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Alienation and the Dialectics of History in Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*

> "When I was a child, I first noticed that neither history as I was taught it nor the stories I was told seemed to lead to me. I began to fix them. I have been at it ever since. To me it is an important task to situate ourselves in the time line so that we may be active in history. We require a past that leads to us. After any revolution, history is rewritten, not just out of partisan zeal, but because the past has changed. Similarly, what we imagine we are working toward does a lot to define what we will consider doable action aimed at producing the future we want and preventing the future we fear."
>
> Marge Piercy

Slayage
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[1] Tearing through the streets of LA, two motorcyclists weave in and out of traffic trying to edge out the other in a race that spectacularly finishes in the lobby of an Asian dance club. Matt, who is celebrating his birthday, is the victor while his girlfriend, despite her knowledge of the city's back streets and her skillful riding, is the loser. She protests: "No way. No way. You cheated" ("Ghost" 1.1), and for those viewers familiar with the premise of Joss Whedon's television show *Dollhouse*, that complaint has a ring of truth. Matt may have won his street race fairly, but he has definitely manipulated the evening's events to his advantage. The girlfriend, played by Eliza Dushku, is an "active." Before dawn, her memory of the last three days will have been wiped away, stored on a hard drive. She will resume her identity as Echo, a presumably empty vessel who resides in an illegal, covert lab. There, she will live in a doll-like state until her next personality is downloaded and she is asked to perform some other duty for some other client like Matt.

[2] Ken Tucker, in his review of *Dollhouse,* notes that in Whedon's previous television work there is usually some overarching metaphor that grounds the show. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, vampirism and the occult provide the backdrop "for the agony of adolescent romance" and in the space western *Firefly*, Mal and company represent "Whedon's take on the broken nuclear family." Given that the show features a main character who adopts several personalities without having one of her own, Tucker wonders if Whedon hasn't written himself into a corner. Thematically, *Dollhouse* is a departure for Whedon. The show seems to be as interested in the social ramifications of new technology—in this case, the ability to fashion and erase personal histories—as it is in character development. Despite this difference, *Dollhouse* still addresses recognizably Whedon-esque concerns about the place of the Self in a larger context. The show employs the traditional science fiction trope of technology gone too far to explore ideas of estrangement and defamiliarization. More specifically, Whedon incorporates representations of dialectical history to dramatize what Karl Marx identifies as "alienation," experienced by the dolls/actives through their compromised identities and confronted by all of the show's characters through their relationships to historical time.

[3] Marx explains the phenomenon of alienation in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Workers experience alienation as a consequence of capitalism because labor under the capitalist system is "external to the worker -- i.e., it does not belong to his essential being," so that "in his work…he does not affirm himself but denies himself" (Marx 72). According to Marx, because capitalism separates the worker from the products of labor—leaving him with nothing more than a paycheck the value of which is determined by the needs of the owners of production, not the needs of the workers—the worker's labor is not voluntary, but coerced. This displacement between worker and product, this idea that the objects one creates belong to another is, to Marx, mortifying: "the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another…it is the loss of his self" (Marx 72-3).

[4] Marx argues that the promises of capitalism must fail to deliver and the inevitable reality of labor under capitalism is privation for the

laborer. He explains that "Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labor by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labour) and production" (71). In separating the producer from the product in this way, capitalist economy "produces intelligence—but for the worker idiocy, cretinism" (71). Adelle DeWitt embodies this essential fiction of capitalism, as Marx describes, for she uses the sign system of economics—contracts and remuneration—to convince prospective actives that she can provide them a chosen, controlled alienation, an escape from responsibility for their labor and their Selves without any consequences for their humanity. The *Dollhouse* narrative, as aired, begins with the pilot episode "Ghost," the opening moments of which establish the transactional paradigm that frames the series, as Adelle pitches the benefits of becoming a dollhouse active to Caroline Farrell. The scene undermines Adelle's civilized tea service and professional language and demeanor by filming the first moments of the conversation through the lens of a security camera. The associated striated effect on these opening images make it seem that we are watching Caroline through bars, exposing the coercive nature of her situation. In addition, the conversation makes clear that, much as Adelle wishes to code this transaction as mutual and voluntary, Caroline occupies a disempowered position; she dismisses Adelle's studied detachment and accuses her of "loving this"—recoding the conversation as personal as opposed to merely business—and brushes aside her offer of a "clean slate" because she knows that there is no such thing: "you always see what was there before."

[5] The presence of the security camera in the series' opening scenes not only frames Caroline as being in a disempowered position, it also calls into question the relationship between technology and coercion. Caroline attempts to personalize the transaction, thereby mitigating her own alienation, but it is already too late for that. She is under surveillance, which renders her private pleadings as nothing more than potential future spectacle. She is operating under the belief that her confrontation with Adelle is leading to some resolution (in this case, whether or not she signs the contract); Caroline, however, has yet to learn that in the Dollhouse "nothing is what it appears to be" ("Ghost") and that through that lens,

confrontations can be ends to themselves: recorded, reviewed, performed not for one audience, but many.

[6] Ultimately, and predictably, Adelle has the last word in the scene, responding to Caroline's "actions have consequences" with "what if they didn't?" ("Ghost"). Adelle's function, one might even call it her "mission," at least in Season One, while she holds firm to her belief that the dollhouse helps people, is to free her house and its inhabitants from consequences by removing them from the cause-effect teleology of dialectical history posited by Marx as a diachronic series of class struggles leading toward the inevitable Communist revolution. Caroline articulates a Hegelian/Marxist attitude toward time, saying "ever try to clean what's on a slate? You always see what was there before" ("Ghost"), meaning that we are always reflective of what has come before, our identities tethered to history. Adelle, however, rejects the diachronic in favor of the synchronic, constructing human experience as something that can be accessed in single episodes or moments, like actives living all those distinct lives and then starting over every time they fall asleep "for a little while." Also in the pilot episode, Adelle objects to the use of the word "mission" as a way to describe the labor the actives provide and insists instead that the dolls go on "engagements."[1] Missions have a linear construction; they involve a goal, and progress toward that goal. "Engagement," on the other hand, is a liminal word. In strictly the marriage context, it is a promise, a hope; it is of indeterminate length, it can last years, or weeks. It lacks resolution in the sense that it is only a preface, the actual marriage ceremony being its own event. The dolls only participate in that preface, eternal fiancées, never brides, always signs, never signifiers.

[7] Also at play here are competing perspectives on "self." The diachronic, dialectical version places the Self on a continuum that runs from one's ancestors through her past and her present, pointing on toward descendants, with all those experiences, influences, and moments contributing to a multivalent, dynamic conversation. The dialectical Self, like history, exists as a palimpsest, overwritten and re-overwritten but never erasing. The synchronic Self, on the other hand, is static; it's the "soul" that Paul Ballard references throughout the series.[2] It stands as a constant, fixed snapshot in Time, like the video of Caroline that Ballard keeps on loop. The

fact that dolls experience many different selves does not allow them to participate in the dialectic, because the selves are erased and thus denied participation in the active conversation of Self. Thus the labor performed by dolls in the varying consciousnesses of their working selves dramatizes alienated labor such as Marx describes:

> Estranged labour turns thus man's species being, both nature and his spiritual species property, into a being *alien* to him, into a *means* to his *individual existence*. It estranges man's own body from him, as it does external nature and his spiritual essence, his *human* being. (76)

The dolls (until Alpha's and Echo's composite events, at least) do not get to incorporate the places on the historical timeline occupied by their imprinted selves, thus their continual alienation.

[8] The architecture of the dollhouse itself underscores its investment in a cyclical, synchronic framework. For example, there's no practical reason for the sleeping pods to be aligned as they are; of course the most economical use of space for beds is to place them in rows, and the anesthetized dolls aren't likely to care. The wheel design, organizing the sleeping actives as cogs, signifies their interchangeability as laborers and their circular relationship to their labor and to themselves. They exist in a series of synchronic moments in time, dehistoricized, disconnected from their individualities and, with that, their respective histories. The use of incantations when actives leave the temporally-suspended dollhouse and re-engage chronology ascribes a ritualistic significance to their movement into and out of the diachronic timeline, including "Would you like a treatment?" and the call-response that takes place after each engagement upon return to doll state:

> Active: "Did I fall asleep?"
>
> Programmer: "For a little while."
>
> Active: "Shall I go now?"

Programmer: "If you like."

The repetitive magic words identify and codify the transitions between engaged-active and disengaged-active, reinforcing the cyclical nature of doll life, with each engagement ending with Topher's "if you like" to remind us of Adelle's focus on the dollhouse-active relationship as a mutual transaction, not an enslavement, while continuing to deconstruct that reading with conflicting signals.

[9] In addition, the LA dollhouse's "luxurious spa-like environment" ("Omega" 1.12) codes alienation of self as a vacation from self, a return to an Edenic utopia of ignorance. Referring to the wiped post-engagement Echo in the pilot episode, Topher jokes that "the new moon has made her virgin again," and in "Omega," Adelle berates Ballard for "[bringing] that thing [Alpha] back into my house to *defile* it," demonstrating that Adelle, at least, views the House as sanitized space. Like so many pre-fall Adams and Eves, actives exist in a regressive infancy free of the burdens of will and knowledge, enjoying lollipops, art projects, unabashed nudity, and Timelessness. In a sense, they exist as their animal selves, eschewing what Marx describes as "conscious life activity" (75) for an existence that invites Topher to label them "a little bit bison" ("Gray Hour" 1.4) and Bennett Halverson to call them "free range chickens" in comparison to the Washington D.C. actives, whom she says are kept more "like veal" ("Getting Closer" 2.11). Whether the dolls live like free range chickens or like veal, both labels indicate their classification as commodities for consumption, in this case literal consumption as meat, particularly in the case of being named "veal," as the word signifies the slaughtered and processed meat, not even the living animal from which it originates.

[10] Of course, the show doesn't allow this capitalist erasure of humanity's place in the dialectic to go unchallenged; notably, the episode "Man on the Street" (1.6) wrestles openly with the implications of the dollhouse economy. In fact, there is more overt commodity language in this episode than any other, including Mellie's telling Ballard about the guy she's recently stopped seeing because he told her she wasn't a "long term investment" and he wanted to "dump the stock before it went public"; Joel

Mynor the billionaire's referring to the "internet establishment"; Adelle's musing about Sierra's handler/rapist that as they are "in the business of using people" the question becomes "what is the best use for someone like you"; and Mynor's telling Ballard that "fantasy is their business, not their purpose," a claim reiterated by other characters. Moreover, the entire episode is framed by a news report on the dollhouse urban legend, with brief unscripted interviews with "everyday Angelinos" that establish the dollhouse myth as one familiar in Los Angeles. Several of these interviews espouse dichotomous perspectives that complicate the narrative's ethical position, particularly in the context of economy and commodification of human beings. For instance, in one clip, an African American woman labels the dollhouse "slavery" and scoffs at the interviewer's correction that the myth denotes the dolls as "volunteers." Her vehement response—"Only one reason someone volunteers to be a slave, and that's if they is one already. Volunteers. You must be out of your f[ucking] mind"—hints at the Marxist critique of labor in general, that wage labor under capitalism can only ever be forced labor, always a kind of slavery, and while in a technical sense we all "volunteer" to enter the workforce, our choices are as compromised as Caroline's because we are every bit as coerced.[3]

[11] The interview immediately following that of the African American woman features a white woman dressed in a cashier's apron. Her response to the interviewer's question, complete with over-processed hair, bright lipstick, nasal voice, and sassy hand on the hip posturing, reveals a jaded working class attitude: "So bein' a doll. You do whatever, you don't gotta remember nothin', or study, or pay rent…and you just party with rich people all the time? Where's the dotted line?" Raffaella Baccolini argues that utopia "has been conflated with materialist satisfaction and thus commodified and devalued" and "consumerism has come to represent the contemporary modality of happiness" (518). The vapid cashier's conception of happiness has been perverted and distorted along with her sense of self, to the point where economic concerns and avoidance of consciousness of her labor (that is, "hanging out with rich people" and not having to "pay rent" or think about anything strenuous enough to connote "study") constitute the best life she can imagine. Her impoverished sense of historicity—after all, she does not seem to consider what it means that she would never *remember* any of her

time with the rich people—stands in contrast to the preceding woman's more dialectical awareness of the past's continuing influence on the present and the future, as she begins her interview with "if there's one thing people will always need, it's slaves."

[12] Another pair of interviews presents a similar duality. The first clip is a close-up shot of a young blond woman relaxing in what appears to be a park setting, with bright green grass and twittering birds forming her backdrop. She stares into the camera unblinking through much of her statement, which contains halting, dreamy contemplations that end with "I think that could be, maybe, beautiful." Immediately following this new age fogginess, the film jumps to the interview of a second woman who, without hesitation, declares the dollhouse "human trafficking," conflating the forthright language of human rights activists with economic coding. Also significant, this woman delivers her statement while standing in an urban setting with her hands on a bicycle, demonstrating her sense of connection to the future with her "green" acknowledgement of the importance of mitigating her carbon footprint, as well as a ready means of self-propelled transportation to indicate her continual movement and progress, her connection to the motion of time and history.

[13] Whedon takes care to address the dollhouse alienation narrative from several possible critical angles in this episode. An interview with an elderly man represents the regressive capitalist impulse of fixing one's location in the past as opposed to continuing to build a self that includes and converses with the past, present, and future in active ways: "If they'd had it in my day, I'd-a had Betty Grable every night. Or Ida Lupino. Every man that fought for his country should have the right to an Ida Lupino." This pro-dollhouse interview aligns the interviewee, and by implication the dollhouse, with a pre-feminist sensibility that takes for granted the commodified position of women, even a woman like Ida Lupino, renowned for her proto-feminist film directing efforts. The man refers to his "right" to "*an*" Ida Lupino, expressing a patriarchal entitlement alongside the denial of Lupino's individuality and subjectivity, while also of course cementing a pre-civil rights hetero-normativity by asserting that "every man" wants a Betty Grable or an Ida Lupino. Later in "Man on the Street," Whedon presents an overt Marxist critique of modern consumerism through another male interviewee,

slightly disheveled, aged about forty, speaking from beside a subway entrance and wearing a tie with an unbuttoned jacket: "You think it's not happening? You think they're not controlling you? Don't worry about it. Just sit back and wait for them to tell you what to buy."

[14] The effect of this barrage of economic language and editorial commentary is to implicate the self-estranged nature of all labor under capitalism in the self-estranged labor of dolls and expose our collective alienation from "species-being" or, loosely, from our humanity. Like the men on the street, most viewers are implicated in volunteering to be slaves under Marx's definition of all wage-driven labor as alienated labor, since we already labor to meet needs outside of ourselves, and while in the process of viewing commercial network television we are, in a sense, waiting for "them" to tell us what to buy. As Marx argues, capitalism denies the laborer the right to labor for his/her own needs, whether those needs be physical or spiritual, thus replacing self-driven labor with external detached motivation. Most telling in this context, after Boyd exposes Sierra's rapist, Adelle scolds him for setting up the sting without consulting her and then tells him a bonus is being wired to his account. He avers, "I don't need a bonus," to which she replies, "Well, I need to give it to you." Sherryl Vint, in her article "Species and Species-Being," points out that "Marx condemns capitalism not just because of inequality and exploitation, which as he was well aware exist under other economic systems. Capitalism is unique in that it impoverishes the human psyche and degrades all social relations among people, reducing people from full human being to an existence as a commodity, valued solely as labour-power" (123). Adelle's attachment of money to Boyd's actions codes them as compelled by wages, reestablishing Adelle and Boyd's transactional relationship and boss-worker power dynamic and distancing Boyd from any internal motivations stemming from personal feelings of human sympathy that would code his rescue of Sierra as an expression of Self. Additionally, like the opening scene of the series, in this scene we again watch Adelle broker a transaction through bars, in this case from outside a blinded window, with the slats of the blinds fracturing our perspective and implying imprisonment and loss of agency.

[15] The pervasiveness of capitalism and the embedded, alienated nature of our situation within it mean we are rarely able to discern our own estrangement. As Marx argues,

> The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. (70)

In his article about alienation in *The Matrix* series, Dahms argues, "Our 'thinking,' thus, [under estrangement] tends to *reflect* the specific features of the time and space we inhabit, rather than enabling us to *critically reflect on those features*. It is for this reason that it is neither sufficient for Morpheus to *explain* the Matrix to Neo, nor for us today to be told that we are alienated" (116). In that film, the protagonist Neo learns that he is living inside the matrix of a computer program, and that his physical self is asleep in one of thousands of engineered pods. It is Morpheus who provides the means for Neo's awakening. As the metaphors of matrix and dollhouse dramatize, the condition of alienation or estrangement influences us through its invisibility; it separates us from our original natural selves but does not leave a Self that we can merely reclaim, because that very separation itself becomes part of us and part of our experience of the world.

[16] Paul believes that he need only find Caroline and tell her who she "really is" to, in essence, kiss her and wake her from her cursed, unnatural, fairy tale sleep, because he believes in the static synchrony of the Self, ironically aligning him more with Adelle's perspective than otherwise, as they share this naiveté regarding the fixity of Time and Self. Notably, the episodes "Briar Rose" (1.11) and "Omega" reveal Alpha, not Paul, as the one who wakes Caroline and allows her to confront her estrangement. Matthew Beaumont uses Holbein's famous painting "The Ambassadors" (1533) to illustrate the prevalence of anamorphic displacement in science fiction. The portrait orients two richly attired French noblemen, Jean de Dinteville and

Georges de Selve, on opposite sides of a table covered with items reminiscent of renaissance victories, "artfully heaped with exquisite objects pertaining to the disciplines of geometry, astronomy, mathematics and music" (Beaumont 29). The two men appear relaxed and confident, facing the observer with unruffled poise. Disrupting this dauntless geometric composition, though, is a slash across the front of the image that, when viewed from the far left of the painting, resolves as a flattened human skull. Beaumont identifies this slash as an anamorphic stain, explaining: "an anamorphic image posits the coded presence of an almost unimaginable reality that momentarily obtrudes on ideologically constituted reality, thereby rendering it arbitrary, ontologically inconsistent" (33-4). Essentially, as a viewer of an anamorph, you can only access the anamorphic image by distorting the primary image; thus the anamorph forces you into a new relationship with that primary image: "it dramatizes the dialectical relationship between symbolic and economic capital whereby each appears to be the precondition of the other" (Beaumont 31). In the case of the dollhouse, the anamorphic slash across the primary image is Alpha.

[17] The house purports to be a place of luxurious comfort and safety and "being my best," and by the time of the episode "Omega" the *Dollhouse* viewer has been encouraged, bit by bit, to identify with the house and its inhabitants as protagonists, with Alpha as the vicious outsider, the "thing" that returns to "defile" our familiar space. In defiance of Adelle's prettification efforts, Alpha's face slashing brings the vulnerability, pain, and disempowerment of the dollhouse into the foreground. Alpha and Omega refer of course to Christ's statement in the Biblical book of the Revelation of John, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come" (*Oxford Study Bible* Rev. 1:8). Invoking Revelation associates Alpha with the ultimate expression of *telos*, the movement of the world itself toward an inevitable final destruction. Like the fantasy offered to actives in the dollhouse, Alpha seeks a Self separated from its history; however, his separation strategy involves violently codifying the alpha-omega teleology so that the result is permanent estrangement.

[18] The dramaturgic space of the power plant scene contributes to Alpha's anamorphic function by introducing more of the strangeness that

moves alienation from the background into the foreground. As Dahms reveals using *The Matrix*, we cannot perceive our own alienation without the familiar being made strange. Simon Spiegel explains the function of stage settings as defamiliarizing spaces in his discussion of Brecht: "In Brecht's Epic Theater the spectator is not allowed to 'delve' into the play and is obstructed from regarding it as 'natural.' Quite the contrary, the action on stage—and by analogy the social order—should be rendered visible as something artificial and man-made" (370). Specifically in the case of *Dollhouse*, the chair that has been naturalized for us in Adelle's controlled, sanitized space appears in Alpha's filthy industrial wasteland stripped of Adelle's veneer of civility, leaving it ugly and painful and violent, a torture device, a site of disempowerment. Unlike the imprinting process we have become used to, featuring boyish Topher, his relaxing call and response dialogue, and an imprinting chair that more closely resembles spa furniture than science equipment, along with actives who placidly consent because they "enjoy [their] treatments," Alpha's chair looks like something salvaged from the set of a cheap science fiction film, down to the frayed duct tape patch on the head rest. He gives Echo a piece of rubber to bite down on during the imprint, something Topher's process does not necessitate, and the wires running from the mismatched computer parts seem invasive and aggressively unnatural against Echo's head. A long shot of the set allows the viewer to see "DANGER" scrawled upside down on the edge of the raised platform on which Alpha has organized his machinery.

[19] Alpha's desire to make history static and fixed by eradicating the past, in the form of old selves, as well as the future, through the symbolic vehicle of the Revelation apocalypse, is rejected by Echo when she faces her estrangement, literally by having a conversation with herself in a different body. The text supports Echo's decision not to murder and erase Caroline, but Alpha's anamorphic function remains crucial in bringing that decision about. Alpha and his exposed wiring operate as catalyst for Echo's recognition of her alienated, fragmented identity, confronting Echo with Caroline in Wendy's body and exhorting her to eradicate that past self and embrace another externally constructed imprint, this time with Alpha as the client and imprinter. Echo's rejection of the Omega identity privileges her

Echo identity, as she denies the split self created under estrangement and chooses instead to embrace multivalence.

[20] The *Dollhouse* narrative, in effect, divulges a double estrangement: Echo/Caroline represent the unaware enslaved laborer under capitalism defamiliarized for the viewing audience through Adelle and Topher and the controlled space of their underground alien technology, while sociopathic Alpha and his grimy abandoned power plant function as the anamorph that allows Echo to recognize her alienation and make active choices about it. In other words, while the house itself is an anamorphic space with regard to the "real world," as evidenced by the reactions recorded by citizens in "Man on the Street," with whom television viewers are invited to identify, Alpha is the anamorph that displaces the dollhouse, and this second layer of estrangement creates the Echo who "understand[s] everything now" ("Omega"). In his analysis of Ian Watson's story "Slow Birds," Beaumont argues similarly:

> Its setting is an anamorphosis in that it is an almost completely self-contained, more or less systematic distortion of the author's empirical reality; and it therefore performs an anamorphic defamiliarisation of this reality. But it also contains an anamorph, in the form of the missiles; and this anamorph therefore restores a sense of estrangement to the fantastical reality it depicts (44).

Beaumont goes on to point out that "the reader of this narrative…must imagine herself into the position in which she is in fact already situated—that is, in a capitalist society torn apart by inter-imperial conflict" (44).

[21] So, as viewers of *Dollhouse*, we experience the defamiliarizing of our capitalist situation and our relationships to dialectical history with Echo, through her discovery of an integrated agency. As Baccolini observes:

> In most of these [dystopian science fiction] novels the recovery of history and literacy, together with the recovery of individual and collective memory, becomes an instrumental tool of resistance for their

> protagonists. Because it is authoritarian, hegemonic discourse shapes the narrative about the past and collective memory to the point that individual memory has been erased; individual recollection therefore becomes the first, necessary step for a collective action. (521)

Through Alpha's anamorphic defamiliarizing of reality, Echo discovers the value of maintaining and living all of her Selves, harkening back to her confession to Bennett Halverson that she does not commit to a major course of study in college because selecting one would force her to exclude all the others ("Getting Closer" 2.11). When Alpha threatens to shoot the wedge that holds the original Caroline imprint, Echo defies him:

> Echo: "I said shoot it, I don't care."
>
> Alpha [gesturing at the wedge with his gun]: "Yeah, well, maybe she will."
>
> Echo: "She won't know. She's me. And we're both comin' to getcha." ("Omega")

Thus, Echo ultimately reactivates time and historicity by resonating—echoing—rehistoricizing her Self, which she can only accomplish by accepting and integrating all of her active experiences and identities as well as her pre-active one. Whedon's *Dollhouse* examines capitalism and its manipulations of identity and historical displacement and rejects regressive, static synchrony and commodification in favor of dynamic, empowered, progressive participation in the dialectical conversation.

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[1] The scene in question occurs with Boyd. As a "handler," Boyd is tasked with watching over Echo when she is out on her assignments. Near the end of "Ghost," Boyd challenges Adelle's decision to end an engagement early, which would result in the sexual abuse and murder of a kidnapped girl. In an attempt to distance herself from the situation after the girl's father is shot, Adelle argues, "We do not have a client," to which Boyd protests, "We have a mission." Her retort, "We prefer to call them engagements," highlights her callousness, but it also reveals something about Boyd. Throughout the opening episode, Boyd reacts to Echo's personalities as if they are not constructs. For example, he feels guilty at the end of Matt's date with Echo, because she thinks she might have met "the right guy." And his passion for seeing the kidnapping case through to completion seems to stem not only from his desire to see an innocent girl rescued, but also from a need to allow Eleanor Penn/Echo to confront her former abuser. Of course, all of this is mitigated by Boyd's betrayal in Season Two, but it seems that even early on in the series, Boyd is interested not just in Echo but in the way she handles her constructed personalities.

[2] In his examination of the ethical and moral difficulties inherent to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, Scott McLaren examines how both shows alternate between representations of the soul as a reified object and as a metaphor for moral choice. McLaren's interest in these ontological and epistemological issues centers on how viewers hold accountable characters who are "beings without souls, without consciences, possessed by demons, and who moreover retain no connection with the absent soul of the host body's former identity" (par. 1). Although the *Dollhouse* narrative avoids these supernatural pitfalls (there are no witches, vampires, or demons that threaten to invade one's identity), it still engages with the problem of moral actions in the wake of multiple identities. For example, Sierra's rape by Hearn is presented as an abhorrent violation, but that presentation also indicts all of the actives' engagements. Hearn defends himself by arguing that his sexual assault is no different from what goes on with clients. When told he is disgusting,

Hearn responds, "Don't give me that. You put her under some fat, old emir, it makes it better because she thinks she's in love for all of a day?" ("Man on the Street" 1.6). The answer, of course, is that it doesn't. With *Dollhouse*, Whedon doesn't abandon questions regarding "the soul" and morality, as much as he reframes them.

[3] Onscreen, the word "fucking" is bleeped over and the actress's mouth is blurred.