" against their own enslavement (145) and regularly promises "escape from everyday drudgery" (142) through the storylines of its output. However, it simultaneously "cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises" (139): "the promissory note . . . is endlessly prolonged" (139) and "escape and elopement are predesigned to lead back to the starting point" (142). Echo, Sierra, Victor and November believe they have escaped from the Dollhouse and fulfilled their desires but their brains have been programmed, as Saunders explains, "to release a sedative the moment they [feel] closure." The result is that they all fall abruptly asleep a few seconds afterward and their handlers simply pick them up and return them (and the other Dolls whom Echo has just led out of the door) to the Dollhouse. At the end of the episode, the four runaway Dolls file blankly and obediently to their sleeping pods and the glass covers slide shut over them. Their emotions have been successfully "purged" and they have returned, at least temporarily, to the passive state in which Rossum aims to keep them.

[18] Even the Dollhouse staff do not escape being controlled through their own emotional needs. In "Haunted" (1.10), Topher tells Boyd he needs a Doll for "his annual anterior insular cortex diagnostic" but actually programs Sierra as a video game and laser tag-playing friend to spend his birthday with because he apparently doesn't have any others. Near the end of the episode, Boyd alerts DeWitt to Topher's deception. However, it transpires that she is not only aware of it, but has been letting Topher get away with the same thing every year for a long time because she believes it is beneficial for his wellbeing: "I allow him one of these 'diagnostic tests' now and again . . . Loneliness leads to nothing good." We know from the previous episode, "A Spy in the House of Love" (1.9), that DeWitt can empathize with Topher's behavior because she also occasionally makes use of a Doll to escape loneliness. Using the pseudonym "Miss Lonelyhearts," she secretly has Victor programmed as a suave Englishman called Roger with whom she acts out her own Hollywood-influenced desires: what Johnathan Mason describes as a "fantasy weekend out of a Bond movie" (97), consisting of sword-fighting and sex at a seafront villa. Yet even DeWitt, the most accomplished of manipulators, is herself being manipulated. In "Belonging" (2.4), DeWitt's boss Matthew Harding (Keith Carradine) casually reveals that he is aware of her liaisons with Victor during a speech in which he pressures her into following some orders to which she objects on moral grounds. Harding claims that "We [Rossum] don't care; everyone likes to take a little something home from the office every once in a while," but presumably part of the reason they allow DeWitt her "indiscretions" is to be able to wield power over her in situations like this.

The Dollhouse service: therapy or exploitation?

[19] As Martin Shuster observes, DeWitt's affair with Victor is surprisingly touching and shows that the character has a "capacity for love" (238), which we might not otherwise have guessed. Topher's "playdate" with Sierra is equally touching, demonstrating that that character too, self-centered as he seems, has, as DeWitt puts it, a "need to reach out" to others, which he is incapable of fulfilling in the normal way ("Haunted"). Such uses of the Dollhouse's technology suggest that Whedon did not wish to present its activities as unambiguously immoral. Indeed, it seems that originally, before Fox interfered, he wanted to draw a lot more attention to the fact that the Dolls could genuinely help people on an emotional level rather than giving purely superficial pleasure, a meaning implicit in DeWitt's insistence to clients that, "This isn't about what you want; it's about what you need" ("Echo"/"Ghost").

[20] This theme is most comprehensively explored in the original pilot, "Echo," which, Whedon claims (though only in interviews conducted while he was still working on *Dollhouse* and therefore still a Fox employee), he voluntarily abandoned after it became clear that it had a completely different "emphasis and . . . feel . . . [to what] . . . the network . . . were looking for" (Whedon qtd Sullivan). In it, we see Echo carrying out an engagement in which she talks a naïve, alcoholic young girl into leaving her pimp boyfriend and going into rehab. It turns out that this "altruistic engagement" is a "*pro bono*" arranged by Dr. Saunders because she believes it is physically salutary for the Dolls, as well as morally important, that they should occasionally do something other than "fulfill . . . the whims of the rich." However, Fox's decree that the show should have "more of an action . . . feel" (Whedon qtd Sullivan) led to a complete change of storyline in the second pilot "Ghost," in which Echo is seen first as a motorbike-riding "perfect date" and then as a hostage negotiator.[8]

[21] The idea of the *pro bono*s was eventually revived in the penultimate episode of Season One, "Briar Rose" (in which the "action" component is provided by Ballard's breaking into the Dollhouse), with Echo being sent, this time by Topher, to counsel a troubled little girl in a children's home. Topher's boasting to his assistant about the "pride" this engagement gives him illustrates the point made by Tami Anderson that the "lower-level [Dollhouse] employees," such as Topher, DeWitt and Saunders (as opposed to the more straightforwardly wicked "Rossum higher-ups"), justify their decision to work there by viewing it as a place with the power to mend "broken people" (167-168). Or, as Topher frantically protests to Echo as she points a gun at his head in "Needs:" "We help people become better people by giving them what they need." This "help" takes two forms: engagements which supposedly function as a kind of "therapy for the clients" and the ongoing "relief from suffering for the people who became Dolls" (Anderson 167), most of whom came to the Dollhouse because they had undergone a traumatic experience they wished to forget.

[22] Whedon tells Ryan that he would have liked to pay a lot more attention to the clients' fantasies than he was ultimately able to--"What they expected, what they wanted"--and, in general, to explore the theme of "what . . . [people] get from each other in [their] most intimate relationships be they sexual or [whatever

else].” According to Whedon’s vision, the imprinting of Dolls to clients’ specifications would work as a metaphor for the way all human beings “incorporate other people in ourselves;…how we project ourselves onto people and how everybody relates to everyone in their lives through the filter of their own beliefs, experiences and memories.”

[23] In his Commentary for “Man on the Street” Whedon talks about how, as well as exploring “the client fantasy,” he also wanted to examine “the Doll fantasy,” why someone might want to *be* a Doll: “the idea of taking away the pain; . . . of experiencing things without regret, without any consequences at all; of cutting out the part of you . . . that you’d like to get rid of.”[9] This fantasy of having one’s personality wiped away and going to live in the Dollhouse seems a very primal one. In psychoanalytic terms, we might see it as a yearning to return to the pre-Oedipal stage where there is no individuated identity, no desire and all basic needs are attended to. This association is reinforced by Topher in “Gray Hour” when he compares being wiped to being born and explains that in the Dollhouse they “minimize the trauma” of this experience with “throw pillows and perfectly crunchy lettuce” (and, one might add, womb-like sleeping pods). It is also implied in what was originally the very first scene of *Dollhouse*: “Echo” opens with the eponymous character swimming in the Dollhouse pool, over which DeWitt comments in voiceover, “The world is a very simple place at first.” We cut to DeWitt in her office as she continues, “Then, as we grow up, it grows around us, a dense thicket of complication and disappointment. Unbearable for some. And even for the luckiest of us, still sometimes more than we can handle. Less than we’d hoped.” She goes on to talk about the “Actives” (the official name for the Dolls) and it becomes clear that this is the beginning of her sales pitch to a potential client, but her words neatly encapsulate the causes of both the client and Doll fantasies. The former--the solution to the world being “less than we’d hoped”--could also be read in Lacanian terms: the promise to eliminate what Slavoj Žižek calls the “paradox of desire,” whereby, “The object [of desire] *a* is an object that can only be perceived by a gaze ‘distorted’ by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an ‘objective’ gaze” (12, original emphasis). The Dollhouse client’s object *a*, on the other hand, his or her Doll, will supposedly “really” be exactly what that client desires, as DeWitt is eager to highlight in her patter: “Mostly people think [the Actives are] just very good liars. They are, of course, quite the opposite. An Active is the truest soul among us” (“Echo”).

[24] In fact, of course, this turns out not always to be the case: much of the narrative momentum of *Dollhouse* is provided by the imperfect nature of the wiping and imprinting process. Echo’s genetic make-up gives her an ability to withstand it particularly strongly but various other Dolls start to experience flashbacks to past traumas. Alpha (Alan Tudyk), a Doll who used to be a violent kidnapper, suddenly kills and maims several people and Victor and Sierra develop a love for one another that survives whether they are in their blank Doll states, imprinted or have their original personalities. As a result, the DeWitt/Roger relationship comes to an end in “Stop-Loss” (2.9) when he insists that he has “fallen in love with another woman” despite her scoffing that it is “patently impossible.” This revelation drives home the point made by Whedon in the “Man on the Street” Commentary, that though, when we

fantasize about another person, "we don't think about the... things [they] . . . are going through that make them not jibe with that fantasy," those things do always exist. Fantasy is inherently subjective and it is impossible to mold another person into exactly what we wish them to be.

[25] Whedon clearly wanted to suggest that everyone, even those who are supposed to remain objective such as FBI agents, is influenced by his or her own fantasies, which each person projects onto others. According to Lacan, this is a normal part of human psychology and relationships--"The field of love" is inevitably bound up in "the framework of narcissism" (Lacan 193)--and Whedon does not condemn it as such. However, that is not to say that he condones the Dollhouse as a system. In the "Man on the Street" Commentary, he says he wanted the series to explore the possible "difference[s] of opinion" and "gray areas" related to what the Dollhouse does. This is achieved explicitly in this episode through the views expressed by the *vox pop* interviewees whose opinions about the concept of the Dollhouse range, as Whedon summarizes, from "It's completely unacceptable" to "It's completely romantic."[10] While Whedon believes that all these "perspective[s are] valid," he goes on to talk about how one of the storylines in this episode, Sierra being raped by her handler, demonstrates "everything that is wrong with this system." The system *in practice* is unacceptable, he suggests, because the Dolls are being exploited.

[26] Whedon is at pains to stress this point because he is aware that what the Dollhouse does is uncomfortably close to certain real life instances of exploitation such as sex trafficking and slavery, both of which are comparisons drawn by outraged interviewees in "Man on the Street."[11] In fact, he tells Ryan that he raised such issues deliberately to be provocative: "The idea was always, how much of the fantasy will [viewers] accept and how much will they go, 'You know what, this just is too much like real-world situations that are truly appalling and so I can't let the fantasy happen[?]'" Unfortunately for Whedon, it seems that the latter response was a common one and possibly one of the reasons why *Dollhouse* never achieved very high viewing figures (2.8 million in the US for "Ghost" and falling fairly steadily thereafter). Viewers discussing the show online often criticised it for centering on an institution whose operations they saw, to quote various posts on the *Television Without Pity* forums, as "a thinly-veiled metaphor for prostitution" (Charlemagne19) or "human trafficking" (bluefish) or as "slavery and immoral no matter what [the Dolls] consented to" (Research Girl). Many said that they had stopped watching *Dollhouse* after a few episodes either because they found the real-world parallels hard to stomach or because they felt that Whedon was being dishonest in condemning such crimes while "capitalizing on the titillation" associated with them (Temis the Vorta). These were not the only types of criticism leveled against *Dollhouse*. The many others expressed by viewers and critics alike ranged from slurs against Dushku's acting (for example, blogger B.J. Keeton calls her performances "consistently subpar and awkward"), to complaints that it was intrinsically impossible to relate to any of the Dolls because they changed personalities from week to week, to dissatisfaction with the storylines of specific episodes, particularly the "boring" (Salmon 87) first five. Nevertheless, almost every article, review, blog and discussion forum dealing with the show at

least mentions the potential for controversy raised by its themes of sexual exploitation.

[27] One certainly cannot deny that, on one level, *Dollhouse* itself *is* exploitative, especially of its uniformly attractive female stars. As Rhonda Wilcox points out, it was marketed mainly with images of an almost-naked Dushku and, naturally enough given the show's premise, the female Dolls are often glimpsed in dress or situations taken from the most stereotypical male fantasies, such as Echo's dominatrix outfit in "A Spy in the House of Love" or the implied lesbian scenario between Echo and Whiskey (Amy Acker) in "Vows." To be fair, as Wilcox notes, there are some "gestures toward gender-parity" in terms of ostentatious display of the male body, particularly that of Tahmoh Penikett. However, we rarely see male Dolls performing sexual engagements, apart from Victor's outing as "Roger." Wilcox defends Whedon by pointing out that he was in a situation, working for Fox, where "there was the possibility of exploitative behavior. But he dealt with the situation by choosing to make the show, in important ways, *about* that behavior--and to give us the opportunity to think about it" (original emphasis). She points out how the characters often display "a high-degree of self-consciousness," thereby inviting the viewer to be similarly self-conscious about his or her own position as a consumer of exploitative cultural products. We, Hollywood's audience, are, to a certain extent, comparable with the Dollhouse's clients. Nevertheless, as Wilcox acknowledges, all of this does not totally exonerate Whedon himself. He chose to work for Fox and he and his fellow writers and directors chose to put exploitative elements on the screen whether or not the wider context in which they are placed works to critique them.[12] In this way, *Dollhouse* presents a more extreme example of the ambiguity which critics such as Lorna Jowett have identified in *Buffy*, a series which simultaneously challenged and upheld traditional gender roles.

[28] Unsurprisingly, *Dollhouse*'s exploration of sexual fantasy was one of the main elements that made the network "really twitchy," as Whedon puts it (qtd Ryan). They forced him to reduce the show's focus on sexuality, until it became, as he observes in the "Vows" (2.1) Commentary, little more than a source of throwaway laughs, such as the reference in that episode to a client known as "Tempura Joe" who wanted to be "rolled in eggs and flour." Instead of the Dolls going on engagements that explored "the spectrum of human sexuality" ("Vows" Commentary) and other "quieter aspects of . . . the human psyche" (Whedon qtd Sullivan), as Whedon had intended, Fox insisted that the majority conform to an action/thriller format evidently designed to please the golden viewer demographic of 18-34 year-old men. Whedon summarizes their instructions thus: "Up the stakes, make the episodes more stand-alone, stop talking about relationships and cut to the chase. Oh, and add a chase. That you can cut to" (Whedon "What happened").

[29] After "Echo" was abandoned, "Ghost" and the following four episodes adhered pretty closely to this formula. Whedon describes them as "baby-steps, single stand-alone episodes . . . [that] didn't go as far into the idea of the Dollhouse, of the controversy about the Dollhouse . . . as I'd hoped" ("Man on the Street" Commentary). It was only in the sixth episode, "Man on the Street," which Whedon considers "the [real] pilot," that he was able

to bring out the "concepts [that he'd] been sitting on for so long" ("Man on the Street" Commentary). As well as presenting many of the possible interpretations of the Dollhouse's activities in the abstract through the comments of the *vox pop* interviewees (anticipating almost all of the points raised in this article!), the main plot is the first to really explore whether the service it provides could ever be morally acceptable. An internet entrepreneur called Joel Mynor has hired Echo, as he does every year on his wedding anniversary, to play the part of his wife so he can show her the house he bought her that she never got to see because she died in a car accident on the way to meet him. However, the engagement is interrupted by Ballard bursting in and trying to rescue Echo. When Boyd extracts her, Ballard is left to confront Mynor who is unapologetic, pointing out that the FBI agent's mission to save Caroline, including the "grateful tears [and] welcoming embrace" that he doubtless expects will be his reward, is itself a "fantasy . . . even sadder than mine." This situation--in which the funny, clever Mynor (played by comedian Patton Oswalt) comes across more sympathetically than the self-righteous Ballard--exemplifies Whedon's aim that *Dollhouse* should constantly confuse the audience about whom they should be "rooting for" (Whedon qtd Sullivan). At the end of the episode, Echo herself chooses to go back and finish her engagement with Mynor, thereby either, depending on which way you look at it, morally vindicating him or, as Whedon remarks, throwing the program into "very dicey territory" indeed by suggesting that Echo is complicit in her own exploitation ("Man on the Street" Commentary).

The Nightmare Factory

[30] "Man on the Street" was the first episode of *Dollhouse* to be widely acclaimed by critics: "Whedon has another big project on his hands and you get the sense here, finally, that he may be up to the challenge," wrote Robin Pierson of *The TV Critic* (see also Tucker, Anders). At the time it aired, Whedon was keen to point out that he did not wish to "blam[e] . . . the network" (qtd Fernandez) for the inferior quality of the first five episodes (which he believes still "had some very interesting elements in them" ("Man on the Street" Commentary)) and take sole credit for "Man on the Street:" "It wasn't like, 'Oh, now they've shut up, and now we'll do it my way.'" (qtd Fernandez). He claimed instead that the episode "contained elements that were pitched . . . or developed by people at the network" and represented the discovery of "the code to a show that I can do my best work in and the network can still get behind" (*ibid*.). [13] However, in the Ryan interview, which took place after *Dollhouse* had been canceled, Whedon is much less forgiving to the Fox executives, opining that the root cause of most of the show's problems was that "the network pretty much wanted to back away from the concept five minutes after they bought it."

[31] Fox's lack of support for *Dollhouse* was manifested not only in their constant interference in creative matters but in various acts of administrative ill-will, starting with the scheduling of the program in the "Death Slot" of Friday at 9pm, which caused *Ain't It Cool News* to predict its untimely cancellation before a single episode had aired (I am – Hercules!!). The final episode of the first season, "Epitaph One" (1.13), was not broadcast in the States at all

as it was commissioned at the last minute when Fox realized they needed a thirteenth episode for overseas distribution (Huddleston).[14] Despite receiving good reviews for most of the Season One episodes from "Man on the Street" onwards, Whedon and his cast and crew were led to believe that *Dollhouse* would not be renewed for a second season. As Whedon relates in a documentary included in the Season Two box-set,

> We were pretty much at a "let's wait and see--that you're canceled" situation . . . and I never actually tried to manoeuvre the . . . network into picking up the show; I just tried to get them to air the thirteenth episode, but they ultimately didn't do it. That, to me, said, "OK, well, clearly we're canceled." ("Defining Moments")

However, for reasons unknown (see Cusack for some plausible suggestions), *Dollhouse was* renewed, albeit with a "drastically reduced budget" (Ausiello), to the extent that it was impossible to have all the main cast in a single episode (Jed Whedon and Tancharoen "Belonging" Commentary), and a reduced running time of 42 rather than 47 to 50 minutes. Ratings continued to fall, despite continuing largely positive reviews, and the program's final cancellation was announced in November 2009 during the filming of the season's eleventh episode, "Getting Closer" (Miller).

[32] As many commentators have pointed out, Whedon had, in fact, encountered very similar problems when he worked with Fox on his previous series *Firefly*. Lisa Rosen summarizes *Firefly*'s fraught history thus:

> Fox had ordered a two-hour pilot and then decided it was too long. They stuck *Firefly* in a Friday timeslot, where shows go to die. They ran the episodes out of sequence, then canceled the show without airing the final three episodes, but did run the pilot as the finale. Whedon vowed not to work for the Fox network again. (31)

Perhaps, then, as Whedon himself acknowledges, he should have anticipated that, having reneged on his vow and gone back to Fox, he would find the making of *Dollhouse* an equally "ugly process" (Whedon qtd Bennett, "Living Doll" 54).[15]

[33] Given the mistreatment of two of Whedon's shows by his overseers at Fox, one starts to wonder if it is more than coincidence that the Dollhouse's overseers at Rossum became more sinister and controlling as the series wore on into its second season. Whedon did not actually write any episodes of Season Two himself after the premiere, "Vows" (leading Kathie Huddleston to wonder "if [his] heart wasn't broken a little bit"), but most were penned by his long-term collaborators. These include Tim Minear, who was, with Whedon, the co-executive producer of *Firefly*, and Jed Whedon and Maurissa Tancharoen, Joss's brother and sister-in-law, who collaborated with him on *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along-Blog* (U.S.), a web-series produced during the 2008 Hollywood writers' strike with the aim of creating something that wasn't "beholden to the frost giants" [networks] (Joss Whedon qtd Rosen 31).

[34] An especially noteworthy episode written by Whedon, Tancharoen, and Andrew Chambliss is "Meet Jane Doe" (2.7), in which Matthew Harding assumes direct control of the L.A. Dollhouse,

moving into DeWitt's office and ordering her around like a secretary. DeWitt is only able to regain command of "her" Dollhouse, of which she is fiercely protective, by handing over Topher's secret blueprints for a universal imprinting device to Harding, a sacrifice of her personal integrity which leaves her bitter and drinking heavily. The Fox executives' interference with his show may not have driven Joss Whedon to drink but, as mentioned earlier, he did empathize with the "hard decisions" DeWitt is forced to make.

[35] Parallels with the Culture Industry re-emerge in Chambliss's "Stop-Loss" when we discover that Rossum is building an army of soldiers, ex-Dolls who have been unable to readjust to the outside world, who have had devices implanted in their brains which make them all think as one. This recalls Adorno and Horkheimer's account of the way that Fascism aims to recruit people who have been "train[ed by] the culture industry . . . in order to organize them into its own forced battalions" (161). But the episode which arguably gives the darkest picture of Hollywood of all is Whedon and Tancharoen's "The Attic" (2.10). In this episode, Echo, Priya, and Anthony (Sierra and Victor's original personalities) go to the eponymous part of the Dollhouse, which has been referred to throughout the series as the destination of those who incur DeWitt's or other Rossum bosses' displeasure, to try and uncover the Corporation's plans.

[36] The Attic turns out to be much more than just a prison for transgressive people: it is also a site of repressed fantasies and thereby functions as a kind of Gothic mirror image of the Dollhouse itself.[16] Physically, it is a facility reminiscent of the Jefferson Institute in *Coma* (Michael Crichton U.S. 1978), where the inmates' brains are hooked up to machines which plunge them into their own worst nightmares. However, the waking nightmares in which the prisoners find themselves are actually, in a twisted way, what they think they deserve in that most of them appear to have been generated by feelings of guilt. Priya is in bed with Anthony when he suddenly turns into the bleeding corpse of a rapist she killed; Anthony, an ex-soldier who was stationed in Afghanistan, fights with a Taliban warrior who turns out to be himself; and Clyde Randolph (Adam Godley), one of the founders of Rossum, envisages various apocalyptic scenarios brought about by the Dollhouse technology. Echo, meanwhile, imagines that she wakes up in the Attic, and tries to free Priya and Anthony but that they are killed in the attempt, seemingly indicating Echo's guilt that she allowed her friends to accompany her on her dangerous mission after trying to talk them out of it in "Stop-Loss." Later, she finds herself in a nightmare version of the Dollhouse itself, complete with a mad-scientist Topher who keeps brains and strange creatures in tanks. There is even one man in the Attic, a Japanese Rossum employee called Matsu (Tzi Ma), who is desperate to convince himself that his desires *are* being fulfilled. As with Priya, his nightmare starts as a fantasy: he is eating an elegant meal in a geisha teahouse, insisting to Echo that he must "try to enjoy [him]self," but then discovers that he is literally enjoying himself in that he is eating his own amputated legs.

[37] The aim of this sadistic system is not only to punish those who are sent to the Attic but to keep their minds working on

adrenaline-fueled overdrive so that they can be used--networked together with all the other prisoners in all the Attics of Dollhouses around the world--as a kind of human super-computer. The Attic powers The Rossum Corporation technologically just as the Dollhouses support it financially and, as Clyde explains, there is no way to shut it down without killing its inmates, since being disconnected from the system would "turn [their] brains to mush."

[38] Like so many of the engagements that the Dollhouse clients request, the nightmare scenarios of the Attic's residents resemble Hollywood films: Priya's, Matsu's, and different parts of Echo's are like different kinds of horror films; Anthony's, a war film and Clyde's, a science fiction movie. Clyde and another Attic inmate, former Dollhouse head of security Laurence Dominic (Reed Diamond), also imagine themselves as characters in a superhero film. Clyde has invented an entirely black, sword-wielding alterego called Arcane and is trying to kill everyone in the Attic in an attempt to bring down the Rossum mainframe. Dominic, meanwhile, is--as he pompously informs Echo--on a personal mission to "chase Arcane . . . [and] try to stop him: . . . I'll never rest; I'll never catch him," which Echo ironically describes as having a "Highlander vibe."

[39] "The Attic" seems to suggest that for all Hollywood's image as a dream factory, it should really be viewed as a place of nightmares. The entertainment industry is fueled by the imaginations of the creative people who work within it, not to mention the imaginations of the audiences who consume their output. However, anyone who believes that they enjoy playing a part in this system is deluding themselves, because ultimately they are nothing more than cogs in a vast corporate-capitalist machine from which there is no escape.[17]

[40] Clearly, 2009 was not a year in which Whedon or his colleagues felt very contented with the Hollywood studio system in which they work. If we remember that the *Dollhouse* character whom most people see as a representation of Whedon himself is Topher, then the once-exuberant scientist's tragic fate seems especially gloomy. In the last episode, "Epitaph Two: Return" (2.13), written by Jed Whedon, Tancharoen, and Chambliss, which follows "Epitaph One" in flashing forward ten years into the future, civilization has collapsed as a result of the Dollhouse technology coming into widespread use as a weapon. The Rossum executives, however, who have developed a vaccine against being wiped, are living in decadent opulence, transferring into new bodies at will. They have kidnapped Topher, who has gone mad with guilt, and are forcing him to work on a device capable of wiping everyone in the world, shooting an innocent hostage every day he fails to finish. He is rescued by Echo and Ballard and taken back to the Dollhouse, where he builds a machine designed to "bring back the world" by returning everyone to their authentic identities. As the machine is in the form of a bomb and the bomb must be triggered manually, Topher's final act is to sacrifice his life in order to reverse his life's work.

[41] Unlike Topher, Whedon has not completely renounced his work at/on (the) *Dollhouse*. In interviews given some time after the series' end, he says he is "proud of what we did, given the circumstances" (qtd Gross), but that "*Dollhouse* was ultimately

probably not right for network television" ("Defining Moments"). This diagnosis seems a fair one and accords with Martin Shuster's concise summary of the contradictions inherent in the project:

> *Dollhouse* found itself in the strange position of attacking corporatism while relying on Fox for its existence, of questioning technology, while depending on the same for its actuality, of decrying the objectification of women while lavishly promoting itself by means of Eliza Dushku's scantily clad body. (235)

Shuster concludes this argument by suggesting persuasively that the "constant tension" *Dollhouse* embodied "between entertainment and social commentary, and between Fox's wishes and the desires of the writers" was what led to its "unfortunate and all-too-quick demise" (236).

[42] Frustrated by what he perceives as an increasing lack of "creative freedom" in network television in general (qtd Bennett, "Whedon on Whedon" 18) and still angry about the failure of the 2007-2008 strike to achieve improved remuneration for writers working in Hollywood (Rosen 31), Whedon came away from *Dollhouse* ready to follow Echo and her friends in rebelling against the capitalist entertainment industry. He told Ryan in late 2009: "For me, the Internet is slightly more interesting right now just because I feel like we have to get in there and start figuring out how to create entertainment without the networks and the studios, because they're basically trying to figure out how to create and entertain without us."

[43] However, Whedon's plans to escape the entertainment conglomerates and "their need for extreme monetization" (qtd Rosen 31) by making a sequel to *Dr. Horrible* have, for the time being, been put on hold. Instead, he has returned to the studios--Disney this time--in his most mainstream, large-scale project to date: writing and directing the estimated $150 million-budget *The Avengers* (U.S. 2012) film. Whedon justifies this about-face in terms of his desire not to "truck down the middle road where you have all the interference of a big project and the feeling of a small project" (qtd Gross). His fans can only hope it does not mean he will let Rossum get the upper hand once again.

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Notes

[1] This complaint of Rayna's is reported mockingly by Biz, whose name marks him out as the personification of the "show biz" industry which imprisons her.

[2] The supposed winner, Audra, is in fact, Sierra (Dichen Lachman), another Doll, sent in as extra protection for Rayna. Nevertheless, the jaded air with which the star reacts to Audra's presence shows that she is entirely used to being treated as a product by the marketing machine dedicated to selling her image.

[3] In addition to Dushku, there are several other actors in *Dollhouse* who have appeared in previous Whedon series. Nearly all of them play Dolls, thereby self-reflexively emphasizing the parallel between the Dolls and actors and that between the Dollhouse and Hollywood as a whole. It also, of course, strengthens the link between Whedon and Topher or DeWitt.

[4] The name is, as one of the Corporation's founders explains in "Getting Closer" (2.11), a reference to Karel Čapek's 1920 play *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots*). Both Kristin Noone and K. Dale Koontz have made detail studies of the many parallels between *R.U.R.*--in which a company called Rossum designs "soulless, mass-produced automata… to be the perfect workers" (Noone 23)--and *Dollhouse.*

[5] They do, however, have their leisure time entirely organized for them by the Dollhouse, rotating from one soothing activity--such as painting or Bonsai tree pruning--to another between engagements.

[6] Making it quite clear that the Dollhouse can be viewed as a kind of corollary to Hollywood, an old man (Billy Beck) interviewed in "Man on the Street" talks about how, if the Dollhouse had existed in his day, he would have had "Betty Grable" or "Ida Lupino…every night."

[7] St. Louis and Riggs point out that this development, and a subsequent one in which Ballard becomes a kind of Doll ("The Attic" (2.10), works to subvert the Sleeping Beauty narrative by transforming Ballard from "prince" to "princess--the rescuer in need of rescue" (9).

[8] As Whedon describes in the "Making Dollhouse" Season One DVD Extra, before "Echo" was thrown out entirely it underwent several reshoots, in all of which he tried to include an altruistic engagement for Echo. Originally, she was seen counseling the alcoholic girl, Danica (Ashley Johnson), in a hospital but "the network said [the scene] was too talky," so Whedon swapped it for a scene in a bar in which Echo physically fights with Danica's sleazy boyfriend; this was also rejected so he changed Danica into Hayden (also Johnson), a glamorous socialite

whom Echo talks into visiting her dying mother. When this too was turned down, Whedon says he "realized what the network really wanted" and scrapped the episode altogether.

[9] The Doll fantasy is expressed explicitly by one of the interviewees in this episode, a disgruntled checkout girl (Katherine Jacques) who says, "So, being a Doll, you do whatever. And you don't got to remember nothing. Or study. Or pay rent. And you just party with rich people all the time? Where's the dotted line?"

[10] This latter, perhaps surprising, way of looking at it is expressed by a dreamy young girl (Abby Cooper) who says, "If you could have somebody be the perfect person, the moment you wish for that you know you're never going to get, and someone signed on to do that, to help you... I think that could be okay. I think that could be, maybe, beautiful."

[11] The fact that it is Sierra, played by half-Tibetan actress Dichen Lachman and the only non-white Doll with a leading role, who is emblematic of the Dollhouse's exploitation serves to highlight these parallels, as it is non-Western women who are the greatest victims of real-world large-scale sex crime such as human trafficking. Sierra is repeatedly used throughout the series to illustrate the different kinds of physical and psychological pain the Dollhouse can cause. In "Echo" she is first seen coming in from an engagement looking upset with a cut on her forehead; in "Ghost" she is glimpsed for the first time undergoing the painful "tissue mapping" process which is part of the preparation for becoming a Doll; in "Man on the Street" it is revealed that she is being raped by her handler and in "Needs" we learn that she was put in the Dollhouse against her will by a Rossum employee who is obsessed with her and who later, in "Belonging," tries to have her permanently imprinted and handed over to him.

[12] As Wilcox points out, Whedon is certainly aware of his own complicity. In the commentary for "Ghost," he makes several jokey references to the way that certain elements in the episode, such as the scene in which Echo rides a motorcycle in a skimpy dress, constitute blatant "pandering" to Fox and refers to himself as a "whore" for doing this.

[13] Nevertheless, he remarks in the "Man on the Street" Commentary that what is arguably the episode's most important scene, the lengthy conversation between Mynor and Ballard, was "the hardest part [to] sell… to the network," presumably because they saw it as too "talky."

[14] As they did not have enough money left for a normal episode, Fox asked Whedon if they could either show the unaired pilot or if he could make a clip show. Instead, Whedon offered to "shoot a post-apocalyptic thriller… in six days" for half the usual cost (Whedon qtd Topel). The result, "Epitaph One," which flashes forward ten years into the future to show the disastrous results of the Dollhouse technology falling into the wrong hands, was voted the best episode of *Dollhouse* overall by readers of *SFX* magazine ("Your Favourite Joss Whedon Episodes!" 6).

[15] However, as this interview was conducted while Whedon was still working on *Dollhouse*, he is quick to add, "When I say that it's been an ugly process, I mean it's been really difficult for me creatively and temperamentally. I don't mean ugly in the *Firefly* sense of being treated in an ugly fashion" (Whedon qtd Bennett, "Living Doll" 54).

[16] Though he doesn't mention it specifically, the Attic's very existence accords perfectly with Peter Tupper's reading of *Dollhouse* as a "21st Century Neo-Gothic" tale (47). Tupper observes that the Dollhouse itself "represents Romantic ideals, in the philosophical sense: people, and therefore society, can be perfected through the application of Reason," and that "[t]he Gothic is a critique of those ideals" (51-52). He goes on to point out that, in classic Gothic style, the Dollhouse's dark secrets--the fissures in its façade of "perfect equilibrium" (52)--such as the Dolls' "personal stories of tragedy" or "Alpha's… bloody rampage" (52), could never quite be successfully hidden. One constant reminder is the

scarred face of Dr. Saunders, who was attacked by Alpha, and now, Tupper argues, functions as the Gothic's "requisite 'madwoman in the attic'--akin to Rochester's secret wife Bertha in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)" (52). What Tupper strangely omits to mention is that the Dollhouse does actually have an Attic and it is the place where Rossum puts people it wants rid of, just as Rochester imprisons Bertha in his.

[17] Of course, as observed earlier, the Dolls in general could be seen as a representation of dehumanized, alienated workers. However, they have, in theory at least, assumed this role willingly and for a temporary period only. What is interesting about the Attic is that it is not only Dolls who are sent there but other people connected with Rossum too, even those who appear to be high up in its hierarchy such as Clyde. This suggests perhaps that no one is ever truly "outside" the system: audiences, producers, and networks are all bound up together in a complex structure of interdependence within the culture industry.