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Hacking the Read-Only File: Collaborative Narrative as Ontological Construction in *Dollhouse*

Introduction

[1] *Dollhouse* explores the question of what might happen if humanity had the technology to overwrite the human brain with the personalities of others. At first, it merely explores one form of the exploitation that would undoubtedly take place. Advancements in technology, guided by the ever-increasing power of global capitalism, would result in masses of people being exploited in the service of a few. Rossum, a corporation spearheading technological advancement, opens several "dollhouses," or high tech brothels. People "volunteer" to give up five years of their lives to be a doll. They will remember nothing of their time in the dollhouse, and they will receive substantial financial benefits from their time as dolls. But *Dollhouse* is more than a simple cautionary tale about the unchecked power of technology. Echo begins her journey as one of the exploited, a doll, to be overwritten time and again in order to fill the needs of a powerful and wealthy elite, but something happens to her along the way. She becomes able to use the technology subversively and to create a posthuman subjectivity that is both at odds with and in debt to the technological tampering that at first rendered her powerless.

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[2] Narratives often hinge on epiphanies. A protagonist's development might begin or at least take a crucial turn at a single epiphanic moment. Echo, the protagonist in Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse,* does not have a single epiphanic moment. Or rather, she has several epiphanic moments, each one

singular. The difference is in the repetition, repetition not just *with* a difference, but *as* a difference. In each of these epiphanic moments, Echo proves that she is not interested in any version of a patriarchal, hegemonic, or normative narrative (fantasy) of the world. That is a story she simply will not be a part of. Some of the imprints within her—identities, not subjects—might be comfortable living in such a story world, a world wherein she fulfills the fantasies of others. Echo—a subject, not just an identity— refuses this narrative placement.[1] Indeed, she does more than refuse the narrative placement; she changes the narrative itself. I argue that Echo's subjectivization process—posthuman in its essence (or perhaps its lack of essence)—is wrapped up in narrative considerations. In short, I argue that the subject is the story and the story is the subject.

[3] Further, I argue that the process of posthuman subjectivization, rooted in narrative and involving both being and knowing, is an ongoing feedback loop involving several discrete elements. First there must be an ontological awareness—a moment (or moments) of epiphany in which one's place in the story (or in the world) becomes clear. After the initial ontological awareness, an epistemological drive kicks in, a drive to know and to act with at least a measure of agency in the story (world). The epistemological drive creates the opportunity for one's self story to interact with the larger narrative in which that self story is placed. Finally a revised ontological awareness grows out of the interaction between the self story and the larger narrative, a revised awareness that enables the changing of the narrative—not just the narrative of the self, but also the larger narrative in which that self is placed. Echo exemplifies a posthuman narrative onto-epistemology because her subjectivization process, enacted in, through, and by narrative, involves changing the story after finding her place within it. I further argue that the conditions of possibility for this narrative (and other narratives unfolding in this medium and in related ones right now), specifically the collaborative nature of storytelling as is demanded by the division of labor necessary for a television show to be successful, is a component of the narrative system itself and that this multi-authored storytelling, in turn, fosters the development of characters who themselves have authorial agency. The narrative proper, that is, is refracted through the lens of its method of creation and is thereby diffracted in such a way as to

create self-similar patterns (or fractals) in both the narrative content and the narrative form.

Subjectivization

[4] Before outlining Echo's subjectivization process, it is important to establish what exactly is meant by subjectivization. In the simplest terms, subjectivization is merely the process of becoming a subject. This process is characterized by one's relation to power structures and by one's struggle to narrate the process, a struggle that results in a coherent story with gaps signifying bits of the psyche that cannot be adequately written into the larger coherent self story. Following a Foucauldian model (which itself follows an Althusserian model), Judith Butler argues in her book *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* that the process of coming to be as a subject, a process which she calls subjectivation, is one that is governed by the discursive and material structures of power in place prior to the individual's arrival (83-84). That is, our subject-ness is wrapped up in the structure of power into which we are born. We come to be within these structures and in relation to these structures. For Butler, though, there is something left over, a part of us that does not get folded into the subject, which she calls the psychic remainder (86). The psychic remainder is part of the psyche, but it is not a part of the self story that constitutes the subject itself. Whatever cannot be reconciled within the self story constitutes this psychic remainder and exists outside of the subject. To put it in Butlerian terms, the psychic remainder includes the unconscious, exceeds discursive limits, and resists the normalizing forces that form and maintain the subject. Butler claims that "[t]he account of subject formation is thus a double fiction at cross-purposes with itself, repeatedly symptomatizing what resists narration" (124). What one does not consciously know lurks in the margins of the self-story as a "lost object [that] continues to haunt and inhabit the ego as one of its constitutive identifications" (134). What one comes to know as oneself, then, is not the whole story.

[5] Slavoj Žižek conceptualizes this psychic remainder in slightly different terms, arguing that for Lacan, and thus also for him, "there is always a hard kernel, a leftover which persists and cannot be reduced to a

universal play of illusory mirroring" (47). This kernel is not just hard; it is traumatic. In individual psychic systems (people), the traumatic kernel is something akin to an essence that threads throughout someone's chronological journey. In larger systems (social systems, for example), the traumatic kernel would be proportionally larger. According to Žižek, our attempts to represent the phenomenon of concentration camps are "so many attempts to elude the fact that we are dealing here with the 'real' of our civilization which returns as the same traumatic kernel in all social systems" (50). The chaos we feel internally echoes through social systems as well. We see both of these ideas—the traumatic kernel at the individual level and at the societal level—enacted in *Dollhouse.*[2]

[6] To complicate this notion of the traumatic kernel, which is a version of the humanist theory (and fantasy) of essence, I turn for a moment to cybernetic theory. Bruce Clarke, addressing Bruno Latour's theories accounting for the equating of humans with cybernetic forms of intelligence, argues that such a view of "life" provides liberation from essence (55). He states,

> Latour's parallel view of the morphism of the human is a neocybernetic turn putting operational flesh on the bones of the postmodern observation that the human is a rhetorical construction. Indeed, the human lies not in the possession of an essence but in the eliciting and instrumentalizing of a conviction, in a persuasion that is present—but also, in Latour's terms, in the continuous translation of itself into being by social communications. (59)

This description suggests a radical constructedness of the human (or, in Echo's case, the posthuman) psyche, a constructedness that resembles the constructedness of narratives. Or rather, it both resembles and engages with the constructedness of narratives. In his book, *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, Bruce Clarke, applying a systems-theoretical approach, argues that rearticulating narrative theories through second-order systems concepts, borrowed from neocybernetic theory, "recuperates their residual humanisms for a posthumanist narratology that factors narrative

communications into the wider complex of social and psychic functions" (7).[3] He goes on to conceptualize narrative as part of a complex set of systems:

> Narrative is a primary formal and thematic program running on the complex infrastructures of social and psychic systems. The medium of narrative in society is the network of metabiotic meaning systems and their media environments. The maintenance-in-being of narratives in any textual medium has to be continuously reconstructed within social systems that can use them as elements of communicative exchange. Over time these contingencies ensure the continuous transformation of narratives and, from fictions of metamorphosis to histories of social evolution, the continuous recreation of narratives of transformation. (13)

That is, the construction of human and posthuman beings follows an evolutionary path that runs parallel to the evolution of the way we tell stories and the way we think about the way we tell stories. My goal here is to tease out some of the interconnections between the posthuman psyche and the nature of narrative as it is exemplified in *Dollhouse*, particularly by looking at these elements as systems within and among other systems.

Narrative and Metanarrative

[7] A full discussion of current trends in narratology is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief look at the conversation will be helpful. In her seminal book, *Narratology*, Meike Bal argues that narrative "is a cultural phenomenon, partaking of cultural processes" and that "it is the conditions of possibility of those processes that constitute the interest of narrative analysis" (9). She does not believe, however, that the actual process of creating narrative is worth critical attention: "[H]ow writers proceed we cannot know. Nor do we need, or even want to" (9). On this point, I disagree. In other areas of scholarship, the process of composition has become at times more important than the final product. The most obvious

example is in the rise of process-oriented pedagogy in composition studies, but Jeremy Green applies these principles to a critique of postmodern American fiction in his book *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millenium*, which he describes as "an examination of the generative pressures on contemporary writing, a study of how the various cultural and economic forces that now impinge on writers condition the relationship between literary strategy and literary field" (5). In "Toward a Socionarratology: New Ways of Analyzing Natural-Language Narratives," David Herman combines narratological methodologies with sociolinguistic ones to create a socionarratology that seeks to explore narrative not just as a product but also a process. He argues that "[t]his merging of theories and methodologies suggests that any analysis of narrative structure must be complemented by an account of how storytellers communicate" (223). He goes on to argue the following:

> [R]ather than being consigned beforehand to the domain of the random and unpredictable, facts about the production and processing of stories should be anchored in the actual practice of participants engaged in narrative communication. Put otherwise, by changing our methods for studying narrative, we may discover unexpected patterns in the way that stories are used to facilitate communication. (220)

[8] Additionally, Whedon scholars are writing about the composition process(es). J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson's "Myth, Metaphor, Morality and Monsters: The Espenson Factor and Cognitive Science in Joss Whedon's Love Ethic" addresses the fact that Jane Espenson's training in cognitive science, particularly her contribution to theories surrounding the metaphor, contributes to the narrative text and the narrative ethic (par 29). In her address at Slayage 4, Rhonda Wilcox closely examines Espenson's drafts of "Pangs" in order to come to a deeper understanding of the episode and its metaphorical and political resonances ("Let it Simmer"). Janet K. Halfyard turns to the importance of the music as a part of the creation of narrative in much of her work. In "Love, Death, Curses and Reverses (in F Minor): Music, Gender, and Identity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*,"

Halfyard argues that the music performs important writerly functions, particularly in the creation of character identities. Finally, several authors address the role of the fans in the creation and extension of the narrative.[4]

[9] These examples highlight the much needed turning of critical attention to the different voices in the creation of the narrative. My argument diverges in its focus on the collaborative nature of the writing of television narrative as a crucial aspect of the narrative itself, an aspect that is reflected in the narrative text itself. Despite the fact that many episodes are credited to one individual, we know from interviews and DVD special features that the writer's room is the place the narrative gets formed, and it does so through conversation. This observation seems crucial to an analysis of television writing, which is, by virtue of the conditions of production, collaborative. There may be a central figure (Whedon, Abrams, Bochco, etc.) given most of the credit, but the key to television narrative's success is the collaborative nature of storytelling. David Kociemba argues in his article "'Over-identify Much?': Passion, 'Passion,' and the Author-Audience Feedback Loop in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" that the serial narrative form, particularly in the digital age, allows for a feedback loop between authors, audience, and the text itself. He further argues that authorial agency resides not merely in the credited authors but also in the actors and in the audience members themselves (pars. 1-3). The story, then, becomes a multi-authored text, just as Echo, herself, is a multi-authored text.

[10] I in no way mean to suggest that we try to parse out individual voices as a methodology. That is beside the point. It is the conversation that matters here—the content of the conversation, yes, but more importantly, the fact of it. I am arguing that an awareness of the changes that have taken place within the narrative systems that most capture and represent society to itself is necessary to developing a deep understanding of the narratives themselves. It is not just that the play's the thing, but rather that the *creation* of the play's the thing. To that end, we have to look at the narrative process as well as the narrative product, which we might, following Arwen Spicer, alternatively call the metanarrative and the narrative (par. 1).

[11] Spicer addresses this interplay between the metanarrative and the narrative itself in her article "'It's Bloody Brilliant!' The Undermining of Metanarrative Feminism in the Season Seven Arc Narrative of *Buffy*." Spicer argues that the feminist metanarrative, couched in terms of taking back the agency of the slayer story, is ultimately self-undermining because it merely reinscribes a hierarchical pattern of authority. The overtly political metanarrative goal, Spicer argues, overrides the narrative means, which themselves fall short of that goal. That is, the goal of shared slayer power—a clearly feminist politics—becomes so important to reach that the means of reaching it fall short of a feminist, dialogic ideal (pars. 1-3). Spicer is pointing to the failure of the two layers of narrative to harmonize. My objective is quite the opposite. I wish to show how these layers are echoes of each other. I will attempt to show how narrative and subjectivization work together at the level of the narrative proper and then turn to the traces we might find in the narrative process that tie into the phenomenon of posthuman subjectivization.

Narrative onto-epistemology in Echo

[12] To situate Echo's subjectivization process, and its reflection of the process by which it was created, it will be helpful to turn for a moment to Buffy's trajectory. J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson argue that Whedon's narratives often revolve around existential choices, particularly choices that his heroes must make for which they are not granted authority by anyone or anything, not even narrative authority. They argue that "moral choice can best be explained through narrative" and "is usually grounded in metaphorical thought based on, proceeding from, prototypes rather than in absolute ethical principles or abstract universal moral rules" (par. 10). The choices that the characters make are made possible by the conditions of the narrative itself—the events leading up to the moment of choice, the "nature" of the character, etc. These choices, in turn, affect the way the narrative unfolds. I argue that they do more than that, however. In Whedon's texts, the choices the characters make often involve changing the very terms of the narrative. For example, Buffy is the chosen one, The Slayer. That identity and subject position define who she is. But then she changes the terms.

When Willow works her mojo and turns all the potentials into full-fledged Slayers, the terms of the narrative have changed, and this crucial change, in turn, radically alters Buffy's own identity. Now she is not the only slayer. She shares the power—and the responsibility—with hundreds of others.

[13] The subjectivization process has much to do with power, particularly in the Foucauldian model. Becoming as a subject is about learning one's configuration within power structures. In her article "'It's About Power': Buffy, Foucault, and the Quest for the Self," Julie Sloan Brannon argues that Buffy's coming to be as a subject echoes the Foucauldian model of subjectivization within discourses and structures of power. The hero's quest is, for Buffy, to find her self. In changing the world, changing the story and the power dynamics, Buffy finds not just her calling, but her self. A similar trajectory unfolds for Echo. Prior to Rossum's tampering with her brain, Echo was Caroline Farrell, but, like the other dolls, Echo does not have access to the personality that was originally hers. Echo must come to be as a subject—and a posthuman one at that—by slowly accessing the fragments of Caroline's story, and she does this largely by accessing these fragments externally. That is, she does not integrate Caroline into her psyche until very late in the narrative. Until then, she must piece the story together as though Caroline is and always was someone else. Caroline herself, locked away on a "wedge," the storage device on which different personalities reside, constitutes Echo's psychic remainder, and it is only through the reintegration of this psychic remainder that the self story can be complete.

[14] Echo, like Buffy, is chosen. This chosen-ness is based on a microbiological predisposition on the part of the body of Caroline. Caroline is special, chosen by the patriarchy, a trope any Whedonite is sure to recognize.[5] But the most crucial aspect here is the fact that the patriarchal chosen-ness rests on the narrative's being controlled by that patriarchy. When Echo, like Buffy before her, changes the story itself, she effectively changes her own role both in the story and in relation to the story. The crucial difference between Buffy's chosen-ness and Echo's lies at the point in the unfolding of the narrative in which they each (and by extension, we as viewers) learn that information. We know from the start that Buffy is chosen, but with Echo, that information is withheld until near the end. In

her essay "Not (Yet) Knowing: Epistemological Effects of Deferred and Suppressed Information in Narrative," Emma Kafalenos reminds us that

> [r]eaders construct fabulas as they read. Each version of fabula that readers construct during the process of reading is a configuration. Readers interpret events as they are revealed in relation to the configuration they have assembled at that stage in their reading. As the fabula one creates grows and extends, the configuration in relation to which one interprets events expands. Interpretations shift as one reads *because* the configuration changes. (52)

Buffy's chosen-ness is something that defines her fabula-construction and the part she plays within it. Echo's is, by contrast, lurking in the margins as a question, a possibility perhaps sensed, but certainly less involved in shaping Echo's becoming. Her biological essence is a factor, but it is not given the privileged position; the essence, like Buffy's stake, is not the power. Echo chooses an acceptance of radical constructedness over essence, and it is this constructedness (and, indeed, the acceptance of it) that signifies the power.

[15] Throughout Season One, Echo proves herself to be a bit different, special. Her doll status seems more aware than the other dolls, and she is in great demand as an Active. It is not until "Omega" (1.12), the penultimate episode of Season One, however, that we see her subjectivize as a fully aware person of her own, a person capable of accessing, or at this stage, perhaps just hearing, the variety of personalities in her head. Echo is not the first doll to become aware of the many people who comprise her. Alpha, the renegade, evolved doll who escaped the dollhouse prior to the viewer's arrival in the narrative, experienced this same phenomenon in his composite event, an "unfortunate technological anomaly" in which Alpha gained access to multiple personalities, including personalities that had been wiped from his brain ("Briar Rose" 1.11). Alpha's subjectivization is demonized—at least at this point. He is unable to integrate his personalities successfully and smoothly, so he becomes a jumble of different personalities the access to which he cannot completely control, resulting in the formation

of a psychopathic genius. His fantasy of being the first Ubermensch results in his plan to make his very own UberEve, and Echo is his choice. He sees that she is special as well and returns to the dollhouse to help her ascend as he has ascended. But, of course, he underestimates her connection to humanity. The scene in which Alpha attempts to meet his Omega is a crucial one for Echo's subjectivization, despite the fact that after being wiped from this experience and put back to Doll status, she will have to come to awareness again and again before it finally sticks. Alpha arranges for Caroline to be imprinted into the body of Wendy, an unfortunate casualty of Alpha's spree. He wants to create Echo's composite event so that the first thing she confronts when she becomes aware is her own human past, her traumatic kernel. He plans for Echo to renounce her humanity and embrace her posthumanity by killing Caroline, but she comes to an understanding of this evolution that is fundamentally different from Alpha's understanding. Rising from the chair, she says, "I get it. Now I understand everything" ("Omega"). She explains the composite experience like this: "I can slip into one. Actually, it slips into me. They had to make room for it. They hollowed me out. There is no me. I'm just a container" ("Omega"). Refusing to play the role in the story that Alpha has written for her, she shows a glimmer of the rebellious spirit that will always refuse the narrative placement in which whatever powers that be attempt to contain her. After the fight with Alpha, Echo says to Caroline, "I'm just the porch light. Waiting for you" ("Omega"). Here, upon first becoming Echo and confronted with her traumatic kernel, she thinks that Caroline is who she wants to be again. This, of course, will change in Season Two.

[16] In Season Two, Echo seems at first to have been successfully wiped from the composite event she experienced in Alpha's chair. We soon learn, however, that the traces of the imprints linger with her. Eventually, she is able to access every imprint she has ever had at will. At this point, Echo becomes an entity of her own, insisting that her "real name's Echo" ("The Attic" 2.10). Thoroughly accepting the radical constructedness of her "essence," she no longer views herself as the porch light waiting for Caroline's return. She has dozens of imprints in her brain, but she seems completely devoid of Caroline.[6] In fact, in order to put the pieces of the larger narrative in place, she must access Caroline, but when Caroline's

wedge is missing, she tells Adelle that while she did not take it, she is glad that it was not there. She is frightened by what the reintegration of her original identity will do to her new one. Even Topher, the scientist responsible for "creating" the personalities that get imprinted in the dolls, is wary of what might happen after reintegrating the original, essential, personality into Echo's constructed psyche ("Getting Closer" 2.11). Echo's traumatic kernel, represented by Caroline, has the power to threaten Echo's existence as a coherent subject.

[17] Before engaging in the epistemological drive that results in a rejoining with her traumatic kernel, Echo must enter the attic, a complex network of intersecting narratives out of which it is ostensibly impossible to break. The Attic is a nightmare landscape of horrors fueled by the adrenaline produced by human brains under prolonged fear. This network composed of human brains (belonging to people who have proven to be a problem, in one way or another, for Rossum's overarching agenda) acts as a powerful processor—powerful enough to compose Rossum's mainframe. Each brain in the attic is caught in a loop of nightmares based on that person's individual fears. Each person is, then, caught in a story of their own creation that they are powerless to change. Echo, of course, can change the story—her own and the stories of others. Clyde Randolph, Boyd's original partner and co-executive of Rossum and the first person to be put into the attic, is surprised that Echo and Dominic are aware. He has been, to his knowledge, the only self-aware brain in the attic, but even he is powerless to change the story scenarios that define his immediate surroundings. Echo, ever the hero, figures out that to change the story in the attic, she has to get out of it and then help the others do the same. To do this, she must die in the attic and resurrect once she flat lines in the physical world. Changing the story in the attic entails exiting it, and the pieces of the story Echo learned while in the Attic give her what she needs to change the story outside of the Attic as well.

[18] In "Epitaph One," the way to Safe Haven is also to be accessed through narrative. The major plot points needed to reconstruct the narrative, represented as fragments, are stored in the imprint chair. These fragments are downloaded via an earlier version of Caroline/Echo, the version that becomes embodied in a child, dubbed by Zone as "Tiny Messiah"

("Epitaph Two: Return" 2.13). Here, Echo is already reintegrated with Caroline, which, coupled with the fact that this version of Caroline/Echo is imprinted into a child, seems to give her an extra dose of posthuman mythos. She now knows the way to Safe Haven, and she has insight into Echo herself, who is mildly uncomfortable with the dynamic this doubling creates. The fact that this double of Caroline is a child is significant. Her interface with the world is necessarily limited by this child's body. She is not as tall or as strong as she is used to being; she has a little girl's voice. Zone and Mag's reactions to her are understandably colored by the body Caroline/Echo is wearing: "Look around, Tiny Messiah, it's over," Zone replies to Caroline's hopeful statement that "we are lost; we are not gone" ("Epitaph Two: Return"). All of this serves to keep a humanist hero in play. What better representation than a walking reminder of that go-to humanist value, sexual reproduction? Once arriving at Neuropolis, Tiny Messiah expects to confront Echo. Mag asks her, "Is it gonna be weird to meet yourself? You know, face to your real face?" ("Epitaph Two: Return"). We never know what her response to this question would be, as they are immediately attacked, but Tiny Messiah seems to take it all in stride. She seems impressed by Echo's plan, showing an approving smile. Meeting with one's double is certainly not a new trope (J.J. Abrams seems particularly fond of this trope, and it occurs in *Buffy* several times), but this doubling consists of two different drafts of the same narrative self as well as a doubling of the mind rather than the body.[7] After the rescue, Echo tells Paul what happened, adding, "I think one of them was me" ("Epitaph Two: Return"). Echo seems slightly disturbed by the doubling, whereas Tiny Messiah seems amused by the opportunity to watch herself, embodied in Caroline, in action—and a self, it should be noted, further along her narrative path.

[19] Echo's final step towards a posthuman subjectivization is her shedding of desire. Unlike Rossum executive Harding's pursuit of desire as he goes through body after body, Echo finally transcends desires. Just before enacting the plan to "bring back the world," Adelle, the head of the Los Angeles dollhouse turned Echo's ally, says to Echo, "Funny that the last fantasy the dollhouse would fulfill would be yours." Echo replies, "I don't have any fantasies, Adelle" ("Epitaph Two: Return"). Still reeling from Paul's

death, Echo perhaps feels at this point that without Paul, there is nothing left to desire. Finding Paul's backup wedge, Echo effectively removes the desire that we as viewers know she does have for Paul by relocating that desire. No longer stuck in a humanist dyad of self and other, Echo queers her relationship with Paul by allowing deeper penetration than is possible for any human subject. Her posthuman subjectivization changes the terms of the story—it rearticulates the fulfillment of desire in such a way that she transcends her desires and the mortal and physical constraints of humanity by allowing Paul to be one of her selves. She adds to her multi-voiced psyche a posthuman queering of subject-object relations resulting in a multi-voiced, internalized fulfillment (theoretically) of desire.[8]

[20] To show the crucial difference between a humanist version of a narrative onto-epistemology and a posthuman one, I want to draw from episode ten of season one ("Haunted"), in which Adelle's friend, Margaret, is resurrected from her wedge into Echo's body. Margaret arranged this resurrection with Adelle so that she could go to her own funeral to see what people would say about her—to get, ostensibly, the truth (as long as the truth is good). But she ends up doing more than that. Convinced that she was murdered, Echo/Margaret's mission is to solve the murder. To solve a murder, particularly in the detective genre, one must put the pieces of a story together such that it "all adds up." Like Echo's, then, Margaret's self-fulfillment lies in finding out the story. Unlike Echo, however, Margaret does not get to change the story itself. She gets to read the ending, but while her connection with Adelle grants her a temporary and likely quite taunting taste of posthumanity, Margaret is thoroughly ensconced in the human. She must die again, this time by willingly being wiped. Indeed, as she is in the chair, waiting to be wiped (with no hope of resurrection), she asks Adelle if she will see her life flash before her eyes. Adelle replies, "every single moment," a clear echo of the visual representation utilized by the show of the fragmented self-stories that make up each doll in Active status.[9] Resigned to her death, Margaret reaches an acceptance of her ontological status, engaging in the epistemological drive only to find closure. Echo, on the other hand, comes to see her ontological status, her place within the intersecting discourses and structures of power, and her epistemological drive follows a trajectory that results in changing the system, changing the

narrative. Not satisfied with humanism, especially since she isn't strictly speaking, a human anymore, Echo effectively hacks into the narrative that she was told was a read-only file.

Conclusion

[21] Echo (with help from her friends, both external and internal) saved the world, but unlike Buffy, she did not change it. She was part of the resistance to a force that inevitably and irrevocably changed the world, and she was a vital part of the entire process of writing the story of humanity. But the telos of the narrative is at least in part a re-entrenchment of humanism. Topher brings back the world, a badly scarred one, true, but nevertheless, the world is "as it should be"—Actuals are now the default once more. Tiny Messiah gets the opportunity to start from where she left off as some other person. Humanism fights back once again. And it kind of wins. But Echo, having spent her entire existence fulfilling the polysemic metaphors of her name, becomes an echo of yet another kind, an echo of a posthuman evolution, a presence that, though residual, is now in the narrative system. It is a presence that has the power to change the story.

[22] But her echo extends even further than that. Her status as a multi-authored subject, a clearly constructed being, echoes the multi-authored nature of the narrative itself. We should shift our focus from Whedon as solitary genius to comment on the collaborative storytelling that seems to happen when Whedon is creatively engaged. In this phrasing the presence signified by Whedon's essential being is merely a powerfully resonating aspect of a system, a narrative system. Whedon and company's posthumanism comes in the form of a fantasy (but a revised one) of authorial agency—a fantasy that exhibits a plurality at multiple narrative levels. Caught in the metanarrative as much as in the narrative, a part of the form just as it is a part of the content, the collaborative nature of storytelling—the social and cooperative efforts of a system to create meaningful narratives—is a force of self-aware changing of the story, which thereby changes the self. The act of accepting the constructed nature of the self is crucial to Echo's survival and success. All of this is not to say that Whedon himself is not important. He clearly is the powerful force behind the

generation of these narratives. But ignoring the very conditions of the creation of the narrative can only lead to critical blind spots. A serious eye needs to be turned to the composition processes involved, to the pluralities in every stage of the narrative, in order to tease out some of the subtler components that might further our thinking on television narratives.

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[1] Adequately defining the difference between an identity and a subject deserves an extended treatment, but for the purposes of this discussion, the critical difference lies in agency and will. That is, Echo is certainly caught within structures of power, but she has a measure of agency regarding how she handles her placement as a self within these structures. The separate personalities used to create Echo have neither wills nor agencies of their own.

[2] This paper will deal almost exclusively with the traumatic kernel on the level of the psychic system. Drawing parallels to the larger social system is an easy jump, however. That is, the backdrop to the story of Echo is the story of the human race struggling to survive the results of its own destructive desires. Again and again we are reminded that something traumatic resides at the core of being itself. Adelle trades the tool to enslave humanity for reinstated power ("Meet Jane Doe" 2.7), Topher doesn't look critically at what he is doing until it is too late and he is trapped within his own ideas ("Epitaph One" 1.13). Like Wolfram and Hart before it, Rossum is the epitome of evil itself. Boyd seems to be the only noble character, and he turns out to be the Big Bad ("Getting Closer" 2.11). Humanity has a lot to answer for in this storyworld.

[3] Second-order systems theory refers to the notion that the investigator or observer is caught up in the system being observed. Clarke's use of system theory is drawn from the theories of Niklas Luhmann, a sociologist who borrowed from various interdisciplinary epistemologies to develop a general theory of systems. The major innovations in this theory include the removal of the subject as a concept (Luhmann reconceptualizes the subject through psychic systems), the importance of a system's differentiation from its environment as a way to reduce complexity through organization, and a system's ability to observe itself as a step to being able

to maintain and reproduce itself. For more detailed explanations, see Luhmann's *Social Systems.* For a more detailed exploration of second order cybernetics or systems theory as well as a concise history of the evolution in cybernetic and systems theory, see N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman*.

[4] Katrina Blasinghame, David Kociemba, Rebecca Williams, Judith Tabron, and Mark Peters have all written articles for *Slayage* dealing with fan communities and their contributions to the larger Buffy mythos.

[5] In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* Buffy is one in a long line of young girls chosen by an ancient patriarchal magic to stand between humanity and the forces of darkness. Buffy finds that she has not only to fight vampires and demons but indeed the patriarchal structures still in place. Buffy breaks away from the Watcher's Council, the modern incarnation of the patriarchal structure, and ends up forming her own, more feminist approach to fighting the evils of the world.

[6] Editors' note: In "Echoes" (1.7), Echo recalls certain of Caroline's memories. See Ginn, this issue.

[7] This trope is of course present in literature as well, but I purposefully pull examples from television, and relatively recent television at that. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* we see splitting or doubling of Xander ("The Replacement" 5.3), Willow ("The Wish" 3.9 and "Doppelgangland" 3.16), Buffy and Faith ("This Year's Girl" 4.15 and "Who Are You" 4.16). J.J. Abrams deals with doubling in *Alias* ("Doppelganger" 1.5 and "Double Agent" 2.14, among others), and he does so extensively in *Fringe*, as almost everyone has a double in the alternate universe.

[8] This reading of Paul's integration into Caroline's psyche ignores the fact that if the show had continued under these conditions, there would undoubtedly be a host of problems resulting from this sidestepping of desire. For example, can a psychic integration that never allows for physical intimacy be satisfying, or would it be more frustrating than merely accepting Paul's death? These are questions that cannot be answered with the narrative closure occurring where it does. Even so, her strategy, regardless of potential problems, reveals her creative ways of changing the story.

[9] This visual representation of the one's life flashing before one's eyes is utilized when the dolls are wiped as well as in the opening credits of the show.