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THEORY BEYOND THE CODES

Silent Television

A Virtual History of Voice and Voicelessness in Divergent Media

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> Our relation, even our critical, political relation to visual culture today should take into account [the various] complications [of the premise that vision is at the heart of Western thought]. They have nothing to do with one sense dominating the other, [but] rather, with another structure of general technoprosthetic virtual possibility -- Jacques Derrida [1]

It is probably not without good reason that there exists, today, no mass of scholarship on the forms and functions of silent television. The very idea flies in the face not only of common sense but also of our accepted histories of television's formation as a cultural and communicative technology. Notwithstanding the tendency to analyze it as an exemplary instance of visual culture, that is, television confronts us as an intractably "audio-visual medium," such that silent television appears, as Herbet Zettl insists, fundamentally unthinkable "from an information, as well as aesthetic, point of view." [2] Such an observation, routinely made in the name of registering the differences between television and cinema, recalls the principle, once sacred in media studies, of attending to the specificity of each medium. Thus silent television's inconceivability stands, according to Michel Chion, in contrast with cinema, [3] whose "pre-history" as a silent medium is widely known and often studied.

What would it mean, then, to propose a history of an inconceivable phenomenon? And what would be the implications of such a history for understanding the complex of technologies, political-economic structures and cultural practices that we more regularly refer to as "television"? Insofar as its apparent impossibility is regularly tied to the medium's defining characteristics, the inconceivability of silent television, as soon as it is identified as such, presents a challenge to any form of criticism that aspires to address the distinctness of television as a cultural form. For despite its apparent inconceivability, references to this unimaginable phenomenon have been made on a number of occasions -- not least of all in the negations of it proposed by Zettl and by Chion -- and so the unthinkability of silent television may turn out to be not so much fundamental as it is virtual. To pursue an unlikely history of a virtual impossibility -- to write a history, not of silent television as such, but rather

of the thought of its apparent im/plausibility -- need not, therefore, be confined to an exploration of television's most general features. In that regard, it is perhaps not irrelevant that the "impossible" thought of silent television should resurface at a time when television's identity is being made over by the development of "new" media and by the related momentum of media and cultural "convergence," which are together presumed to give TV audiences the voice that broadcast television has historically denied them. When the question of television's identity is thus already being asked (as it were) at the practical level of its "everyday" use, the foundations are in place to approach the history of "silent television" with an eye to the fact of television's *divergence* -- attending to the ways in which television diverges from "itself" as much as from the regularities that define our entrenched perceptions of other, related media. It is by way of the metonymic case of televisual silence, therefore, that the following discussion proposes to reflect on a complex of issues pertaining to the variable relations between television, sound, art and cultural participation.

SOUND

Straightforward negations of the phenomenon of silent television are ultimately premised on a simple and implicitly understood historical fact: in terms of its technical capabilities, broadcast television has *always* been an audio-visual medium. Modelled on existing radio broadcasting technologies, television from the time of its introduction as a public communications system has been conceived and operated as a means of transmitting images and sounds concurrently. Perhaps more significantly, not only has television always possessed the power to speak, sing and ring, but the medium was born at a time when a range of aesthetic, production and recording techniques for employing sound in conjunction with images were already being developed and had been more or less established by a highly successful cinema industry. To the extent, moreover, that "the question of [television's] content" during its formative years "was resolved ... parasitically" [4] -- particularly through the simultaneous televisual transmission of radio programming and through the broadcast of Hollywood-produced "tele-films" -- television was effectively "predestined" (with all due respect to Raymond Williams) to emerge fully-fledged as an audio-visual medium.

Unlike cinema, then, broadcast television had no soundless "pre-history" that could be retrospectively identified as constituting "talking" television's prevenient phase. By the same token, what we today call "silent films were, in fact, rarely seen in conditions of silence," as Steve Neale among many others has argued. [5] Indeed, the "silent film," in Raymond Fielding's words, "is a myth. It never existed." [6] In the event of their screenings, so-called silent films were filled (or filled in) with all kinds of sounds, both theatrical and incidental, from scripted sound effects and orchestrated music, through the casual chatter of audience members, to the plurivocal "monologue" of the cinematic occasion's "master of ceremonies," whom Fielding describes as having performed a number of functions:

> First, as a master of ceremonies, he provided a link between the new and somewhat disreputable motion picture and the more respectable music hall and vaudeville traditions with

which audiences were familiar. Second, he read the subtitles, which were then, as they are today, crucial in introducing abstract ideas of any intellectual complexity into the silent motion picture experience.... Finally, he interpreted the motion picture artistically for the members of the audience -- a crucial contribution at a time when the form and the structure of the film, particularly insofar as it involved changes in camera position or editing, was likely to confuse audiences. [7]

What was born with the advent of the "talkies," then, was not film sound as such, but "an entirely different *kind* of sound" -- the mechanized reproduction of a standardized "soundtrack" that enabled "the same sound performance" to accompany a given "film from day to day, theater to theater, screening to screening." [8] With the introduction of the new sound recording and playback technologies, moreover, came the standardization and entrenchment of a particular form of aural address, [9] one defined by a more perfect synchronization of sound with the image of action and by a corresponding decrease in the use of non-diegetic sound outside of the film score. [10] The standardization and synchronization of sound were particularly significant of course for the purpose of introducing the voice -- spoken dialogue -- into the film text. But perhaps the more notable effect is the one such dialogue had on the film-going experience, as Alexander Walker argues:

> The addition of dialogue did not simply add a dimension to the experience; it replaced an attitude towards it.... Silent movies had enabled the casual customer to drop in, and within a minute or two be locked into the story and characters. Mime-acting made the characters' predicaments easily intelligible; sub-titles gave people emotional cues to follow rather than narrative points to recall. But dialogue changed all this: it demanded attention, it enforced silence on the audiences who had hitherto been able to swap comments on the movie below the music of the pianist or pit orchestra. Now one had to shut up, sit up and pay attention to a plot that more and more was conveyed in words, not pictures. [11]

The transition from "silent" to "talking" motion pictures can be marked, therefore, not by the appearance of a soundtrack that had been formerly absent from film exhibition, but by the emergence of a *new regime of listening* [12] marked by a demand for aural attentiveness to the film text itself and, simultaneously, by a synthesis of image and sound in a one-directional causal relationship. If the former feature appears to grant sound a newly privileged place in the cinematic event, moreover, the second undermines that standing with the demand that the soundtrack be "identified with, and subordinated to, the image" of action, [13] a "naturalism" in sound production and reception that ensures film carries on as vision first, audio second -- pictures with sound, not the inverse. [14]

Given this continuing privilege granted to cinema's visuality, it's not surprising that the history of that form should continue to be commonly understood in terms of an abrupt transition from its early, static "silent"

phase and its sudden arrival as a fully-matured, albeit incrementally optimizable, multi-modal aesthetic enterprise. And it is in the purview of this reconstituted history that the inconceivability of silent television is itself able to be imagined -- notwithstanding the fact that the aurality of television, at least at the time of its introduction, probably owed much more to the production techniques and routines of consumption associated with radio than it did those that governed the talking motion picture. Hollywood "tele-film" production formed only a small component of television content up until the mid-1950s, with the US networks up to that point "resisting filmed programming" and clinging to live television instead, with the aim of "control[ling] program supply and national advertising distribution." [15] The bulk of television programming before that time took the form of live broadcasts (including talk shows, sportscasts, dramatic performances and variety shows) often modelled on formats developed for radio -- hence the recurring description of television as "radio with pictures." In this way, the history of television ought to be more readily depicted as sound first, image second -- as an initial "blindness" before the attainment of vision -- than imagined in terms of an antediluvian phase of silence. It is a testament, therefore, to the power of the naturalist (or formal-realist) regime of listening ushered in by the standardization of film sound that the myth of the "silent film" lives on not merely as an emblem of cinema's formative years but also as the near-exclusive model for conceiving of silent television's impossibility.

And so it should come as no surprise that Lynn Spigel's recent speculation on silent television turns for evidence of its plausibility, not to closed-circuit television (CCTV) -- which from a technological perspective would surely count as silent TV's definitive form -- but to the pantomime and sight gags of television comedian Ernie Kovacs. [16] For Spigel, Kovacs' *Saturday Night Color Carnival* (aired on NBC in 1957) stands as a stark counter-example to Chion's argument that silent television is inconceivable. [17] Eschewing the prevailing norms of commercial television, the "Silent Show," as Kovacs' half-hour special was widely known, "turned to silent cinema for models" and "evoked the physical mayhem of the silent clowns." [18] Recalling the image of Buster Keaton in particular, Kovacs' sketches consisted of sight gags, pantomime, musical montages, and surreal sketches premised on visual tricks and on "the incongruity of sight against sound." [19] Apart from a brief opening monologue, the "Silent Show" was characterized by a complete lack of speech. In its place, viewers were treated to the antics of Kovacs' mute Chaplinesque character, Eugene, whose movements within his fictional world generated some surprisingly unnaturalistic results:

> When Eugene looks at a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, the painting laughs. When Eugene opens a book titled, "Digging the Panama Canal," we hear the crashing sounds of heavy machinery. Similarly, when Eugene opens up *Camille*, the novel emits sounds of a coughing woman. When Eugene dials a telephone..., the soundtrack plays loud machine gun noises in lieu of normal dial tones. [20]

Rather than an alternation of voices, then, Kovacs' television skit foregrounds a cacophony of noises. As a program thus virtually bereft of verbal communication, the "Silent Show" marks a manifest divergence from

the established conventions of the medium.

But perhaps the most interesting aspect of Kovacs' work is captured in Spigel's argument that the "Silent Show" was "directed at wider social anxieties about the disruptive and distasteful noise of the new commercial television culture." [21] Produced at a time when public displeasure about "television's relentless chatter and offensive commercial din" was increasingly expressed, Kovacs' silent special consciously sought to provide relief for its audience from television's incessant "conversation," as testified by the show's invitation to its viewers, made in the opening monologue, "to spend half an hour without hearing any dialogue at all." [22] As Spigel explains, the 1950s were characterized by much vexation over television's perceived faults and evils -- its potential for deceit and even fraud; its predilection for "tasteless," "lowbrow" entertainment -- which came to be metonymized by perceptions of the medium's "noise": its constant barrage of canned laughter, over-modulated advertisements, and excessively vocal ex-radio entertainers. Such concerns about TV noise thereby created the conditions for exploring "new forms of silent television," providing a popular base for the virtually avant-garde nature of the *Saturday Night Color Carnival*. [23] Indeed, according to Spigel, the popular and commercial interest in silence as a respite from television's aural assault not only spawned Kovacs' special but "gave way to a rash of television programs that also experimented with silence and silent-film techniques." [24] And while the "Silent Show" perhaps demonstrated Kovacs' most sustained experiment with silent TV, it was far from an isolated event: Kovacs took his taste for pantomime and non-verbal humour into most of his television endeavours, peppering his subsequent television appearances with sketches featuring little dialogue, or none at all, and even producing a number of largely non-verbal advertisements for his favorite sponsor, Dutch Masters Cigars. [25] *Contra* Chion, then, far from being inconceivable, silent television appeared, for a time, on the verge of becoming the medium's pre-eminent form.

Fast-forward -- or, indeed, "skip" -- forty years, to a more recent event in television history: Episode 10 from Season IV of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*Buffy*). Titled "Hush" (1999), the episode of the Joss Whedon-created television series -- about a super-powered young woman who is fated to battle vampires, demons and the forces of evil with the aid of her high-school friends (the "Scooby gang") -- is notable for its 26 consecutive minutes featuring virtually no dialogue. The main plotline centers on a group of fairytale monsters known as "the Gentlemen" who arrive undetected at Sunnydale (the fictional town in which *Buffy* is set) with the intention of stealing seven human hearts -- for reasons known neither to the characters nor to the audience, but understood implicitly by all as inhumanly evil. As the only thing that can slay the monsters is a human scream, the Gentlemen use their supernatural powers to capture the voices of the Sunnydale population, thereby providing the narrative premise for the lack of dialogue during the second and final acts. Meanwhile, the episode advances a number of season story arcs concerning the relationships between the main characters, most significantly the one between Buffy and her new love interest, Riley, whom Buffy has not been able to inform of her fantastical calling (nor of her feelings for him), and who likewise has an aspect of his identity -- the fact that he is a soldier in a secret military "Initiative" -- that he is hiding from Buffy. As the episode progresses, Buffy

and Riley attempt, separately and in ignorance of the other's efforts, to determine the cause of the Sunnydale population's mysterious voicelessness and to protect the town from its as-yet unidentified attackers. In a final confrontation with the Gentlemen towards the end of the episode, Buffy, with the fortuitous assistance of Riley, regains her voice and slays the Gentlemen with a sustained, ear-piercing scream. General "normality" is thus restored, as demanded by the episodic logic of television, but the fate of the developing relationship between Buffy and Riley is not so secure, each of the pair having learnt that the other has something to hide, and neither of them knowing quite how to tell the other about their own secret identity.

While the experimentation of "Hush" may fall short of the exemplar set by Kovacs' NBC special, its deliberate suspension of dialogue conjures once again the unconventional thought of silent television. Not only does the episode make use of many of the narrative devices of silent cinema -- pantomime performances, sight gags and written communication of narrative points -- it also incorporates several self-conscious and self-reflexive allusions to the role of sound in the viewing experience. One scene, in particular -- crucial in terms of relaying information both to the characters and to audiences -- unfolds as a kind of postmodern parody of silent film exhibition. In the scene, the Scooby-gang have gathered in an auditorium, ready to attend to a silent lecture on the Gentlemen given by Giles (Buffy's "Watcher" and the gang's resident expert in the occult). In a move that recalls silent film's use of subtitles, Giles places transparencies on an overhead projector to present his notes, but -- absurdly -- before he does so, he walks around to a cassette recorder next to the projector and plays a tape to soundtrack his presentation with appropriate theme music. From then, in a kind of abortive mimesis, members of Giles' audience (who are simultaneously characters in a drama for our benefit) react in pantomime to the slides revealed by Giles, generating numerous sight gags into the bargain -- all the while "ex-Demon" (and newest member of the Scooby gang) Anya plays the role of audience member, sitting at the back of the theater, eating popcorn and enjoying the show.

Still on another level, the silence of "Hush" reacts against a forceful history of media sound through its suspension of an industrially standard production and narrative technique. The episode is often remarked upon for its lack of dialogue, and after the episode first aired Whedon explicitly described his aesthetic goal for "Hush" in terms of breaking with the conventional techniques of television production. [26] In a comment that recalls early reviews of television as "radio with pictures" [27] as well as Chion's argument that commercial television "is fundamentally a kind of radio, 'illustrated' by images," [28] Whedon complains,

> One thing that I don't *love* about television is that a lot of it is what I refer to as "radio with faces".... If you want to shoot a scene quickly, just put somebody up against a wall, have them say their lines, and -- boomph -- it's done.... On a practical level, the idea of doing an episode where everyone loses their voice presented itself as a great big challenge, because I knew that I would literally have to tell the story *only* visually.

In view of Whedon's remark, however, the cultural significance of TV silence seems irreducible to the question of sound alone. On Spigel's account, the apparent impossibility of silent TV stems from "the cultural and industrial demand" for television "to secure the illusion of liveness over death," following "western culture's" association of silence with extinction and "the end of time." [29] To be sure, in "Hush" and in Buffy more generally the depiction of extermination and oblivion are par for the course, such that the show's thematic link between silence and death appears assured. But Whedon's commentary eschews such quasi-mystical thoughts in favor of an account of silent TV's aesthetic effects that alludes to the medium's distribution across a limited range of pre-existing auralities constituted in relation to prevailing production conventions and habits of listening.

To make the obvious point here, neither Kovacs' "Silent Show" nor Whedon's "Hush" is actually lacking a standardized soundtrack, and so the silence they promise retains a grounding in television's normal technical processes of production. [30] Moreover, in both cases their aesthetic endeavours exploit not simply the possibilities of sound, but also the potentialities of the television *image*, such that their respective experiments -- not with sound as such, but with *television* sound -- cannot be understood in terms of any straightforward repetition of silent film techniques. As Spigel herself notes,

> Kovacs specialized in absurd visual tricks, elaborate set pieces, and anti-realist montage symphonies that juxtaposed rapidly edited and incongruous images against music ranging from the classical compositions of Tchaikovsky to ... offbeat contemporary performers.... Meanwhile, his numerous sight gags and visual tricks used sound counter-intuitively and sometimes with no particular relation to the image at all. [31]

Qua counter-intuitive, such uses of sound, whether for the purpose of avant-gardist experimentation or of "mere" popular comedy, require attention to the image if they are to have any chance of "working" aesthetically. Similarly, Whedon's overriding aesthetic aim for "Hush" (and for *Buffy* generally) was to have "the show work *visually*," to produce something "visual and cinematic, and not just people a-yacking." In both cases, then, the absence of dialogue seems defined by its attention to the vision: "silent" TV's enlistment of silent film models and techniques thus operates in the name of accomplishing not silence so much as relatively spectacular tele-*visual* feats.

By the same token, the sound of television "itself" might best be understood in terms not of the "talking motion picture" against which pre-1926 cinema stands as "silent," but of the aurality associated with television's "blind" precursor: the modes of listening peculiar, that is, to broadcast radio. While across its history television certainly has taken what it could from the film industry (including pre-produced content, dramatic production techniques, audience formations and more), its initial anchoring in the milieu of broadcasting -- hence, its communicative "flow," its heavy reliance on radio for genres of programming, its domestic context of consumption, and so on -- has, from the beginning, sustained forms of engagement that are markedly different to the formal-realist listening regime established by the

"talkies." Where the arrival of standardized soundtracks in cinema rewarded forms of engagement marked by attention to sound and image (or, indeed, to sounds seemingly emanating from images), television's "pre-history" prepared its audiences for a potentially different kind of viewing experience. As "radio with pictures," in other words -- and as Chion has already argued [32] -- television needn't be *viewed* at all, and so neither sight nor sound in broadcast television has quite the same significance as it does in the context of film production and reception.

This is as much as to note the essential *in/separability* of sight and sound, the simultaneously severable and inseverable bond between vision and audio. While the relationship between sight and sound is undoubtedly reconfigurable (as Kovacs' and Whedon's respective audio-visual experiments demonstrate), neither of those components is constituted outside the cultural, economic, and political contexts that shape the respective auralities established by divergent traditions of audio-visual production and reception. To the extent that these contexts differ markedly for television and cinema, the audio-vision *relationship* in television routinely diverges from that defining cinema in both its "talking" and its silent phases. In this way, the equation of silent television with silent film ultimately fails to capture the *sound* of televisual silence -- how (silent) *television* is *heard* -- and thus falls short in accounting for the latter's properties, let alone its cultural significance. If the arrival of standardized sound in the film industry imposed silence on audiences and demanded their attention, the absence of dialogue from the television viewing experience should not be assumed therefore to release audiences from such impositions or to return to them the capacity to "drop in and out" of the narrative with ease -- and this if only because broadcast television had already more or less conceded audiences this freedom, had already constituted itself around such a capacity, which had previously been acquired through a familiarity with radio. On the contrary, then, the effect of silent television's lack of dialogue -- the event of "silence" in broadcast television -- can be understood in terms similar to those accounting for the arrival of sound in film, as demanding of its audiences, that is, a kind of attention that is otherwise practiced as inessential to the TV "viewing" experience. Even as it breaks the perceived natural bond between sound and image, therefore, silent television demands of its viewers that they grant the televisual text an aesthetic completeness that it is otherwise rarely given.

ART

So: what of the forty years that separates the "Silent Show" and "Hush"? The fact that Chion -- a distinguished thinker of "the audio-visual contract" -- had cause in 1990 to doubt the possibility of silent television without having to acknowledge the experiments with silence ushered in by Kovacs suggests not only that the dominant image of silent TV fails to capture the sound of televisual silence, but also that the effects of the industry's early forays in that direction proved temporary or limited. Or rather, as Spigel's analysis implies, such experiments were more likely corralled into those channels in which the attention-capturing effects of silence could be most profitably employed -- into the realm, for example, of television advertising. [33] Freed from the analytical bias of the "silent cinema" model, a history of

silent TV can find textual examples of televisual silence appearing with greater regularity than one might at first suspect, turning up not only in advertising, but also in the sparseness of voice-over narration accompanying nature documentaries and in the respectful attention accorded to athletes by the hushed pauses peppering certain forms of sports commentary. [34] In this regard, Chion's remarks on silent television can be read less as a comment on the medium's essential features than as a lament on what he saw as its limited aesthetic potential at that time. While Spigel's study of Kovacs is presented largely as a negation of Chion's pessimism, her very recovery of the former's work (by means of a genealogical speculation on TV sound), and its subsequent depiction *as* counter-evidence does much to prove the momentary credibility of Chion's claim. Chion's remark can be heard as true for a time, so to speak, and to neglect the facticity of silent television's momentary or bounded implausibility would be not only to deny, potentially, that televisual silence has a history but also to leave the ordinariness of televisual aesthetics unremarked. For silent TV seems in the first instance to be imagined always as an experimental aesthetic form and not as a regular televisual occurrence, a routine, if barely noticed, element of television's ordinariness. That the thought of silent TV continues, moreover, to be defined in terms of a lack of *dialogue* says a great deal more about what telepoetic forms are practised as endemic to the medium's artistic potential than it does about televisual silence as such. The apparent impossibility of silent television thus says something about television's (in)conceivability as an art form, as both Whedon's attempt to overturn the medium's conventions and Spigel's affirmation of Kovacs' avant-gardism may attest.

In this regard, it's interesting to note that the example of "Hush" happens to have emerged at a time when TV's capacity to be imagined as art is being reconfigured in the most significant transformation to television sound to have occurred perhaps since the 1950s. While television is currently subject to a range of industrial and technological changes, one modification in particular -- the embrace of DVD technology for the purpose of retailing television programming -- is significant both for its potential impact on TV sound and for its capacity to redefine television as an aesthetic form. For the advent of the DVD box set has seen a veritable explosion in the packaging and marketing of televisual material for viewer purchase and collection. While the cultural significance of the DVD may appear to owe a great deal to its most immediate forbearers -- notably, videotape and the home video cassette recorder -- DVD technology, as Derek Kompare argues, has brought about changes the significance of which even the VCR, with its potential to turn every television receiver into a television editor, was never able to match:

> With much higher resolution sound and image, random access capability, a smaller size, and most significant, a larger storage capacity, the DVD has rejuvenated the home video industry and has finally enabled television to achieve what film had by the mid-1980s, namely, a viable direct-to-consumer market for its programming.

> The pivotal innovation of this achievement is the season box set: a multiple-disc DVD package containing an entire season's worth of episodes from a particular television

series. First introduced by Fox with the release of the first season of *The X-Files* in April 2000, the box set ... extends the reach of the institution of television into home video to an unprecedented degree and functions as an intriguing aesthetic object in its own right. It culminates the decades-long relationship between television and its viewers, completing the circle through the material purchase -- rather than only the ephemeral viewing -- of broadcast texts. [35]

Crucial in this regard is the level of expansion that the DVD box set introduced to the television home video market, turning otherwise marginal retail and viewer practices into structural determinants in television production and reception. Although the VCR provided viewers with the capacity to build their own archives of televised material, that is, the commercial success of the DVD box set offers an alternative source of funding for television production (which in turn has implications for the life expectancy of particular television series), while the promise of programming's DVD publication has the potential to dramatically alter TV viewing habits. Most notably, DVD box sets literally objectify an audio-visual text that previously had been accessible in and as televisual flow. As Kompare argues, then,

in the wake of innovative cultural artifacts like *The X-Files* box sets, home video is a much more significant factor in the cultural lifetime of a television series, and the experience of popular culture in general, than it was only a few years ago. As the television of the twenty-first century takes shape ... perhaps the flow of television is [now measurable] not only ... in time but in physical commodities, as cultural objects placed in the permanent media collection alongside similarly mass-produced media artifacts (books, recordings, films on home video). [36]

When broadcast television meets with DVD technology and direct-to-consumer marketing, TV thus diverges from itself, diverging away from the indistinct form of "ordinary television" and its associated regimen of ephemeral, inattentive viewing to the extraordinary form of aesthetic object and cultural artifact. TV diverges, that is, into two forms: mundane, ephemeral *flow* and distinct, appreciable *publication*; "ordinary television" and "special television." [37] And in this way the DVD is helping to reshape television -- or at least certain aspects of it -- as an aesthetic enterprise. For its literal objectification of television programming introduces a practical basis not only for generating wider levels of consumption than broadcast television -- extending television's reach across both geographical and temporal, potentially generational boundaries -- but also for undertaking repeated and close "readings" of television texts in a way unimaginable in the context of broadcast viewing. And so DVD technology makes critical, aesthetic reflection on television texts more plausible than ever before, concomitantly granting television's serial form a cultural respectability that it had previously struggled to achieve.

Perhaps critical in this respect is the fact that, as Kompare states, "DVD box sets provide the content of television without the 'noise' and limitations of the institution of television." [38] As it was for Ernie Kovacs, then, it

seems that once again TV's status as art form is won at the moment that television ceases to *sound* like television. And so DVD technology can be read not only in terms of its potential to commodify and fetishize particular (predominantly dramatic) events within the televisual flow, but also in terms of its initiation of a radical transformation to television's sound-image relationship. For not only does DVD publication extract the program narrative from the sea of sounds that form the backdrop to its broadcast -- in effect *silencing* everything that we would otherwise call *television* -- but, unlike videotape, the technology also introduces the possibility of packaging any number of alternative soundtracks alongside the vision, a capacity which is routinely put to use for the purpose of bundling commentary tracks with the original soundtrack. Indeed, the "Director's commentary" has fast become not only a standard feature, but a key selling point for the DVD publication of both television and film.

In principle, of course, there is nothing about the DVD format which demands that its storage capacity and the data access features be employed for the purpose of laying commentary over the dramatic production. But from the perspective of the history of silent television, such use takes on particular significance. For the DVD commentary recalls without reproducing certain dimensions of the sound of silent cinema. Predominantly (if not purely) non-diegetic in form, for example, the overlaid commentary shatters the "naturalism" of sound that has dominated audio-visual production since the late 1920s. In place of that former unity, the commentary affords a service comparable to that provided by silent film's "master of ceremonies," whose voice, as Neale explains, would "oscillat[e] between its function as an extension of the film itself (speaking the characters' dialogue, generally amplifying the drama of the story) and its role as a source of information and authority outside it (perhaps giving technical information about the film and those involved in its production)." [39] Of course, as an aspect of film *exhibition*, the role of MC in silent cinema was open to be performed potentially by anyone, and, in principle, the same could be said of the role of DVD commentator. Indeed, the option exists for multiple commentaries from all kinds of sources, their number limited only by the overall data capacity of the disc (which the newer Blu-ray format promises to increase significantly). In practice, however, access to the role of commentator is almost exclusively the privilege of the television narrative's writer/director/series creator.

In this regard, a significant difference between the silent film MC and the DVD Director's commentary is the generic imperative in the latter to employ the first person, such that a director is not only authorized but expected to say "I," to state his or her intentions. And in this way external expert commentary is transformed into authorial exegesis, breathing new life into a putatively dead author. Accordingly, Whedon (for example) uses his commentary track on "Hush" to provide all manner of insight (as cited earlier) into his ambitions for *Buffy* and his aesthetic aims for that particular episode. In a gesture that vividly illustrates the potential for DVD commentary to deepen audience understandings of the industrial nature of television, Whedon also speaks at length on the various constraints that the production conventions and schedule demands place on the development of serial television. But perhaps reiterating the fact of silent television's inevitable attention to vision, the bulk of his observations focus on the obstacles confronting the composition of images -- lighting issues, the

spatial and temporal considerations involved in set design and use, the challenges that long one-takes present for editing to program length, and so on. In fact, aside from a couple of brief remarks concerning the use of music, Whedon's few observations on the nature of television audio deal exclusively with the aesthetic and thematic significance of the episode's suspension of dialogue. In a remark thus validating (as it were) the argument that "silent" TV is characterized not by the formal absence of *sound* but by the aesthetic question of *verbal communication*, Whedon informs us that "Hush" is "about" language, that it is about the idea

> that when people stop talking they start communicating, that language can interfere with communication, because language limits. As soon as you say something, you've eliminated every other possibility of what you might be talking about; and we also use language to separate ourselves from other people; we also use language as white noise; ... we also misuse it horribly. All of these things appear in the show, because once I realized that the episode was about communication, I then found that absolutely everything I wrote was completely on theme. [40]

Thus "Hush" unfolds: as a warped, nightmarish counterpart to Rousseau's discourse on the origin of language, a fantasy in which the loss of our capacity for speech, despite being accompanied by the most unspeakable of horrors, is what finally gives us the power to truly communicate. But in the choice between non-invasive linguistic violence and involuntary heart removal, speech must surely prove to be the lesser evil, and so prudential calculation, if nothing else, demands that normal channels of communication be restored *post haste*. Enter: Buffy and Riley to kick some monster butt, as the Slayer would put it. But "once we get our voices back," Whedon warns, "we stop communicating, after we'd been doing so well."

Packaged as it is alongside the program itself, Whedon's account of the narrative is granted an official, literally authoritative status. In an age in which the author-function thus triumphs over even the widely conceded fact of television's collaborative nature, the auteur's corpse stands re-animated (if indeed it ever truly died). Having cast serial television as an object worthy of aesthetic inspection, in other words, DVD publication opens the door to an entire discourse on art, paving the way for television's acceptance as an aesthetic enterprise, though perhaps at the cost of critical engagement with its more distinctive features. While literary theory has done much to challenge the author's sovereignty over cultural production, then, the force -- and, indeed, the profitability -- of traditional aesthetic discourse appears far from diminished. Standing in for the long-presumed (or long-enforced) silence of its audience, DVD commentary shadows the main feature, providing an audible, material check on "the cancerous and dangerous proliferation ... of meaning." [41] In its specific form as Director's commentary, moreover, DVD's extended audio capability amounts to the convergence of artistic and commercial control over television sound even after the event, privileging authorized contexts of interpretation -- not least of all the idea that the accompanying narrative is a product of authorial intent, complete in itself and unified by its artistic vision -- and thereby potentially silencing alternative interpretations of cultural texts.

As ever, such systems of control are far from perfect. [42] Not only does the very existence of the parallel commentary track thrust upon viewers a limited interactivity and a kind of direction over the narrative, in the form of a menu of audio-visual options, but -- as it happens in the case of "Hush" -- the Director's commentary can sometimes be heard, quite audibly, to undercut its own account of the narrative's significance. In the first place, there's the irony of Whedon's observations taking the form of a *verbal* commentary track over the (audio)visually communicative text, which ought, by its own logic, convey what the episode is all about far more effectively than Whedon's speech. Beyond such performative paradoxes, the narrative events themselves routinely show up Whedon's notion of a more authentic form of expression for the fantasy that it is. Indeed, the episode's many hilarious sight gags are essentially premised on the realization that non-verbal forms of communication are susceptible, no less than speech, to misuse, misinterpretation and misdirection. A great deal less genial is one tension-filled scene, in which one character's knocks on her neighbours' doors, made in a frantic attempt to raise the alarm, are met with fear and suspicion from the rooms' occupants, leaving the Gentlemen's would-be victim to fend for herself. Voicelessness, "Hush" thus consistently shows (against its "author's intentions"), promises no access to more direct, reliable and sincere forms of communication, only more confusion, misunderstanding and violence. Worse still, loss of the power of speech simply adds to the horror of our communicative condition, precisely through the removal of one of our most ready means of calling for help.

PARTICIPATION

As the introduction of recorded-sound playback in film and the advent of the Director's commentary already indicate, the history of silent television is necessarily entwined with images of the television audience. To be sure, in the early days of mass communication theory the unidirectional nature of the television transmission was routinely taken as relegating audiences to the role of passive, voiceless media receivers. Uncritical and unproductive, TV viewers of yore would -- theoretically -- sit in silence as they watched and absorbed programming produced by a privileged few. Today, however, the image of the silent viewer seems particularly obsolete, as the development of the Internet (especially "web 2.0") and the corresponding emergence of a "convergence culture" are read for their role in giving audiences a "voice" that a former age of mass media seemingly denied them. "Interactivity," "participatory media," "citizen journalism," "content co-creation," "produsage" and "user-generated content" (UGC) are all by now familiar tropes in media criticism and all point to the increased potential, granted primarily by the development of web-based communications, for what were once called "media audiences" to play an active role in the production, circulation and criticism of what was once called "media content." [43] From reader-submitted book reviews and personal weblogs, through Flickr and MySpace Music, to machinima and media mashups uploaded to YouTube, the opportunities for "non-professional" (new)media users to produce, publish and distribute cultural texts of all kinds have never been so abundant as they are today. And so the era in which television audiences' voices could be registered only through the restricted decision to watch or not to watch -- as measured

and interpreted by an industry-managed ratings system, no less -- would seem to be well and truly over.

Of course, there's more than a little hyperbole to this story of a new media-generated transition from silent spectatorship to babelic net-working. As José van Dijck has argued, "the implied opposition between passive recipients defined by old media (e.g. television) and active participants inhabiting digital environments, particularly UGC sites, is a historical fallacy." [44] There is, for example, a documented history of the "receivers" of mass cultural forms becoming content producers themselves. Most notably, Janice Radway's study of readers of romance fiction identifies, as an element within a gift-economy running parallel to the system of commercially-driven mass cultural production, the significant incidence of romance readers going on to become romance writers. [45] Likewise, Spigel notes in her discussion of Kovacs that his "experiments with sound and image inspired viewers to create their own experimental art," with "numerous fans" having sent him "unusual drawings, trick photographs, and descriptions of performances modeled on Kovacs's interest in sound-image experimentation." [46] Such "amateur" productions, moreover, have even made their way on occasion into primetime television via the various national productions of the *Funniest Home Video* franchise, [47] the latter counting perhaps as a kind of precursor to the now seemingly ubiquitous UGC interface YouTube. Beyond these examples of media-receiver-turned-producer (as the latter is conventionally defined), there is a strong tradition of audience analysis emphasizing the intrinsic capacity of media audiences to "co-create" media texts by way of "active interpretation." In fact, since at least the 1980s, most theories of textual meaning and audience reception have insisted not just on the possibility but on the necessity of such sense-making (inter)activity on the part of audiences for media texts to be "received" in the first place. Audiences, in other words, have always participated in the creation of media texts to varying degrees, have always interacted with their preferred (i.e. chosen) media sources -- and this because "participation," "interactivity" and "co-creation" are not qualities of particular kinds of technology (the Internet, computers, video games, etc.) but rather functions of the event of reception itself. As the old saying has it, "there's always the off button." Indeed, there's always the volume control, too, which remains an unobtrusive yet ever-present totem of the TV audience's capacity to "co-create" silent television at will.

By the same token, if media reception has always been structured by the potential for a certain kind of "produsage," it would be folly to suggest that modes of participation and capacities for co-creation aren't distributed and activated in historically and situationally variable ways. In this regard, it must be recognized that the rapidly expanding availability of computing and Internet technologies has significantly supplemented "audience" members' access to the semiotic means of critical and creative production by providing increased opportunities to generate not just ideational and linguistic "texts" but multi-media texts, too, and to distribute them on a potentially large scale. What is thus different in the digital era, as van Dijck puts it, "is that users have better access to networked media, enabling them to 'talk back' in the same multi-modal language that frames cultural products formerly made exclusively in studios." [48] The question, then, concerns not whether but what kind of voice the Internet, et al. have given

the viewing public: in what ways, that is, and to what extent have digital and networked communications technologies transformed television audiences' presumed conditions of silence?

One particularly visible transformation to viewers' capacity to "speak" to the television industry as well as amongst themselves lies in the Internet's provision of opportunities to publish -- hence to make widely available and semi-permanent -- interpretative and evaluative responses to broadcast programming. Even before it earned its "2.0" tag, the web produced many outlets for at least some users, the so-called "early adopters," to express themselves on topics that concerned them the most. From as far back as the early-90s, free web hosting services such as Tripod, Angelfire and the recently defunct GeoCities, followed by freeware Internet forum packages and services like ezboard, phpBB and Yahoo! Groups, helped establish the virtual conditions for media audiences to voice their opinions on cultural forms of all kinds, including television. [49] In a kind of direct democracy of TV criticism as against the indirect representation of audience interests provided by self- or industry-appointed TV critics, then, viewer response to televisual programming was able to move outside the traditional domains of the living room and the proverbial office water-cooler and into forums whose audience reach was in-principle (albeit virtually never in fact) as large as some television shows themselves. And in this way, such online forums offered the promise not only of completing the feedback loop -- providing TV Networks with the means for gauging audience sentiment seemingly directly, which is to say in the form of reactions registered by viewers on a TV program's "official" online discussion forum -- but also the chance for viewers to present their own assessments and readings of televisual materials in a marked challenge to the cultural authority of the paid TV reviewer.

The relative stability of such audience criticism, however, remains a significant question. While some conceptions of the Internet may offer a seductive image of the technology's archival potential, the silent closure of GeoCities in October 2009 provides a signal of the comparatively fragile, even transient nature of Internet publication. [50] As the vast majority of online discussion of cultural texts takes place in forums hosted and administered not by audience members or private Internet users but by commercial organizations, control over the *continuity* and *duration* of publication remains in the hands of those commercial providers of website-hosting services. Accordingly, the continuing existence of whole petabytes of audience feedback, criticism and interaction becomes not a simple fait accompli grounded in technological development but also a contingency in commercial decision-making. This is particularly true for audience response and debate published in forums attached to a given program's "official website" -- within a space, that is, hosted by the TV Networks themselves. Because these websites are more likely to be administered according to the exigencies and temporality of program promotion than established on the basis of heritage-minded ideals of eternal reposition, the critical output of entire communities is routinely lost to the ether -- as anyone seeking to revisit the discussions that unfolded at UPN's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* online forum ("The Bronze") at the time of its broadcast would soon learn. As measured particularly against the becoming-permanence that DVD publication is now granting select televisual programming, then, audience-generated criticism enjoys (or suffers) a relatively more ephemeral

existence.

If the loss of this form of audience activity to the ravages of television time seems a somewhat trivial concern, a challenge merely to the naïve "web 1.0" fantasy of comprehensive storage, it nevertheless provides some portent of the potential for affirmations of participatory media to overlook the continuing recourse of new media user-producers to services provided by corporate media. [51] Indeed, the entire rhetoric of "produsage" all too readily disguises the distinction between content producer and content host (or distributor) -- a distinction which takes on particular significance in the context of claims made for the potential of UGC sites such as YouTube to enable audiences to "talk back" in the languages of audio-visual production, where the costs of archiving and streaming are significantly higher than is the case for primarily text-based discussion forums. As Julie Levin Russo has argued, "as long as the infrastructure for video hosting remains prohibitively expensive, not to mention legally delicate, grassroots producers who wish to participate in the culture of streaming depend on commercial social media sites for distribution." [52] Such dependence not only forces users to share (if not sign over) their intellectual property rights with the hosting service [53] but also leaves users with "a lack of recourse" in the event that the latter decides unilaterally to suspend the former's submissions. [54]

At the same time, the design of UGC interfaces themselves inevitably furrow channels or pathways to particular content in ways which potentially regulate user participation. [55] YouTube's home page, for instance, promotes specific clips (and, ultimately, specific forms of content) through its prominent display of thumbnails and links to "Featured Videos" -- chosen by YouTube "editors" in a process that is entirely hidden from the YouTube "community" but which results in astronomical increases to the featured clips' view rates and to their uploaders' profiles. [56] Also promoted on the home page are selected clips from a range of categories defined in terms not of textual content but of user activity. While ostensibly these categories constitute simple reflections of viewing practices (e.g. "Videos Being Watched Now," "Most Popular," "Top Favorited"), they are not for that reason free from the regulatory effects of YouTube's commercial goals and operational structure -- not least of all because the videos are necessarily selected on the basis of "algorithms, the technical details of which remain undisclosed." [57] As Jean Burgess and Joshua Green argue, for instance, YouTube's "popularity metrics"

> are not representations of reality, but technologies of
> re-presentation. Because they communicate to the audience
> what counts as popular on YouTube, these metrics also take
> an active role in creating the reality of what is popular on
> YouTube: they are not only descriptive; they are also
> performative. [58]

While it would be wrong, therefore, to discount the role of "practices of audiencehood" in constructing the "YouTubeness of YouTube," [59] the site's interface, itself very much a product of the organization's operational goals, unavoidably plays a part in regulating those audience practices. Such is the seductive power of the logic of participation, however, that Burgess and Green, having noted the productive force of YouTube's

popularity metrics, choose to return to an image of user equality by describing "all those who upload, view, comment on, or create content, whether they are businesses, organizations, or private individuals, as *participants*." [60] Notwithstanding their attention to the "performative" dimension to certain features of the site, that is, Burgess and Green end up defining "the cultural logic of YouTube" in terms solely of its users and without reference to the structuring role of YouTube-as-service-provider, whose "contribution" could never be reduced to that simply of one "participant" among others.

To be sure, "popularity" is hardly unique to UGC platforms -- uneven distribution of audience attention being perhaps one of the few constants across all media systems. The *visibility* that the YouTube interface affords the various measures of popularity, however, arguably serves not just to promote particular kinds of content but also to amplify the cultural value of popularity itself. In this respect, it's perhaps not surprising to find that view "requests on YouTube seem to be highly skewed towards popular files." [61] In a communications culture shaped or underpinned by the operations and imperatives of an "attention economy," moreover -- where consumer attention is "an intrinsically scarce resource" [62] and where "the more something is shared the more valuable it becomes" [63] -- the cultivation of popularity amounts to a key commercial strategy. The ultimate goal in this regard must be the production of Internet memes whose popularity allow them to break out of an otherwise bounded economy (relatively speaking) of viewer attention and to attract non-habitual and first-time "users" and, ideally, the attention of the mainstream media. In this way, YouTube's popularity feedback loop might be thought to constitute a kind of media concentration -- a concentration of user attention -- and thereby to play its part in the development of a different kind of silent television. For the discourse of popularity underscores the extent to which user-generated content, understood as a form of audience speech, needs to be heard *about* in order to be heard. Neither hi-falutin' media theory nor pop philosophies about falling trees and empty forests are needed to question whether user-uploaded clips that are rarely (if ever) viewed by anyone other than their uploaders really count as audiences "talking back" to the mainstream media -- or at least, whether they count in the way champions of social media participation routinely claim. In the context of media hyperabundance and attention-scarcity, then, whether formerly silent audiences are now able to "talk back" to the mainstream media matters less perhaps than whether anybody is actually listening, or indeed garners the opportunity to listen. "Silence" might thus be imagined to derive not simply from an incapacity to speak but also from failure to become an object of speech -- a point of communication and a locus of communion. And if, as van Dijck argues, citing an OECD investigation into UGC production and use, "participation is ... a relative term when over 80 percent of all users are in fact passive recipients of content," [64] it is all the more so when seemingly half of all YouTube videos *collectively* can earn as little as 2% of aggregate views. [65] While YouTube undoubtedly provides opportunities for non-professionals to circulate their diverse audio-visual productions, therefore, its mechanisms for capturing and channeling attention have significant implications for the strength of any given contributor's voice -- as any YouTuber whose video has ever been officially "Featured" could probably attest.

By the same token, if the discursive and disciplinary effects of popularity sees many a produser's creations receiving relatively little viewer attention, the "Recommended for You" feature recently added to the YouTube home page serves as a reminder that UGC users actually communicate far more than they necessarily know or intend. Like all targeted recommendation systems, YouTube's works by tracking user's viewing history and suggesting similar content on the basis of video tags and rankings. While such recommendation functions ostensibly work to "optimize" user satisfaction, they also make apparent the potential for advanced digital technologies to facilitate "the tracking of individual social behaviour." [66] YouTube's integration with Google's multifarious web services (web search, email, advertising, document creation, traffic analysis) means that user-behaviour tracking goes well beyond the scope of capturing video selection data for the purpose of recommending similar content, potentially generating, moreover, a wealth of information about audiences that would have been unimaginable in the context of broadcast television. Personal details captured through registration processes but also "metadata" -- information about media use, web search histories, and other online movements -- obtained from IP addresses, clickstream data, cookies and so on provide a boon for advertisers and niche-marketers aiming to draw up detailed images of the UGC user demographic. As van Dijck puts it,

> the metadata Google harvests from UGC traffic and clickstreams is much more valuable to advertisers than the content users provide to these sites. Metadata are not merely a by-product of user-generated content: they are a prime resource for profiling real people with real interests. [67]

Crucial in view of the image of audience silence is the fact that YouTube users "have no power over data distribution," [68] every seemingly private act of media consumption being registered, aggregated and traded as the property of YouTube. Accordingly, the apparent (qualified, uneven) agency at the level of content production is won at the same time as "users" "lose their grip on their agency as consumers as a result of technological algorithms tracking their behaviour and refining their profile." [69] With every action, every communication, on the part of an individual aiding media service providers in their quest for market dominance, the result, as Charles Fairchild has observed in a different context, is that "the cultural studies shibboleth that institutions use strategies to dominate while individuals use tactics to resist has become a blurry maxim at best." [70] In an era of increasingly surveillant media, then, the audience "silence" that was once was taken as the very measure of media domination becomes, instead, precisely that form of agency which the viewing subject is most aggressively denied.

SILENCE AND VOICELESSNESS

It is by now hardly revolutionary to note that television's divergence across a range of variable technological, industrial and cultural contexts precludes coherent description of its "essential" features. Precisely for that reason, though, when faced with the alternative between judging silent television as impossible as such or finding it readily observable in a voicelessness that has accompanied television almost from the beginning, neither conclusion

would seem entirely satisfactory. Televisual silence escapes such accounts, of course, because the sound of television is likewise variable across TV's divergent forms. Sound is, from the outset, multi-modal, divided across contexts of production and reception, subject to interpretation and speculation, willed and unwitting, standardizable yet event-like -- in a word, virtual. Accordingly, far from marking a lack, televisual silence *sounds* in response to investigations into the artifactual nature of audio-visuality, the objectification of television as art, and the fragile, uneven and divided character of audience participation.

Understood in this way, the cultural significance of televisual silence lies foremost in its exposure of the analytical influence of the myth of silent film, the enduring discursive force of author-ity, and the customary rendering of audience passivity/powerlessness as an inability to speak. The discursive effect of such views is to construe debates over silent TV in terms of the theme of "voice" (as dialogue, as sign of presence of intent, as audience participation), rendering voice and voicelessness as polar states in a binary system ("on" and "off"). While the productive potential of that theme should not be underestimated -- providing, as it does, some insight via the thought of silent television into the oft-unacknowledged reversibility of television's aesthetic conventions and the historico-technological variability of television's communicative power *vis-à-vis* its audiences -- the image of silence as voicelessness can often obscure as much as it reveals. For the construction of presence of voice as the antithesis of silence risks neglecting not just the role played by mediated modes of listening in the achievement of sound or silence, but also the fact of the unspoken as unwitting revelation in the event of communication, and the uneven distribution of the voice "itself" across a number of constitutive and regulatory mechanisms (speaker, transmitter, ritual, receiver, and more). The analytical reduction of silence to voicelessness thus functions both as a sign of the technoprosthetic "nature" of orality-aurality and as a measure of the sway that the myth of the indivisibility and self-sufficiency of communicative acts continues to hold over the study of communication and visual culture. Against this reduction, the thought of silent TV's virtual im/plausibility paves the way for approaching silence and sound as intermingling and interchangeable, as reconfigurable elements within a structure of general technoprosthetic virtual possibility. And it is perhaps only when televisual silence is thus apprehended that the body of scholarship on the forms and functions of silent television -- indeed, television more "generally" -- can be found to warrant further investigation than may at first be imagined.

Notes
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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction Engaged: The Sydney Seminars*, ed. Paul Patton and Terry Smith (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001), 22.

[2] Cited in Nikos Metallinos, *Television Aesthetics: Perceptual, Cognitive, and Compositional Bases* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 40.

[3] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 165.

[4] Raymond Williams, "The Technology and the Society," in *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader*, ed. Kelly Askew and Richard R. Wilk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 36.

[5] Steve Neale, *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour* (London: Macmillan Education, 1985), 91.

[6] Raymond Fielding, "The technological antecedents of the coming of sound: An introduction," in *Sound and the Cinema: The Coming of Sound to American Film*, ed. Evan William Cameron (New York: Redgrave, 1980), 5.

[7] *Ibid*

[8] *Ibid*, 6.

[9] Neale, *Cinema and Technology*, 91.

[10] The synchronization of sound and image was, and remains, far from perfect, of course. Indeed, its fallibility was famously exploited for comedic and narrative purposes in *Singing in the Rain* (1952).

[11] Alexander Walker, *The Shattered Silents* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1978), 97.

[12] More precisely, the "talkies" arguably ushered in a regime of listening formerly restricted to contexts of cultural reception defined by the centrality of spoken or musical performance (opera, theater, lectures) and largely absent from sites of film exhibition.

[13] Neale, *Cinema and Technology*, 98.

[14] It's worth noting, too, that the formal-realist mode of listening that has come to dominate commercial cinema production generates a proclivity to treat all instances and elements of film sound as diegetic, including those that are otherwise not contiguous with the image of action (e.g. "voice-over" narration, which is far more often than not composed as the utterance of a character from within the "world" of the narrative). With one important exception to be discussed below, music is today the sole remaining use of non-diegetic sound in mainstream cinema -- though even in this case it is far from uncommon for a non-diegetic soundtrack (in the form of a popular song, for instance) to be rearticulated as diegetic (e.g. by synchronizing the abrupt cessation of the music soundtrack with an image of a hand switching off a car radio, say), such that the use of music soundtracks increasingly responds to and reinforces the formal-realist mode of listening that demands the soundtrack be "explained" diegetically.

[15] Peter Lev, *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen 1950-1959 -- History of American Cinema, vol.7* (Irvine: University of California Press, 2006), 137. In the very early days of television, moreover, the major Hollywood studios declined to license their feature films to television stations "for a variety of reasons, including their relationship with exhibitors and talent unions, their involvement in alternative exhibition schemes such as theater and subscription TV, and their dissatisfaction with the prices offered by the networks for quality films" (138).

[16] Lynn Spigel, *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network*

Television (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[17] *Ibid*, 180.

[18] *Ibid*, 180, 178.

[19] Kovacs cited in *ibid*, 189.

[20] *Ibid*, 190.

[21] *Ibid*, 179.

[22] Cited in *ibid*, 178.

[23] *Ibid*, 180.

[24] *Ibid*, 205.

[25] *Ibid*, 202-3.

[26] Whedon's account of his aesthetic aims for "Hush" and for *Buffy* generally are taken from the commentary on that episode, available on the DVD release of Season IV -- the significance of which fact I will return to below.

[27] Cited in Spigel, *TV by Design*, 180-1.

[28] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 165.

[29] Spigel, *TV by Design*, 182-3.

[30] The soundtrack for the "Silent Show" was produced live, of course, as per the routine production processes of late-50s live television production. But the program's soundtrack is no less standardized for that reason, to the extent that studio recording and transmission technologies mean that, with the exception of sounds produced live at the point of reception, the same soundtrack accompanied the program's "exhibition" during its initial and subsequent broadcasts.

[31] Spigel, *TV by Design*, 188-9.

[32] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 165-6.

[33] Spigel, *TV by Design*, 201-12.

[34] One feature of silence in sports commentary worth noting here is that such silences "work" only in relation to particular kinds of sports. Silence in football commentary would seem incongruous, a sign of technical fault, but for test cricket, lawn bowls, golf and even tennis such silence is ordinary. In other words, the volume (as it were) of the commentary mimics the expected or required silence of the spectators on the ground, such that silence does not function as a self-identical sign of death, of TV's essential distance from the event, but rather counts among the tools with which the "liveness" of sports coverage may be produced.

[35] Derek Kompare, "Publishing Flow: DVD Box Sets and the Reconception of Television," *Television & New Media* 7 (November 2006): 337-8.

[36] *Ibid*, 353.

[37] I borrow this distinction from Frances Bonner, who argues that much critical analysis of television neglects a whole range of programming -- game shows, lifestyle programmes, chat shows, advertising and other forms of continuity -- and who seeks to make sense of these "genres" in terms of television's regularities and "everydayness." For Bonner, such "ordinary television" stands against "special television": "It is as much a characteristic of special television that it disrupts regular scheduling, as it is of ordinary television that it constitutes it" (*Ordinary Television: Analyzing Popular TV* [London: SAGE, 2003], 43). To the extent that DVD publication enables schedule-disruption on demand (as it were), it plays a significant part in making particular forms of television "special."

[38] Kompare, "Publishing Flow," 352.

[39] Neale, *Cinema and Technology*, 92. In this regard, it's worth noting that commentary tracks tend to be superimposed over the dramatic soundtrack, leaving an audible trace of the latter rather than taking its place, and thereby positioning the commentator as viewing companion.

[40] Joss Whedon, "Hush: Director's Commentary", *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (TV Series) [DVD], Episode 10, Season IV.

[41] Michel Foucault, "What is an author?," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 158-9.

[42] Henry Jenkins argues, for instance, that "fans reject the idea of a definitive version, produced, authorized, and regulated by some media conglomerate" (*Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* [New York and London: New York University Press, 2006], 256) -- though it would be a mistake to treat "the fan" as indicative of audiences generally rather than as a highly vocal segment of such audiences or as one of a (limited) range of cultural dispositions available for audience members to adopt or inhabit in a potentially discontinuous fashion.

[43] For two exemplary accounts of such developments, see Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, and Mark Deuze, *Media Work* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

[44] José van Dijck, "Users Like You? Theorizing Agency in User-generated Content," *Media, Culture & Society* 13 (2009): 43.

[45] Janice Radway, "Reading Is Not Eating: Mass-Produced Literature and the Theoretical, Methodological and Political Consequences of a Metaphor," *Book Research Quarterly* 2 (1986): 21-2.

[46] Spigel, *TV by Design*, 201.

[47] van Dijck, "Users Like You?" 55 note 2.

[48] *Ibid*, 43.

[49] In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins places his first experience of online fan activity as early as 1991, when he accessed alt.tv.twinpeaks, the fan community that formed around David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*, whose readership reportedly sized as much as 25,000 readers (32). Further evincing the tendency to treat online communications media as providing

TV audiences with a "voice," Jenkins describes various practices of online fan activity as being "shaped by the desire to talk back to the television set" (29).

[50] Leena Rao, "Yahoo Quietly Pulls the Plug on Geocities," *TechCrunch*, 23 April, 2009, http://www.techcrunch.com/2009/04/23/yahoo-quietly-pulls-the-plug-on-geocities/.

[51] The quasi-permanence of audience-generated criticism may also have implications for audience studies and any media criticism that seeks to analyze audience responses as part of a broader cultural text. For instance, Carol Deming, in her case for "television-centred television criticism," argues that "it is the television critic's job -- perhaps in concert with the audience researcher and surely in concert with the audience -- to identify the unspoken or unenacted in a text" ("For Television-Centred Television Criticism: Lessons from Feminism," in *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular*, ed. Mary Ellen Brown [Sydney: Currency Press, 1990], 51). While today the idea of "centering" television criticism on "the" medium's idiosyncratic features seems particularly challenging, the emergence of online discussion forums nevertheless has the potential both to greatly assist and occasionally frustrate those television critics who would seek to pursue a form of criticism that is appropriate to television's publicness.

[52] Julie Levin Russo, "User-Penetrated Content: Fan Video in the Age of Convergence," *Cinema Journal* 48 (Summer 2009): 125.

[53] For instance, Point 6C in YouTube's "Terms of Use" states that "you [i.e. the 'user'] retain all of your ownership rights in your User Submissions. However, by submitting User Submissions to YouTube, you hereby grant YouTube a worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free, sublicenseable and transferable license to use, reproduce, distribute, prepare derivative works of, display, and perform the User Submissions in connection with the YouTube Website and YouTube's (and its successors' and affiliates') business, including without limitation for promoting and redistributing part or all of the YouTube Website (and derivative works thereof) in any media formats and through any media channels," http://www.youtube.com/t/terms (Accessed 2 February 2010).

[54] Russo, "User-Penetrated Content," 125-6.

[55] van Dijck, "Users Like You?" 45-6.

[56] For one YouTube user's account of the structuring effects of the site's commercial and organizational activities on the site's users, see mrblacksmoviereviews, http://www.youtube.com /user/mrblacksmoviereviews, and his video criticizing the secretive nature of YouTube's "Featured Video" and "Partnership" programs http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GtNyGXKnOU (Accessed 2 February 2010).

[57] van Dijck, "Users Like You?" 45; as Cha et al. have noted, moreover, information filters, such as search engines and recommendation systems, "typically favor a small number of popular items, steering users away from unpopular ones" (Meeyoung Cha, Haewoon Kwak, Pablo Rodriquez, Yong-Yeol Ahn, and Sue Moon, "I Tube, You Tube, Everybody Tubes:

Analyzing the World's Largest User Generated Content Video System." *Internet Measurement Conference: Proceedings of the 7th ACM SIGCOMM Conference on Internet Measurement* [San Diego, 2007]: 6, http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1298306.1298309).

[58] Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 41.

[59] *Ibid*, 57.

[60] *Ibid*

[61] Cha et al., "I Tube, You Tube," 4. Again, concentration of audience attention on popular texts is not at all unusual, and indeed conforms to the regularly observable Pareto principle, or 80-20 rule, which in this context would suggest that the top 20% of videos as ranked in terms of popularity would receive 80% of the view requests, with the remaining 80% of videos earning only 20% of the requests. By contrast, Cha et al. find YouTube requests to follow a more skewed distribution, with the top 10% of videos receiving 80% of the total views (3-4), providing some small warrant to suspect that there is something about YouTube's interface that intensifies the mobilizing power of popularity.

[62] Michael H. Goldhaber, "The Attention Economy and the Net," *First Monday* 2 (April 1997): n.p, http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/519/440.

[63] Mark Pesce, "Unevenly Distributed: Production Models for the 21st Century," *The Human Network*, 31 January, 2008, http://blog.futurestreetconsulting.com/?p=42 (Accessed 2 February 2010).

[64] van Dijck, "Users Like You?" 44.

[65] Cha et al., "I Tube You Tube," 4.

[66] van Dijck, "Users Like You?" 46-9.

[67] *Ibid*, 49.

[68] *Ibid*, 47.

[69] *Ibid*, 49.

[70] Charles Fairchild, *Pop Idols and Pirates: Mechanisms of Consumption and the Global Circulation of Popular Music* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 86.

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